Our ethnographic study of Palestinian Israeli women at the Hebrew University explores how these women construct space into place as they construct themselves. Tracing the women’s experiences in the dormitories, Jerusalem, and Israeli/Palestine, we show how the women acquire knowledge of the gendered and national organization of space and develop practices for using this knowledge to negotiate power relations. Using an analytical understanding of space as constituted of and by social relations, we expand on the work on space as text done by Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Moore. We show that it is the power to read places, or spatial literacy, which allows women and marginal groups to contest dominant power regimes. [space, literacy, marginal groups, Palestine/Israel]

When Palestinian Israeli women¹ come to study in Jerusalem they begin to see what Zarek calls “the places where we are not” (2000:226). They begin to see the new places in which they are. From their homes in Palestinian enclaves created by Israeli policies of development and construction (Yiftachel 1999; Schnell 1993), they come to the capital city—an urban center, the seat of government, and a hotbed of religious and political conflict. They attach themselves to the Hebrew University—a prestigious university founded to further the interests of zionism and the Jewish state. In this context, they become more aware of their gender and national marginality and how this position changes in different arenas of the same space. This elaborated understanding of the nature of Palestinian women’s marginalities becomes an integral part of their ability to read and question power relations, compare between their locations in power
relations in multiple arenas, maneuver these relations, and work on asserting themselves in new positions in new and old places. When Palestinian women at the Hebrew University learn to read space, they learn to decipher the social engravement of power relations. This knowledge is a resource for negotiating geometries of power.

Using the case of Palestinian women, we explore how individuals in marginal positions can construct space into place as they construct themselves. We follow the women in their exploration of familiar and unfamiliar spaces of Jerusalem, home, and in-between. In their movements and practice in space, they plot their course through these spaces, ascribing social and political meanings to space, and positioning themselves in places. This article is an attempt to understand how Jerusalem spaces trigger the women to confront their marginalities; how they serve as a locus through which and by which young Palestinian women assert, negotiate and resist relations of power. In other words, we examine the significance of spatial experience and practice for the construction of identities.

We employ an ethnographic case study to illustrate the concept of spatial literacy. This concept views spatial practice as a process of reading and putting to use an understanding of the spatial organization of social relations. The concept illuminates how the subject and space interact in creating and identifying each other. It can be a tool for analysis of how space directs the social construction of identities and how marginal subjects can contest the power of social construction in place.

Space, power relations, and identity

Study of the constellation of space, power relations, and identity has been developed by an inter-disciplinary dialogue between sociology, cultural geography, human geography, and cultural anthropology (Agnew and Duncan 1989). At the base of this inter-disciplinary project is the assumption of a link between social structure, mental or personal experience, and physical space. Often referred to as spatialization or spatiality, the connotation is “the ways in which the social and spatial are inextricably realized one in the other...the circumstances in which society and space are simultaneously realized by thinking, feeling, doing individuals...the many different conditions in which such realizations are experienced by thinking, feeling, doing subjects” (Keith and Pile 1993:6).
Since space is viewed as neither natural nor static, it is important to draw a distinction between space and place to show how they are differently linked to social process. Doreen Massey distinguishes space as “social relations ‘stretched out’” (1994:2), whereas place is a bounded or fixed articulation of one moment of social relations in space. Both are imbued with the power and meaning of social relations, but while space is always in flux, place is defined. It is a moment of imposed power relations in space.

Combining sociological theorization of space (Giddens 1983; Pred 1983; 1984) and marxist thought, cultural geography has brought to this dialogue a focus on the reproduction of social inequality in space, planning, and unequal access of non-dominant groups (Storey 2001; Duncan and Ley 1993). It has illuminated how the built environment plays an integral role in producing social life, reproducing capitalism (Harvey 1992; Smith and Katz 1993), and exerting authority and power through the control of territory (Sack 1986). It also shows that non-dominant groups can resist power through spatial contest.

