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THE ARAB FAMILY IN HISTORY

"OTHERNESS" AND THE STUDY OF THE FAMILY

Judith E. Tucker

Despite the widely prevailing assumption that the family played an important part in the structuring of economic, political, and social relations in the Arab World, little historical study of the family has actually been done. The centrality of "family" to the history of the region is amply attested in studies of elite politics, for instance, where family ties and family alliances underlie both the solidarity and factionalism of the ruling group.[1] On other levels as well, the view of the family as a primary economic and social unit can be found in most of the historical literature on the peasantry or urban poor.[2] It thus remains all the more surprising that, upon closer examination, we find the almost total absence of any systematic study of family history in the Middle East, whether by region or historical period.

The neglect of family as the object of serious research can be traced to two rather different sets of perceptions, one belonging to the field of history of the family and one to the field of women's history. First, study of the family has been impeded by the untested assumption that the Arab family, whether in Egypt or Palestine, Algeria or Saudi Arabia, is one monolithic institution, variously termed the "oriental" family, the "Arab" family, or the "Islamic" family. This family is generally described as the mirror opposite of its Western European counterpart: it has remained basically unchanged, undergoing neither the signal historical transformations of family structure that paved the way for capitalism in Europe nor the process of "modernization" that promoted individualism at the expense of family control. Historical analyses of the European family now differ enormously on the very basic issues of the nature and timing of change in the family; most discussions of family in the Arab World, however, concur that it was (and is) an institution with a structure and function different from that of Western Europe and seemingly impervious to change until the very recent past.[3] This "otherness" of the Arab

family, the notion that this family can be defined in historical opposition to the European family, still permeates most discussions of family life.

In the field of women's history, a palpable reluctance to focus on the history of women within the family springs from a very different set of considerations. With historical research on women in the Middle East still in its beginning stages, women's historians have directed their attention to correction of the pervasive neglect of women. Standard histories of the Middle East assigned women to the world of the household, thought to be far from the spheres of economic production or political and social power that mattered in society. Understandably, most women's historians therefore are engaged in research which will establish the historical roles of women as important economic producers and political actors.[4] The family, on the other hand, is likely to be perceived as the instrument of women's oppression, the mediator of values and customs that circumscribe women's activities and perpetuate an unequal distribution of power between genders. Study of the family reduces the woman to victim and obscures the multiplicity of ways in which she did participate in her society. While such a vision of the family holds more than an element of truth, it sidesteps the importance of the family to the history of the region in general and to women in particular. Women did live and act in familial contexts and, while we increasingly realize that they also enjoyed a multitude of activities and ties outside the family, there is little reason to doubt that family relations remained central to their lives.

In order to explore the critical role of family, we need to reclaim the history of the family, to study it in ways that intersect with the concerns of women's history.[5] The family in the Middle East was not an ahistoric institution expressing elaborate kin relations against which we can measure and highlight the dynamism of the European family. Rather, it was a unit of economic, social, and political relations situated within a particular historical context. The attempt to deconstruct this family in order to understand its importance for women must take into account the ways in which the family fit within the prevailing economic system as a unit of production and consumption, within the prevailing social system as an instrument of socialization and control, and within the political system as a means of recruiting support and forging alliances. Similarly, the woman's role within the family was not necessarily just that of victim. Women's perceptions and actions also shaped relations within the family and could affect how power was distributed and exercised.

The Arab Family as "Other"

