

**GENDER AND EDUCATION DURING
THE MANDATE**

Preparing the Mothers of Tomorrow: Education and Islam in Mandate Palestine, by Ela Greenberg. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2010. 195 pages. Notes to p. 245. Bibliography to p. 266. Index to p. 277. \$55.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper..

Reviewed by Andrea L. Stanton

Ela Greenberg's first book is a gracefully written work of scholarship that highlights an important but overlooked aspect of Mandate Palestinian history: girls' education. With a deftly woven, richly sourced text that brings together gender, religion, social class, nationalism, and politics, she presents the history of girls' education in Mandate Palestine as a key lens through which to read some of the era's most critical issues.

Greenberg's work builds on two connected strands of scholarship: that of Mandate Palestine studies, with attention to the roles of the political and the social in examining the formation and character of national identity, and that of gender and modernity in the Middle East, in which the refiguration of woman as mother—a scientific, modern, national, teaching mother—played a role in colonized and uncolonized societies alike. She graciously acknowledges

Andrea L. Stanton is an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Denver and author of the forthcoming *This is Jerusalem Calling: State Radio in Mandate Palestine* (University of Texas Press).

this earlier work, and uses it to make a compelling argument: that education was “integral to the nationalist and modernity narratives in Palestine” and that girls’ education, even when underfunded or used in service of a larger agenda, was crucial to these narratives (p. 4).

The book begins with a chapter on girls’ education in late Ottoman Palestine. Chapter 2 looks at government schools and Muslim girls’ education during the Mandate, while chapter 3 looks at Muslim girls in Christian schools. Chapter 4 considers the Islamic Girls School in Jerusalem as a case study of the Supreme Muslim Council schools, while chapter 5 looks at the various curricular approaches used for inculcating “modern motherhood.” The book concludes with a chapter on women’s expanding access to the public sphere, including mass media, employment, and volunteer associations.

While Greenberg’s primary focus is on the Mandate period, her work helps connect Mandate education with the educational reforms of the late Ottoman period. These continuities undercut British claims that the Ottomans discouraged girls’ education and highlight the ways in which the Department of Education built its institutions on Ottoman precedents. Such continuities followed the letter rather than the spirit of late Ottoman educational reforms, which worked to broaden educational access and promote national identity. For example, British administrators insisted on the Ottoman practice of gender-segregated schooling, even in rural communities where segregation was less strict and separate school buildings prohibitively expensive. They similarly claimed Ottoman precedent in giving Christian schools wide latitude in their operations, while bringing Muslim education under state control. The result was a system that worked to separate students by religion, rather than connecting them by nationality.

One of the most interesting arguments in Greenberg’s book is that of the connection between language, class, and education among Palestinian elites. Drawing on earlier research regarding the role of formal Arabic in notions of elite Muslim masculinity—as “the language of men and of public

affairs”—she notes that this translated into a preference for upper-class girls to be educated in European languages rather than in Arabic (p. 30). This preference seems to have influenced the popularity of French-language Catholic girls’ schools in the late Ottoman era, and French- and English-language Christian schools during the Mandate. The concern with language and literacy for elite girls was reversed in Mandate officials’ and elite Palestinians’ concern with rural education, where literacy for girls was discouraged in favor of “practical” training in farming and rural housekeeping.

This is a work of social history, and one that assumes readers will have a fairly strong knowledge of Mandate political history. While Greenberg goes into some detail about the Arab Revolt and its impact on schooling, other major events—like the Wailing Wall uprisings and World War II—are mentioned only in passing. Yet Greenberg has a rare ability to connect institutional histories to her findings regarding education. For example, she neatly links the Supreme Muslim Council’s disastrous decision to build the Palace Hotel in the late 1920s to the erosion of its financial resources, which in turn weakened the educational institutions it supported. These included Jerusalem’s Islamic Girls School, which shifted within a decade from attracting elite Palestinian girls to those listed in school registers as “faqira” or “faqira jiddan,” “poor” or “very poor” (p. 120). At the same time, she notes, this shift accompanied another: the increasing social acceptance of teaching as a profession for upper-class young women. Even as the pupils’ socioeconomic status declined, a growing number of women from Palestine’s elite families signed on as teachers. This fits with one of Greenberg’s broader points: that girls’ education during the Mandate, however limited in scope and vision, helped open up the public sphere to Palestinian women, and especially Muslim Palestinian women.

Greenberg obtained her doctorate from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and was a postdoctoral fellow at its Truman Institute for the Advancement of Peace. She has published several articles on girls’ and boys’ education during

the Mandate, including in the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. With this book, she has provided a major contribution to the social history of Mandate Palestine and to understanding the complex intersections between cultural norms, religious identities, rural and urban dynamics, notions of

modernity, and the mix of fiscal conservatism, stereotypical assumptions, and good intentions that characterized the Mandate. Further, she has returned girls' education to the prominent position that it held in this era, in the minds of educators, political figures, religious authorities, journalists, and parents.



Israel's newly deployed Iron Dome missile defense system launches a missile to intercept a Palestinian rocket fired from Gaza towards Israel, 12 March 2012. (Uriel Sinai/Getty Image)