Human geography has emphasized the link between space and identity. The concept of a “sense of place” focuses on how human understanding and experience of space are what make it meaningful, while the meanings of spatial experience are simultaneously the basis of self-understanding or identity (Soja 1989). By observing the ways places are rendered meaningful and the cultural processes of the embodiment of these meanings, we can study how social relations are re-organized as place and identity are defined (Feld and Basso 1996; Casey 1996; Werlen 1993).

Setting forth from both the ideas of power relations in space and place as identity, cultural anthropology has taken up the study of space in efforts to theorize the construction of identities in postmodern, postcolonial, and globalized contexts (Appadurai 1991; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Watts 1992). This has led to an expansion of the concept of culture from a locally spatialized phenomenon to a fluid, unbounded phenomenon that expands across and reproduces itself in spaces. With this in mind, cultural anthropologists have also looked into how the politics of identity are played out in space (Featherstone and Lash 1995; Soja and Hooper 1993; Kaplan 1996).

The interactive dialogue and overlap between perspectives has brought about a social/geographical perspective, which sees both social phenomena and space as constituted socially. Social practice on and in space creates and recreates society; subjects constitute themselves through spatial practice and in relation to the social-spatial organization of power. Identity is thus constituted through spatial practice.
Within this inter-disciplinary trend of inquiry, we are interested in the identities that emerge from social relations in space, how space guides social relations, and how social relations reform place. We aim to add a piece to the puzzle of how spatialization works and identity is created through it—especially in situations of marginality. We propose that space and spatiality are involved in identity not just because they are mutually constructed by and of social relations; through spatial practices subjects also can reveal and grasp power relations and the power of place.

**Beyond reading space: literacy and identity**

Our view of spatial literacy adds to what theorists have termed the need for a “lexicon of the strange effects of space” (Yaeger 1996:25), which emphasizes rituals of the spatial organization and theorizes how space is reterritorialized (Sibley 1995; Gupta and Ferguson 1992). We propose drawing an analogy between the post-structuralist view of ideological literacy and spatial practice.

In the post-structural tradition, knowledge is understood as inscribed with power relations; it is hierarchized and privileges hegemonic ideologies of society. Thus encounters with knowledge necessitate encounters with power. Learning and applying knowledge involves making choices about how one relates oneself to the organization of power (Street 1993; 1984; Langer 1987). Literacy refers to the acquisition of the tools (reading and writing) of knowledge as well as to their application. When a subject becomes literate, she makes choices about how she in particular uses knowledge/power; that is to say, her literacy applications or practices are what position or re-position her vis-a-vis power relations. Since becoming literate is connected to the experience of power and the re-definition of social positioning, it entails working through identity.

Radical pedagogues built on this link between knowledge and identity. They saw literacy as a tool for creating a consciousness, or a kind of politicized identity among marginal groups that would empower them to resist dominance (Freire 1971; Freire and Macedo 1987; Giroux 1991; Shor 1987; hooks 1994). Building on the link between power, identity, and potential resistance, we analogize spatial practices to literacy. Since space, like knowledge, is inscribed with power relations, spatial practices necessarily entail coming up against power relations and positioning oneself vis-a-vis them. Certainly, this can lead to reproduction of power and
positioning. Yet, it also implies at least a potential awareness to the inscription of social relations in space and the potential ability to manipulate them. Thus spatial practice, like literacy, can also be an empowering arena for social struggle. We call the idea that identity is worked on through spatial practices, spatial literacy.

The idea of analogizing between spatial practice and reading is not entirely new. A similar analogy between space and text has been raised by de Certeau, Lefebvre, and Moore. De Certeau and Lefebvre raised the analogy mostly as a metaphor without developing it into an analytical concept that could inform our study of the effects of space. Though Moore related to social practice in the text of space much in the same way as we do by spatial literacy, she used this metaphor not to understand identity, but to draw conclusions about changes in the structure of space and society. Building on these ideas, we make explicit the link between space and literacy theories in order to help elucidate how actors, and not just space or social structure, transform themselves through spatial practice.