In a preliminary attempt to raise questions about Arab family history, we focus here on four aspects of the "otherness" of the Arab family as it has been described that hold special significance for women's roles and power. First, the relationship between husband and wife is defined initially by the absence of consensual union. Marriage, in this "other" family of the literature, is not entered into by freely consenting adults who have developed affection for each other; rather, marriages are arranged to suit the interests or needs of the couple's respective families and the young people, particularly the young woman, may be forced to marry their families' choice of mate. Goody points out that consensual union was not always the practice even in Europe, for upper-class families with significant property at stake were careful to arrange proper marriages. Still the Catholic church early on viewed consensual union as a requirement of marriage and it was widely practiced among people outside of upper-class circles. While the high rates of divorce in "Islamic" society introduce a measure of doubt as to whether the absence of consent was always the rule among the Arabs, because of the freedom associated with the termination of one marriage and the selection of a new partner, Goody's discussion still implies that "Islamic" marriages were not based on free choice.[6] Thus, from its inception, the Arab marriage was a family affair in which the wills and emotions of the bride and groom had little place. Bonds of affection which tend to equalize conjugal relations were thus absent, and a young woman entered a marriage without any claim to her husband's affections.

Second, in the Arab family women bear the burden of family honor (*'ird*). Any female behavior explicitly or implicitly connected with sexual relations outside legal marriage reflected immediately and negatively on the good name of the woman's family. Although a woman's sexual conduct throughout her life was subject to close social scrutiny, premarital virginity had the greatest weight and any suggestion of loss of virginity before marriage the greatest shame. Fathers and brothers, whose responsibilities included the policing of their women and also their punishment if necessary, were therefore quite likely to favor severe restriction of unmarried female relatives, including their seclusion and early marriage.[7] One of the easiest ways to safeguard a girl's virginity was to marry her off at a young age, even before she had attained her legal majority at puberty. Again, the implications for female power loom large: a girlhood of seclusion and very early marriage thrust an inexperienced and hardly grown girl into a new setting where the possibilities of self-assertion appeared quite remote.

A third critical feature of the "other" Arab family was the importance of the patrilineal clan, a lineage structure that defined family relations in terms of several generations of descendants of a given male line. Economic and political relations were influenced, if not actually structured, by the patrilineal clan; as a result, the integrity and solidarity of the clan lay at the heart of both the economic prosperity and political power of its members. Whether this clan is described as a three-generation extended family or a group of families that could trace their origins up to ten generations to a common ancestor, endogamous marriage was one of the most important ways of maintaining economic integrity and achieving solidarity.[8] The prevalent form of endogamous marriage was cousin marriage, specifically that of the children

of two brothers which would bind together the patrilineal unit. Here the implications for female power are somewhat mixed. On the one hand, marriage within a family, insofar as it allowed a young woman to remain within a familiar setting and close to her own parents, undoubtedly lent her greater leverage in her relations with her husband and his parents who were, after all, her own cousin, aunt, and uncle. Widespread cousin marriage, however, also may have heightened family control and narrowed marriage choices: certainly most cousin marriages were arranged with the interests of the wider family, not the young couple, in mind.

Finally, in the "other" family model, the woman is placed in a basically powerless position within the family. Although Islamic law reserves full property rights to women, married women exercised these rights only with difficulty because they lacked access to the public sphere. Often disinherited by their natal families in the interest of not dividing family property, women were then at the mercy of their husbands' management of whatever property they had acquired through inheritance or their *mahr*.[9] Perhaps the ultimate measure of such powerlessness was the practice of polygyny. With the legal right to marry up to four women concurrently, a husband could add wives to the household who could compete for material resources as well as affection, without the prior agreement or even knowledge of his present wife.[10] The practice, or even threat, of polygyny could be used as a form of social control, as an ever present threat to the position of a woman inside her own house and therefore as a means of enforcing submission.

The Arab family thus emerges as an extended family of patrilineal descent that preserved its integrity at least partly through the arranged marriage of very young women, often to their cousins. Within the family, male dominance was ensured by the practice of secluding the women, thereby effectively preventing them from exercising their property rights. Female submission and obedience was further enforced by the actual or potential practice of polygyny.

