

# Foreword

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As I sit in my home in Ramallah, the sights, sounds, and smells of the Israeli attacks bombard my senses: helicopters, bombs, bullets, gas. The conflict that shapes this book is sadly alive and indeed booming louder than ever. News broadcasts around the world almost daily report the rising death toll. This sinister numerical game, whereby Palestinian victims of Israeli live fire are daily given as  $x$  numbers killed and  $y$  numbers wounded, reduce our humanity to a series of abstractions. The victims' names, identities, dashed hopes, and shattered dreams are nowhere mentioned. Absent too are the grief and anguish of their mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, and other loved ones who will have to live with that tragic loss. This routinized reporting allows viewers to accept comfortably the continued killing of this "intransigent," "hard-line," "violent" people. Indeed, Palestinians' will to resist subjugation and oppression is spun by the media as proof of their culpability for their own victimization.

Only through the most sophisticated and approachable analyses can the layers of abstraction and dehumanization begin to be peeled away. Rhoda Kanaaneh's book, standing among the best of scholarship and still widely accessible, is an important model for such efforts. It gives voice to subjects that historically have been kept voiceless. In the array of diverse Palestinians she interviews, people otherwise thought of as "violent," "dictatorial" "terrorists" are humanized. The book gives readers a beautiful introduction to individuals who become complex

reflexive creatures—in short, human beings. These Palestinians are capable of being subtle, introspective, witty, and playful as well as strategically blunt and dogmatic. These portrayals come as a welcome reprieve from the ubiquitous distortions of the Palestinian people. They will unsettle any reader's sense of complacency about the anonymity of Palestinians and thus the invisibility of their suffering and the meaninglessness of their deaths.

Significantly, one of the recent misrepresentations of Palestinians and perhaps the most blatantly racist slur against us is the Israeli and international media's theft of our humanity as parents. In an attempt to rob us of our most basic feelings for our children, we are accused of sending our children out to die for the sake of scoring media points. Even as 18-month-old Sara Abdil-Athim Hassan was shot in the back seat of her father's car and other child victims were killed in and around their own homes, their parents were blamed for putting their children "on the front lines," thus obstructing the free path of Israeli bullets. Rhoda's book is a highly appropriate antidote; Palestinian mothers and fathers reflect on their parental roles, responsibilities, affections, and strategies. They carefully consider and weigh the impact of national struggle on their families, as well as medicalization, consumerism, and other trends of globalization that many parents around the world increasingly face.

*Birth of the Nation* focuses on Palestinians living inside the borders of Israel established in 1948. Israeli propaganda would have us believe that these Palestinian citizens of the state are different creatures from Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. We are told that these "Israeli Arabs" are happily integrated into the Jewish state. Despite such misleading claims, the current al-Aqsa intifada spilled beyond the borders of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Palestinians living inside the so-called green line of Israel loudly and publicly demonstrated in solidarity with their compatriots in the Occupied Territories. In more than thirty towns and villages they protested the injustices of Israeli-imposed "peace." The Israeli response also erased the alleged dividing line between "Palestinian" and "Israeli Arab" when it shot thirteen of its Palestinian citizens dead. The same brutal military tactics are used on all Palestinians, regardless of citizenship. It seems Palestinians are subhuman no matter what passport they carry. Two of the citizen victims, 18-year-old A'laa Nassar and 17-year-old Asel Asli, were from 'Arrabi village, Rhoda's hometown.

Anyone who wishes to understand the connections within and across state borders must read Rhoda Kanaaneh's vivid analyses of the porous-

ness of the green line in relation to Palestinian identity. The contracting and expanding zones of identification that nurture a Palestinian sense of community are elegantly illuminated. Various partitioned, annexed, occupied, closed, and besieged, these territories and histories fragment Palestinian identity but are also transcended by it. In discussing vital issues of fertility, demography, and modernization, Rhoda's subjects use "Palestine" to refer to pre- and post-1948 entities, depending on the context. These linguistic switches and slippages highlight the limitations of the framework of the now collapsing peace process and the multiple forms Palestinian struggles take in varying locations.

Among those kept voiceless, women are often doubly silenced. The expressions, arguments, and analyses of Palestinian women collected in this book, including those of the author herself, are thus doubly important for undoing misrepresentations. In part, this book is significant simply because it is written by a mature and articulate Palestinian woman. We urgently need to hear more feminist perspectives (both male and female) that, like Rhoda's, seriously attend to the intersections of politics, "race," class, religion, and gender. In the case of this book, the results of such an approach are fresh insight, powerful arguments against Israeli domination, and much-needed internal criticism. This multifaceted framework is relevant well beyond Israel and Palestine. It is indispensable to anyone interested in struggles for justice and freedom, including those against racism and sexism, wherever they may occur.

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