The three existing approaches to space as text or to the reading of space share a common conception of spatiality—the inter-relation between social relations and space. They differ however, in their conceptions of text, reading, and resistance/reproduction. Lefebvre (1991[1974]) dismissed the idea of space-as-text on the grounds of his functionalist perception of text/reading. He understood the idea of space as text from a semiological view, implying that space embodies a code of signification, which can be decoded by reading. He thus argued with semiological concepts of text and reading. He dismissed the analogy of reading space as text as unhelpful on the grounds that space cannot be seen as text since it does not have one message or even code, but is over-inscribed; and that space is not read or deciphered but perceived, lived, and produced by means of embodied experience. Unfortunately, Lefebvre’s views of both text and reading are erroneous. By viewing texts as fixed on one message, merely in need of decoding, and by viewing reading as a passive decoding directed by the code, Lefebvre left no room for the reader’s personal experience with the text nor the connections she draws between experience of the text and context and history.

De Certeau’s view of reading, on the other hand, recognized the involvement of the reader herself and of context in transforming texts. His theory on the practice of everyday life aimed to show how power is resisted through the consumption and redefinition of socially produced cultural products, including city spaces. De Certeau substitutes writing-reading for the idea of production-consumption to show how reading and by proxy consumption, is
not passive but “transforms another person’s property into a space borrowed for a moment by a transient” (1984:xxi). He sees both reading and spatial practices, such as walking, as intervening in a dominated, regulating field of power and turning it to the advantage of the user. He introduces the useful concepts of ‘strategy,’ manipulations of power from above that are rooted in a proper place, and ‘tactics,’ temporal procedures of the weak that overturn momentarily the power of the dominant.

Because de Certeau associates strategies with the spatial and tactics with the temporal he conceives of tactics separately from the spatial text. When it comes to spatial text, he sees the city, for instance, as a modern, disciplined text which is set and prominent. Tactics, such as walking become viewed as anti-text that can define place for individuals, but are still not involved in the text of the city. Thus while he acknowledges the power that reading spaces in practices like walking can have for individuals, he de-emphasizes the power of reading for effecting space.

Moore in contrast, ties the reading-of-space and space-as-text together. She insists that spatial text can have no meaning without spatial practices, which like Bourdieu’s theory of practice, she sees as reading. Building on Ricoeur’s ideas of text, she treats space-as-text as dynamic. It is open to interpretation and its production and reading are interconnected with context and history. It is only through reading, which she defines as the “practical relation between action and understanding given in the interpretation of a spatial text” (1986:84), that space is made meaningful. She also sees spatial practice/reading as political, or potentially reproductive or resisting, in that it “‘inserts’ the individual into a particular relation both with the text (as representation) and with ideology and history” (ibid:90). Moore proposes the same ideas about space and practice, or knowledge and literacy that we are suggesting. Like the idea of ideological literacy, she sees spatial practices as themselves involving encounters with dissimulated power relations, as being able to contest and/or reproduce them, and as informing both social order and individual identity. In the conclusion of her ethnographic study however, Moore is primarily concerned with the changing order of space and less with identity. In the end, Moore’s view eliminates actors’ experiences and effects on space. Though she views space as dynamic, she views the impetus for change in space from within the logic of discourse. Space changes in order to symbolize or represent discourse. Like Lefebvre and de Certeau, her work over-privileges the power of semiotics and under emphasizes the agency of actors to read, interpret, and apply or contest the power relations embedded in spatial organization.
We hope to add to this discussion of spatial practice as a form of knowledge, power, and social reproduction/resistance. The ideas of Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Moore are helpful in understanding how space is constantly being interpreted and produced. Spatial literacy is meant to reformulate some of these ideas in a way that emphasizes the meanings of spatial practice for actors’ identities. We accentuate how actors work through power and positioning by reading the organization of power in space and by applying what they have read in their own practices. Following Bourdieu we see this practice as indicative of identity (1977). Identity need not be conscious and declared in words; rather, action is an indication of practical awareness. Spatial practices are identity practices that work through and on power relations as they are organized in the real spaces in which people live.