But was this family the reality or even the ideal for the majority of people in the region? The construction of the model itself presents problems, for it borrows heavily from prescriptive literature on the one hand and a small number of specialized empirical studies on the other. Are the discussions of polygyny and early marriage references to certain allowances under Islamic law rather than descriptions of actual past practice? Was forced marriage or cousin marriage really as widespread as the handful of available sources suggests?[11] The historical reality of the Arab family might, indeed, be far different from what this model implies: rather than one monolithic oriental family, Arab history may well present us with a number of different families, no one of which was the prototypical Arab family. In the context of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Egypt and Palestine, we can discuss at least two distinct "families," the family of the upper class, and the family of the urban lower class. Based on rather preliminary evidence, we would like to suggest that each type of family inhabited a different economic, social, and political

environment, and evolved a different set of internal gender relations as a result, with distinct consequences for women.

The Upper-Class Family

Family life and gender relations in upper-class circles of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Palestine and Egypt probably came closest to the Arab family as "other" model. In the realm of wealth and political power, upper-class concern for the integrity of property and the solidification of influence fostered a distinct vision of family life, a vision that tended to buttress the disparities of power between genders so clearly apparent in the "other" family model. In both the cosmopolitan milieu of the urban-based Egyptian upper-class, composed of government officials, wealthy merchants, and well-connected *'ulama* and among the rather more isolated elite circles of the Nablus region in Palestine, large landholders with strong rural ties who often held official positions, family ties were formed and defined in ways that emphasized the overweening importance of family solidarity and continuity to the social order. Marriage practices and the kinds of roles assigned to women within the upper-class family formed an important element of this family definition.

First, consensual union was not a current practice. Upper-class marriages were carefully arranged by the families involved to ensure that their economic and political objectives were achieved. One strong indication of scant attention to the wishes of the bride is marriage age: a girl who was married off before puberty certainly had small opportunity to exercise any kind of choice in the matter. Indeed, under Islamic law, a legally minor girl, that is, one who is prepubescent, enjoys no right of refusal of a marriage arranged by her guardian (*wali*), generally her father.[12] The Nablus area elite took full advantage of this law in the arrangement of its daughters' marriages. In the 107 marriage contracts that were recorded in the surviving registers of the *mahkama* (court) of Nablus in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, only nineteen or roughly twenty percent of these marriages involved minor brides. Of these nineteen marriages, however, five were clearly lower class and four united members of the "middle" class of prosperous artisans, merchants, and *'ulama*; the remaining eight involved daughters of the ruling elite, who were thus far more likely to be married off while still below the age of reason or refusal.[13]

Once married, the upper-class woman tended to remain married to the same husband. In a society and under a legal system that recognized divorce and encouraged remarriage, the permanence of upper-class marriage is striking. In the Nablus marriage contracts, almost a quarter of the brides were marrying for at least a second time: twenty-three women were identified as *thayyib* (deflowered), meaning widowed or divorced. Of these twenty-three, however, only two were conceivably members of the upper class, while a full sixteen were clearly of lower-class origins. Such stability in upper-class mar-

riage underscores the centrality of the institution to social and economic life in elite circles: when political alliance and property arrangements lay at the heart of a marriage arrangement, divorce could not be an option. The upper-class woman as well as the upper-class man had little freedom to change marriage partners.

Such severe limitations on consensual union were also linked to the upper-class practice of female seclusion. The *harim*, or separate women's quarters where wives, daughters, and female slaves and servants of the household were sequestered, was an upper-class institution. In Cairo, the daughters and wives of the official elite passed their lives in the confines of the household *harim*, or in visits to the *harims* of others. An array of services were brought to the *harim* by women of less lofty origins: special female peddlers (*dallalat*) and female musicians (*'awalim*) entered the harim, bringing their goods for sale and their talents for amusement.[14] Upper-class women themselves, however active an interest they might take in affairs outside the household, were physically restricted. Although wealthy Cairene women invested money in business ventures, founded *waqfs*, and bought and sold all kinds of property, they, unlike women of more humble background, never went to court for these transactions: the public aspects of their operations had to be entrusted to an agent (*wakil*).[15] Such isolation from all men, except close relatives they were forbidden to marry, certainly ensured that neither girls nor women would develop any inconvenient attachments that might disrupt family plans for marriage or disturb established marital bonds.