Before we apply this concept to the case of Palestinian Israeli women at the Hebrew University, we should clarify that the application is not arbitrary. Though we have presented here a neat theoretical argument, the ideas behind it were stimulated by field research. Over a year and a half (1998–2000) Lauren conducted observations in a women’s floor of the Resnick Dormitories and lived with several Palestinian women in the Eidelson Dormitories (see below), observed in classes, accompanied the women on excursions and to activities, and traveled home with them on weekends and vacations.2 Following the women through many spaces, Lauren became aware of the significance of spatial arenas and realized the importance of the spatial dimension of the women’s experiences. Thus we were led to look at place as a fundamental part of living, so as to capture what is being done in and to places. This article is based on an ethnography of place (Geertz 1996) that we use to flush out a theoretical concept.

From enclave to Jerusalem spaces

Israeli society is spatialized around national, religious, ethnic, and gender hierarchies. The Palestinian population in Israel in general and women in particular are a dominated group on all respects. We must understand how these hierarchies constitute a matrix of domination similar to that of class, race, and gender for black women in America (Collins 1991). Land and place have become major constitutive elements of the national identity of both Zionism and Palestinian nationalism (Rabinowitz 2000; Swedenburg 1990). Land metaphors are part of the moral discourse of us and them, good and bad; geography plays a major role in edu-
cation, literature, and the constitution of a national ethos (Selwyn 1995; Khalidi 1996; Parmeter 1994; Bar-Gal 1991). Palestinian Israelis, although privileged to have remained in the homeland, have been constantly enclaved into separate spaces by dominating policies. Until 1966, movement between villages and between them and Jewish areas was strictly regulated by permits issued by the military administration; today Palestinian towns and cities are kept mostly segregated from Jewish areas by separate systems of education, government, and even industry. This situation has trapped the Palestinian minority in Israel, leading them to consider themselves as doubly marginalized. On the one hand, this minority has been pushed to the outskirts of the dominant Jewish society, and on the other, it is considered to have been co-opted by the Zionist state and thus betrayed the greater Palestinian cause (Bishara 2000; Rabinowitz 2001; Rabinowitz and Abu Baker 2002).

For Palestinian women, this emphasis on physical and metaphorical place has created a situation of oftentimes hyper-restriction on women’s freedom of movement. Despite cultural and social differences among the various geographical regions, cities, towns, and neighborhoods in mixed cities, Israeli enclaving policies have facilitated the reproduction to various degrees, of patriarchal social and cultural norms. The lives of these young women become restricted by norms of movement with roots in both culture and colonial relations (Fenster 1998; Hassan 1999; Shvita 2003). Yet domination has also instigated a community-wide focus on higher educational attainment as a source of power (Ali 1999; Al-Haj 1987; 1989; Lustick 1989; Leesh 1971) and of personal advancement in face of discrimination. Thus a growing number of women have been encouraged to move into new spaces in the pursuit of higher education.

The city of Jerusalem, in particular, distances these women from their homes, where the tether of spatial constraints loosens, freeing them to explore new domains. Though certainly a Jewish-dominated place, created as Israel’s capital by what Lefebvre refers to as the violence of national political power, Jerusalem is not entirely “closed, sterilized, emptied out” (1991:69). As a conflict-ridden zone, the troubled and dense city of Jerusalem consists of different spaces replete with ethnic, religious, and national-political meanings. Situated on the border between two national territories, it is packed with tensions and characterized by harsh social and political conflicts over its status as Palestinian, Israeli, international; Muslim, Christian, or Jewish. Its situation on the border of, at the time, two distinct national territories, Israel and the PA, epitomizes the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and make Jerusalem a starting point for
new escapades, explorations, and adventures. As an urban center and capital, Jerusalem also presents stimulants, dangers, temptations, opportunities, and obstacles not as readily accessible in more provincial home towns (Massey 1993; Soja and Hooper 1993).

Situated in northeast Jerusalem, the Mount Scopus campus of the Hebrew University is a densely Jewish space, both replete with the implications of the Zionist conquest of the Land of Israel and symbolizing the prestige of long-standing traditions of higher education. With the exception of a hiatus from 1948–1967 when Mount Scopus was controlled by the Jordanians, it has been the university's central campus since 1928. Today it houses the social science and humanities campus. The Resnick and Eidelson Dormitories, along with most other buildings on campus are named for Jewish philanthropists from around the world who donated money for their construction. The campus sits atop a hill overlooking the Old City of Jerusalem. From many windows in the university one can see the shining gold Dome of the Rock Mosque from which Muhammad is reputed to have ascended to heaven to receive the Koran, the hilly terrain of the Judean Desert, and the Palestinian village of Issawiya whose inhabitants are classified as residents but not citizens of the state. The campus is surrounded also by the Jewish neighborhood of French Hill, and the Hyatt Hotel. The central downtown area and bus station are easily accessible by public transportation. Non-permitted Ford Transits provide inexpensive and accessible transportation to the Old City, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and other cities in the PA.

Throughout their university experience, the women avail themselves of Jerusalem spaces around the campus as significant arenas of experimentation. Following de Certeau, we can view them as “users of dominated status” in this hierarchized space. Their reading/consumption of space should be informative of how they try to contest or re-produce it and thus of how they work on identity.

Practices of spatial literacy

We focus on three spatial arenas the women live in daily: dormitory space, Jerusalem, and Israel/Palestine. These revealed themselves to be arenas in which home, locality, and nation are negotiated. In other arenas, such as classes and the university campus and bureaucratic offices, national and gender identity was formed through conceptions of knowledge (Erdreich and Rapoport 2002). In the following sections, we discuss how the women encounter, learn, and challenge gender and national marginalities through spatial practices.
Creating separate place: A new home enclave

At the Hebrew University, an institution planned and structured as part of the zionist project, a Palestinian woman begins her three years far from home and on her own (unlike her peers at Haifa University, which is situated in much closer proximity to the Palestinian villages of the Galilee and Triangle Region). She will live in dormitories near the campus, which sit not amidst Israel’s modern secular center as do those of Tel Aviv University, but amidst the Old City of Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, and villages in the PA. In the dorms, she will share her room with other Palestinian women, her floor with Jewish Israeli, immigrant, and foreign women, and her building with Palestinian and Jewish Israeli and foreign men and women.

A Palestinian woman’s first year at university is usually also her first year away from home. Most have spent several days away from home on the year-end school trip—a tradition borrowed from Jewish Israeli educational goals for collective bonding. Some have also traveled to various peace camps and summer programs. Jewish peers however, are several years older having served their obligatory army service and often having spent considerable time travelling the world. In interviews and casual conversations, Palestinian women recalled feeling alone and confused in their first few months. In an auto-biographical article Nadia Zoaby connects this feeling to being in a new place that she feels is not hers and to worrying about the expectations of how her life as a Palestinian woman in the new place will reflect on her position in an old place:

My father said to me... “For me it [sending her to university] was like throwing a stick into a fire and waiting for it not to burn.” For the first two months after that I lived with a feeling that I was in the heart of a fire, which I should stay away from and be careful that it wouldn’t leave its mark on me. I feared my father would show up suddenly and see me in some situation unacceptable to him. I remember that I asked boys who studied with me not to come to my room, and I lived constantly with a sense that my father was watching me. I felt a heavy sense of being followed in everything I did.

Getting to the university was a difficult experience. My expectations were not matched by the complex new reality of my studies. Nonetheless, my family’s and society’s expectations of me were clear. There was an awesome contradiction between what was going on around me and what
was going on inside of me. Whole nights I cried without knowing why. In lectures I felt weak and threatening at the same time (2000:16).

The theme of how to act as an honorable Palestinian woman in a new Jewish framework appears again and again. Manal6 addresses feeling of out-of-placeness that Nadia felt in classes. Describing her first lecture, Manal said that everything and everyone was “weird.” Connecting to the home place, she said she could not believe this was what her parents had sent her to study for. She looked around herself and felt that

I didn't find it to be my place; it was a very scary place. So I felt a fear like that and I didn't want to listen, I didn't want to see—who are these people? Even the problem came up inside me of Arabs and Jews. So how can I live with them? In my life I haven't lived—with them.