Thus, the idea and the practice of consensual union were indeed very distant from upper-class experience. Women were married early, sometimes before puberty, to mates of their family's choosing, and, despite the rather broad rights to divorce enjoyed by men, their marriages were seldom terminated before the death of one of the spouses.[16] The isolation of these women, away from almost any form of social intercourse with unrelated men, provided a critical key to the system: seclusion greatly reduced the opportunities for the development of desires contrary to family plans.

The practice of seclusion was also related to the second critical aspect of the Arab family, the view of women as the repository of family honor. Low marriage age and the many restrictions on the public movement of the upper-class woman served to safeguard family honor by ensuring that girls and women would have no opportunity, whether real or imagined, of transgressing rather strict sexual mores. The honorific titles commonly used for upper-class women were particularly revealing of the concern for sexual virtue, defined, in the case of a woman not previously married, in terms of guaranteed virginity. The daughter of Salih Basha, an Ottoman provincial governor of the early eighteenth century, is described in her marriage contract as "the pride of the guarded women (*mukhadarat*), the ornament of the venerable, the exalted veil, the inviolable temple."[17] Thick images of seclusion, of protection, of impregnability denote the value of the bride, a value directly correlated to her distance from the world of temptation and sexuality. Curiously enough,

however, the attribute of virginity was far from being the most important determinant of a bride's worth. In the case of previously married brides of the upper class, the *mahr* specified in the marriage contract was not necessarily lowered by the prior "deflowering" of the bride. Two non-virgin brides of good family received *mahrs* of very ample proportions according to the contracts registered in Nablus.[18] While the virgin bride deserved the praise, representing as she did the ideal of absence of sexual experience, other considerations entered into the practical assessment of a bride's value including, we may assume, family connections and property ownership.

Third, the upper-class family, at least in Nablus, did indeed practice the cousin marriage of the "other" Arab family model. While not unknown in the lower class, cousin marriage, and specifically marriage between brothers' children, seems most common among the upper class in the Nablus district. Of the seventeen cases of cousin marriage in the 107 registered marriage contracts, eight of them involved upper-class families: roughly 25 percent of upper-class marriages were among cousins as opposed to 16 percent among the whole population. Cousin marriage occurred in the local families of greatest prominence: the Tuqans and the al-Hanbalis, two of Nablus's leading families, married among themselves in the eighteenth century as did the Abi Ghazalis in the nineteenth century.[19] Such marriage was highly valued, and the cousin brides received *mahrs* that were among the highest of the time. Sadiqah, the daughter of Hasan al-Hanbali, who married her cousin Najm, commanded a *mahr* which included a hundred gold sequins, a qaftan with special pinafore and belt, a rug, twenty white robes, twenty blue robes, twenty *ratls* of cotton, twenty *ratls* of wool, and a female slave for domestic service. Only in the relatively rare instance of an exchange, that is, of the simultaneous marriage of a daughter and a son of one brother to the son and daughter of another, was the *mahr* appreciably lower. In one such case of exchange, the *mahrs* were set at fairly low and equal amounts, reflecting the fact that the *mahr* was actually a token payment, each bride receiving immediately the amount her family had given to the other.[20] In general, however, cousin marriage, which served to knit families together and cement the social and economic ties central to the building of a strong extended family and therefore political power, was both practiced and highly regarded in upper-class circles in Nablus. There is less evidence for widespread cousin marriage among the Cairo elite: women tended to be married to the men of families in close association and alliance rather than to their first cousins, a practice which, of course, also underscored the importance of family to politics.