Manal, Nadia, and others mitigated this feeling of alienation by creating a familiar place within the strangeness of the university. They attached themselves to other Palestinian students, at first those from their villages or towns and later from other Arab areas in Israel. Intisar and Basam, though they were rivals in high school, became roommates. Maram consulted her sister’s fiance, who guided her not only on how to do assignments, but how to dress and with whom to associate among the Palestinian students. Another woman explained that “what made it easier was that we were five girls from Nazareth.” Though they were not friends or from the same class, the familiarity of origin became a base of support.

The university brings together in one space Palestinians of different religions, regions, and worldviews. In the context of the Jewish-dominated space, it seems natural that these students would seek each other out. However, the gathering of Palestinians from different regions also disrupts spatially bordered social conceptions about what is acceptable for a Palestinian woman. Part of the difficulty these women face is having to learn by practice what is acceptable in this new spatially confined community of university Palestinian peers. Working to define a community in this new place then is not only an act of searching for support but also of identity redefinition.

Mariam, a Christian from a northern village, related the importance of building this Palestinian support group in the dormitories:

You get used to having a lot of friends [in the village], and you come here and you have no one. You got used to a sort
of life and you have to build it. Okay, they [Palestinian peers] are different friends, different relationships, they understand you in a different way, and each one is from a different region... My society in the dorms, in the department, they give me power.

Mariam brings two places—home and university together in order to both help her decipher the different friends and relationships she finds at the university, but also to help her produce a new society out of the no one she has at the start. She looks for ways to turn the alienating, (in Manal’s terms “weird”) space of the university into something that resembles the friendships she had at home. Manal and Nadia also take refuge in a Palestinian peer group they create—Manal through her roommates and other people from her village, Nadia through friends in a Palestinian political group.

The women’s experiences at the university on the one hand widens the common denominator of their identity reference group to Palestinians from different regions, but on the other hand narrows it to those who are becoming university educated, who can understand them in a different way than friends and family back home. As we will show below, the women use the university space as an opportunity to transform the solidarity of Palestinianess from home into something new that gives support to educated women. This new identity gives them power both as Palestinians in the Jewish space of the university and as Palestinian women away from home.

Let’s take a closer look at the tactics the women use to transform the Jewish space of the dormitories and the meaning of these tactics in relation to practices in the home place. The Resnick Dormitories, located across the street from the academic campus, are comprised of double-occupancy rooms. Each single-sex floor has a communal bathroom and kitchen and an open sitting area called the jacuzzi. Further down the hill, are the Eidelson Dormitories. These dormitories are individual apartments of two rooms identical to the Resnick rooms, with a private kitchen and bath. Though by Housing Department policy, no statistics are available for the percentage of Palestinian women in the dormitories almost all of them live in there. The reason for this lies in the national and gender spatialization of Israeli life. First, Palestinians are discriminated against in the rental market in the neighborhoods surrounding the city. Second, Palestinian families want their daughters to live in a supervised protected environment when they are away from home in the big city. These two spatial arrangements of power turn the women into a significant if not dominant presence in the dorms.
One day Lauren arrived on the Resnick floor to find the dorms empty of people but the kitchen full of remnants of the women’s presence. Along the windowsill were soaking pots and Arab coffee cups. On the sideboard was a plastic tray with washed dishes and Suheir’s Arabic coffee pot. Even in their temporary absence, they had left their mark. At every observation on this floor, one or several of the women were in the communal kitchen. They chatted freely with each other, yelled to one another across the jacuzzi and constantly went back and forth into each other’s rooms. The Palestinian women claimed the space. They filled the kitchen with their laughter and the jacuzzi with their Arabic singing.

The Jewish women rarely interacted amongst themselves, and often even locked their doors when going to the bathroom. They only went into the kitchen to retrieve or return things to their refrigerators, never stayed to eat. They ducked away shyly or spoke only briefly with the Palestinian women there. The Jewish women moved minimally and on the margins of the space, rarely asserting their voices. They were faced with a constant, omniscient auditory Palestinian presence that filled the entire floor. The Palestinian women used their bodies and their voices to establish a presence on the floor and to claim the space as Palestinian.

By their practices in this new-home space, the women not only assert Palestinianness as an existent part of being a university student, but also render themselves anew as women. Gatherings of the women in close daily interactions in the dorms mak e possible the production of a new female peer community with new definitions of Palestinian women. All the Palestinian women on the Resnick floor had keys to each other’s refrigerators and rooms. They moved freely in and out of the rooms, bringing spices, utensils, and dishes. Many women, when returning from weekends spent at home, brought containers of Palestinian foods, cooked by their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. They shared these with their Palestinian neighbors and often cooked foods together in their apartments. Huddling around the kitchen table to eat, their talk centered on the university. They exchanged class material, cooperative assignments, worthwhile courses and professors, and information about how to get materials from other Palestinian students who had taken courses.

The kitchen space and Palestinian food were central in the peer dormitory place. Foods and cooking practices linked the women with the flavors of home. Their practices of sharing recreated relations of “connectivity” (Joseph 1993) among a new pseudo-kinship group of women students (Erdreich 2006). Their talk around the kitchen table shifted the basis of what united them from gendered issues of mothering and housework to studies and job search. In
addition, bringing food cooked by women at home would seem to reinforce typical gender roles of women cooking and dependence on the family. Yet, it freed the women from the traditional domestic role and allowed them more time for study, leisure, and work. Food connected between the home and university places, reminding the women of different traditions and expectations of women in these places: the aspect of a mothers’ role as cooking and provide for her children, versus, at least temporarily their student role to focus on studying and preparing for a career. By recreating gender roles, connectivity, and communal values characteristic of their home places, the women challenge whether such roles can mesh with that of an educated woman.

The public private-space of the dorms gives the women opportunity to bond and contest patriarchy. The re-location of the domestic to the university brings the women together. It frees them from concerns of family, household, and childcare that their peers at home are expected to deal with. Manar Hassan reflects about how girls are brought up to be the family “handmaid” and to “view this role as if it were her greatest wish and desire” (1991: 67). While at home Reem stopped what she was doing to fix her brother a sandwich, at the university she was the one who had food prepared for her. While Jumana and her sisters shared the cooking, cleaning, and childcare so her brothers and father could run the family business, at university, she focused on her studies and did not worry about domestic order.

The women fill up the female home space of the dorms with new meaning that supports women’s role in the public sphere. Their practices in this space read into it a place for them as student/worker—a position similar to that of male peers. They create a place for women that upsets the reproduction of the home as women’s workplace and men’s castle (Drucker, Tentokali, and Gumpert 1997). The dorm home, when created this way, becomes a means not of trapping women into domesticity, but of freeing them from it.

Creating separate spaces:
Making space for bodies

The dormitory space is also central to the women’s experience because of the way it reorganizes social surveillance. Families’ preferences for dorm residence at once emphasizes the spatial dimensions of a woman’s sexually-based marginality, exposes
the women to new spatial arrangements of sexuality, and allows them to experiment with tactics for reformulations. Outwardly the women are still under a social surveillance, but the authority of this in loco parentis (Hoekeman 1995) is virtually fictitious. This space provides the illusion of a surveillance replacement, allowing families to believe that their daughters are under surveillance and preserving the family honor. Women may be in a secure university building, but they live without familial supervision and in close quarters with strange men. Yet Palestinian peer groups do replace family surveillance to some degree. But women are free to set their own hours, go where they please, and choose with whom to associate—all without reporting their whereabouts or being under the constantly critical community eye.

In the following analysis, we can see how new criteria for honor and social relations are reworked spatially. The women of the Resnick floor, who hailed from two Muslim northern villages, put to use new practices that defined gender relations in this new home place. Hisham and Uthman, who were frequent visitors on their floor, ate with them, and interacted freely with them, were men they knew and were connected to from their home village. Choosing men from back home for their close male-female relationships is a very safe practice in that these men are known to them and their families. Nonetheless, the women's relationships with these men differed from their relationships in the village. The visiting code for men was clearly mapped out through the dormitory space. Over the year however, cross-gender interactions suffused inward to more intimate spaces. In the beginning of the year, most interactions happened in the kitchen and hallway. Their practices defined the kitchen as a neutral space—the site of communal activity. Bedrooms were strictly off-limits. Before entering into a room, male students knocked on the door and waited for permission to enter. As the year progressed, Hisham and Uthman entered the women's rooms more often, but always with the door open. By the end of the year, at the last observation, Uthman was found sprawled out casually on Haneen's bed in her room. Nonetheless, one Thursday at the end of the year when Hisham offered to drive Suzanne home, he made sure to reassure her that he would drop her off at the entrance to the village, so they would not be seen in the car together.