The fourth and final aspect of the Arab family model spoke to the powerlessness of women within the family. Subject to the erosion of her right to hold and dispose of property and ever at the mercy of her husband's decision to take another wife or wives, the woman of the Arab family supposedly could not exercise any real power. The lives of women in Cairene upper-class circles, however, suggest some modification of this picture of total subservience. Although secluded far from the world of the public marketplace, upper-class

...n did, in fact, control property and conduct business affairs of various ...nds. Numerous wealthy Egyptian women joined commercial associations in the early nineteenth century where they invested their own money in various commercial ventures, including the lucrative sea trade in spices and the caravan trade in slaves.[21] Upper-class women were clearly acknowledged as competent managers of common forms of property: as holders of *iltizam* (tax-farm) land and as managers of *waqf* (religiously-endowed) property, they were entrusted with a significant proportion of both rural and urban productive property.[22]

On the other hand, polygyny was indeed practiced by upper-class men: the *harims* of the prosperous might contain multiple wives as well as concubines. In a random sample of sixty-two estates left by grown men in Nablus, all of which record surviving legal heirs, only ten listed two wives and only one more than two. It is striking that all of the polygynous men, except for one, were both wealthy and socially prominent: polygyny was not for the poor.[23] A woman might dislike the introduction of another wife or slave mistress, but she had no right of objection under the law. The *mufti* in Cairo, when presented with a case in which a woman and her relatives were applying pressure on her husband to sell his concubine, reminded everyone that the man was exercising a clear legal right and his wife had no grounds for protest.[24] Thus, while an upper-class woman might exercise considerable power within the family through her ability to control her own property, she was also vulnerable to the unwanted intrusion of other women, wives or concubines, whose presence would dilute her position, to say nothing of her material claims. Other wives and their children, as well as the children of concubines, acquired rights to material support and shares in the man's estate, all of which encroached on the resources available to the first wife.

On balance, the upper-class family, while it shared much in common with the "other" Arab family model, was not quite the same thing. Gender relations within the family were surely influenced by the absence of consensual union, by the strongly held view of women as the repository of family honor, by the social, economic, and political importance of the extended family, and by the practice of polygyny. But the upper-class woman was not the quintessential victim of male dominance, stripped of all rights in the service of the family. On the contrary, she remained capable of engaging in a fairly wide range of activities, albeit from within the "protection" of the *harim*. The family did serve to define and enforce one major dimension of her existence, the dimension of seclusion with all that it signified for her relations with men. It was within this same family context, however, that the upper-class woman controlled her own property and its disposal.

The Lower-Class Family

While discussion of the "other" Arab family does help to describe some critical aspects of upper-class family life, the urban lower-class family in the Palestinian town of Nablus or in Cairo appears to have developed a significantly different lifestyle. Far from the circles of wealth and power, the family held less importance as a wielder of economic power or forger of political alliances. In the households of the modest artisans, small shopkeepers, service workers, and casual laborers, family ties also helped to organize economic and social life, but on a much more modest scale. With a good deal less at stake, some of the rigid controls, particularly over women, that characterized the upper-class family were greatly relaxed.

First, although we have no evidence for consensual union in the sense of a courtship period which might allow for an informed choice of mate, lower-class women in Nablus were more likely to have a say in marriage arrangements for a number of reasons. Fewer lower-class girls were married off in their minority: whereas 26 percent of upper-class marriages involved minor brides, among the lower class the percentage shrank to 15. Thus, a greater number of lower-class brides were in a position to exercise their right of refusal. More importantly, however, a lower-class woman was much more apt to marry more than once in her lifetime. Most of the marriages of non-virgin brides in the Nablus records clearly involved lower-class women: fifteen of twenty-three such contracts named brides whose families were neither part of the official elite nor of the merchant or *'ulama* communities. Indeed, such second- (or third-) time marriages represented almost half of the recorded lower-class marriages. When marrying a second time, the bride was most likely older, and better able to influence marriage arrangements. In addition, the impermanence of lower-class marriage suggests that far less, in the way of property or politics, was riding on marriage alliance in these social circles: the degree of family control over marriage arrangements could be correspondingly weaker.

Second, the lower-class lifestyle could not sustain female seclusion, the lynchpin of the preservation of female honor. The provision of *harim* quarters lay beyond the means of poorer families who could ill afford, in any event, the loss of female labor that strict seclusion entailed. Nablus marriage contracts recognized, indirectly, the lesser weight attached to honor, in the sense of the absence of female sexual experience, among the lower class: the bride is identified as simply "the woman" (*al-mar'ah*) in addition to her given name; there were no honorifics testifying to purity or protection. Similarly, the activities of the lower-class woman of Cairo precluded any strict adherence to an ideal of honor. Cairene women engaged in many professions which took them to the streets of the city: as petty traders or craftswomen, they labored in the public eye while as purveyors of varied services to other women, including those of midwife, bath attendant, weigher, etc., they passed through public space daily. Such women came to the Cairo *mahkama* in person with their business and their complaints; they purchased property, registered debts, and accused others of theft. Indeed, the upper-class female lifestyle was predicated on the mobility of these lower-class women who came and went from the *harims* in their capacity as servants, seamstresses, and peddlers.[25]

Third, lower-class families, at least in Nablus, appear to have practiced less cousin marriage. While a quarter of upper-class marriage contracts in Nablus involved first cousins, the proportion dropped to 12 percent among lower-class families. With less property at issue, we may assume that the families had a correspondingly lower motivation to marry endogamously. In addition, the forms of political alliance based on family ties so important to the upper class had far less relevance in lower-class circles. The politics of patronage integrated the lower classes into the political sphere, but integrated them vertically as the clients and followers of upper-class families. As such, horizontal linkages among the members of the lower class had less political significance and figured little in marriage arrangements.[26] In Cairo, there is much to suggest that lower-class economic and social life as well was based on a variety of popular associations. Men belonged to guilds, neighborhood groups, and religious brotherhoods while women maintained a range of informal social networks.[27] The fact that family ties played a rather minor role, as a result, in much of lower-class urban life helps explain a more casual attitude toward marriage arrangements.

Finally, lower-class women did manage, like their upper-class counterparts, to exercise considerable control over their property and their other affairs. Free of the trammels of the *harim*, lower-class women could assert their rights in person in court and use their control over property to forge a variety of economic relations. In Cairo, we find that men were often in debt to their wives. These debts were not merely formal: the women kept careful account of the loans of petty sums and resorted to the court, when necessary, to enforce repayment. Husbands and wives also bought and sold property together, as did, upon occasion, sisters. These women, then, were active in the employment of their property. In Nablus, on the other hand, lower-class women rarely appeared in court for business purposes: if they were doing business of any kind, they were settling their affairs outside the court. Estate records do demonstrate, however, that Nablus women also loaned money to their husbands: one lower-class man died owing his wife more than the entire, admittedly modest, value of his estate.[28]

Not surprisingly, male relatives at times attempted to defraud a woman of her rightful inheritance from a husband or father, hoping, no doubt, to avoid fragmentation of family property. In such cases, however, women were quick to resort to the court to invoke their rights as legal heirs and to call upon the judge to restore their property.[29] While the property at issue was usually meager—a few household goods, shares in modest houses, small sums of money—lower-class women did defend their property and the position of power it lent them within the family with considerable vigor. Nor did the lower-class woman have much to fear from the practice of polygyny: in these social circles, a second wife was an expensive rarity and there is almost no evidence of multiple wives or concubines among the lower class.

The lower-class family thus emerges as quite distinct. Weaker control of marriage, relaxed notions of honor, less pressure for the maintenance of family ties through marriage, and the absence of seclusion distinguish lower-class family life from that of the more affluent. The implications for gender relations are many. Because marriage practices played a far less important role in the construction of political and economic life, and female honor was not as publicly acclaimed, lower-class women need not have been controlled so strictly: their marriages, while not exactly consensual unions, probably did, at times, spring from the desires of the bride and groom. Once married, a woman of the lower class continued to live, in part, outside the family circle: her roles as worker and guardian of her own property took her into the world of the street, the market, the court—the antithesis of the *harim*. The court records do suggest that lower-class women in Cairo and Nablus did not have identical life styles: Nablus women are far less present, at least as independent craftswomen and traders, in the court; they were, however, well represented in real estate transactions. Overall, the images of female passivity and powerlessness fit rather poorly with the emerging outlines of lower-class family life.

Conclusion

On the basis of the rather fragmentary evidence we have so far, we would argue that the historical Arab family was far from being a monolithic institution. As part of the economic, social, and political landscape, the family evolved in response to variations in its role. On an economic level, the family of the wealthy appeared to function as an extended unit, keen to retain its property and economic influence within the family circle through carefully arranged marriages. Among the lower classes, on the other hand, the family, as an economic unit, was smaller: much economic activity rested on relations between husband and wife. In addition, business transactions and estates involved far less property and families appeared to be more relaxed about marriage arrangements. The family also operated differently as an institution of social control in different environments. Among the upper class, the overweening significance of family honor as vested in female behavior was manifest not only in the rhetoric of public testimonies to female purity, but also in the practice of confinement to the *harim*. Such a conspicuous display of honor was clearly beyond the means of the working poor: their women were very much part of a public work life which precluded all but the most formal adherence to the ideal of female seclusion. Finally, family politics also operated differently in class terms. Whether among the important landed families of the Nablus region or the urban elite of Egypt, marriage acted to buttress family solidarity or to forge needed political alliances. In either case, careful planning and control of marriage lay at the heart of the political system. The lower class, on the other hand, was integrated into the system primarily through material links of patronage or popular associations in which marriage

played little role. As such, the lower class could afford to be far more flexible about marriage arrangements and tolerate changes of marriage partner.

The implications of such differences for women, for the ways in which they experienced family control and managed to carve out spheres of power within the family, surely lie at the center of any study of women's history in the region. As we attempt to understand the ways in which family helped structure gender relations, we need to pay close attention to variations in the idea, the structure, and the function of family that occurred across class and, most probably, across time. We have tried to suggest that the family of the upper class may have differed from the family of the lower class, a divergence obscured by reference to a monolithic model. We have certainly not exhausted the possible varieties of family in the region: the families of the peasants or nomadic pastoralists undoubtedly would display yet other differences in idea and organization. Nor have we tackled the critical issue of how families were changing, particularly in the context of the socioeconomic transformations of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Family life, including the position and power of women, was part of a social world that was neither static nor absolute. As we begin to examine how families evolved over time, we will be better able to assess the significance of such historical change for women and understand how women themselves might have influenced family development.

NOTES

1. For a recent and most remarkably detailed study of this kind, see Linda Schatkowski Schilcher, *Families in Politics: Damascene Factions and Estates of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden GMBH, 1985.

2. See, for example, Gabriel Baer, *Studies in the Social History of Modern Egypt*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1969, pp. 210–11.

3. For a discussion of variant theses in European family history, see D. H. J. Morgan, *Family, Politics, and Social Theory*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985, pp. 159–67. For a rather widely accepted vision of the Arab family as static, at least until very recently, see Halim Barakat, "The Arab Family and the Challenge of Social Transformation," in E. W. Fernea, ed., *Women and the Family in the Middle East*, Austin, University of Texas Press, 1985, pp. 31–32.

4. Recent or current research in women's history includes the work of Margot Badran on the Egyptian feminist movement, Margaret Meriwether on women and work in nineteenth-century Aleppo, Afaf Lutfi al-Sayyid Marsot on women's economic activities in eighteenth-century Egypt, Beth Ann Baron on the feminist press in late nineteenth-century Egypt, and Julia Clancy-Smith on female religious leadership in late nineteenth-century Algeria.

5. See Rayna Rapp, Ellen Ross, and Renate Bridenthal, "Examining Family History," in Judith L. Newton, Mary P. Ryan, and Judith R. Walkowitz, eds., *Sex and Class in Women's History*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1983, pp. 232–58, for a discussion of ways to integrate women's history and family history.

6. Jack Goody, *The Development of the Family and Marriage in Europe*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1983, pp. 24–26.

7. See William Goode, *World Revolution and Family Patterns*, New York, Free Press of Glencoe, 1963, pp. 89–90, for a standard discussion of the importance of honor to the Arab family.

8. See Goode, *World Revolution*, pp. 93–95; Goody, *Development*, pp. 31–32.

9. Goode, *World Revolution*, p. 139.

10. Goode, *World Revolution*, p. 123. In his discussion of polygyny, Goode notes that it remained the ideal, out of reach for many.

11. Goode himself deplores the absence of reliable studies of family life in the region, Goode, *World Revolution*, p. 87. Although over twenty years have passed since publication of his book, the situation he describes still holds true for historical studies of family in the Arab world.

12. See John L. Esposito, *Women in Muslim Family Law*, Syracuse, Syracuse University Press, 1982, pp. 16–22, for a discussion of the laws governing marriage arrangements.

13. Out of the 107 contracts registered in the incomplete Nablus records between 1721 and 1856 (*sijills* 4–5 and 9–12), 31 were clearly identified as contracts of the upper class, 38 as contracts of the comfortable "middle" class, and 33 as lower class. In addition, there were 2 contracts of freed slave women and 3 peasant contracts. Among the clearly identifiable ruling group who monopolized important official positions under Ottoman rule, 26 percent of recorded contracts named minor brides. We do not know why only some contracts, and surely a minority of the total number of marriages contracted in Nablus, were registered in the court.

14. See André Raymond, *Artisans et commerçants au Caire au dix-huitième siècle*, Damascus, Institut Français de Damas, 1974, vol. 1, p. 275; Edward Lane, *An Account of the Manners and Customs of the Modern Egyptians*, 5th ed., New York, Dover, 1973, p. 355; Edward W. Lane, "Description of Egypt," British Museum 34080, vol. 1, fol. 111; and Antoine Clot-Bey, *Aperçu général sur l'Egypte*, Bruxelles, Meline, Cans, 1840, p. 80, for comments on these professions.

15. See Judith E. Tucker, *Women in Nineteenth-Century Egypt*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 95–96.

16. Under Islamic law, a man enjoys a blanket right of divorce and need not show cause. See Esposito, *Women*, pp. 30–31.

17. Mahkamat Nablus, *sijill* 4, p. 11, 24 Dhu al-qa'dah, 1135.

18. Mahkamat Nablus, *sijill* 4, p. 215, Shawwal 1137; *sijill* 11, p. 158, assume Sha'ban 1265.

19. Mahkamat Nablus, *sijill* 4, p. 127, 13 Rabi' I, 1137; *sijill* 4, p. 142, Jumada I, 1137; *sijill* 4, p. 297, Jumada I, 1138; *sijill* 11, p. 24, assume Rajab, 1263.

20. Mahkamat Nablus, *sijill* 9, p. 18, assume Jumada I, 1247: two contracts.

21. Mahkamat Bab al-Ali, Cairo, *sijill* 323, no. 628, 1216/1801–02; *sijill* 345, no. 196, 1226–27/1811–12.

22. See Tucker, *Women*, pp. 93–96.

23. Mahkamat Nablus, *sijills* 4, 5, 9–12.

24. Muhammad al-'Abbasi al-Mahdi, *al-Fatawa al-mahdiyah fi al-waqa'i al-misriyah*, Cairo, al-Matba'ah al-Azhariyah, 1883–84, vol. 1, 6 Rajab 1266/1850, p. 389.

25. See Tucker, *Women*, pp. 81–83.

26. For a detailed discussion of political alliance in the Nablus region with frequent reference to the mobilization of lower classes in the political system, see Miriam Hoexter, "The Role of the Qays and Yemen Factions in Local Political Divisions," *Asian and African Studies* (Jerusalem) 9 (1973), 249–311.

27. See Tucker, *Women*, pp. 102–15.

28. Mahkamat Nablus, *sijill* 9, p. 149.

29. See Tucker, *Women*, pp. 97–99.