By spatially distributing their bodies in the dormitory space differently than they would at home, albeit with the same men, the women both challenged and reproduced traditional patriarchal codes. By expanding the “body spaces” (Middleton 1998) open to such interactions as the year progressed, the
women learned to utilize the freedom of a new space to challenge traditional aspects of a patriarchal social order and to work around the gossip mill. While accepting the safety of familiar men, they redefined the criteria for honor preservation. Adopting standards that allow for closer, more frequent interaction, they partially freed themselves from more constraining rules. The surveillance of the family and local community was replaced by a reformulated peer surveillance with new criteria adopted for and in the new place. In defining the dormitory space into place, the women redefined the boundaries of honor from their home communities. They safeguarded honor not by preserving separation between men and women, but by creating a place with boundaries determined by familiarity and trust.

The dormitories also allow for more sexual freedom and experimentation. Freedom is a concept that cannot be separated from space. It can be limited in certain spaces by spatial sequestering and facilitated in others. Women in particular, often have a sense of place that is aware of embodiment. The threat of being seen and judged objectifies women's bodies, making women feel located in space rather than sensing space as their own. Thus for women, space can be experienced as a dangerous part of patriarchal power to be carefully navigated (Rose 1993). Due to their geographical distance from home communities, the female Palestinian students enjoy free movement that can go relatively unnoticed and seemingly not threaten the local social order. Even if they do allow home space to re-position them on trips home, their changing practices in the dorms show an understanding and criticism of the organization of gender power at home.

The dormitories provided women with the freedom to go out, even with unfamiliar men. They often laughed at their parents’ belief that they spent evenings in their rooms studying, when really they were out with boyfriends. Mariam compares the dorms to a convent where she had lived the year before, “You have to be [at the convent] at eleven or not sleep there at all, so my friend who wants to go out with her boyfriend stays over at my room [in the dorms].” Another woman used the pretext of staying in the dorms to study over the summer to manage a trip abroad to meet a man she had fallen in love with. Lubna even identified having a boyfriend as the most beautiful part of her time in Jerusalem: “This is the most beautiful period, because now I have a steady boyfriend and my parents don’t know anything about it...beforehand I didn’t know what it was to go out with boys...In Jerusalem I started to meet guys and that is a radical change for me.” She uses Jerusalem as a site in which she uses a tactic that goes against the rules at
home. In this practice she shows an understanding of how gender power is distributed in space at home.

In the dorms, the women were also exposed to the sexual acts of others. The women gossip about those who have has male friends and boyfriends visit in their rooms, of overhearing sounds of lovemaking from other rooms, and of walking in on people having sex in semi-public places. With this talk, active sexuality becomes visibly hidden. The women show an awareness that the hymen mystique is being escaped and eluded; that the criteria of honor are being challenged. With the loosening of spatial constraints, both through practice and conscious thought the women shake the basis of patriarchal social honor and identify new positions for themselves vis-a-vis men.

The in loco parentis of the dorms creates a place that looks bounded and can preserve purity. The women take advantage of this illusion. Unlike Foucault's (1977) conception of institutional space, in this case, the institutional place is more freeing than the home space. When it is experienced by women, the home means surveillance while the anonymity of the institution can allow for a "political act of forgetting" (Yaeger 1996). That is, the layout of the space creates a feeling of safeness that erases gendered power relations. Because the women are tied to places where these relations exist, their literacy of the ways gender can be organized in places becomes a resource for struggle.

Breaching place:
Palestinizing the Hebrew University

In remaking the dormitory space into something familiar, the women's Palestinian peer groups challenge and reconstitute part of the Jewish space into a Palestinian space. Within the peer group, this re-creation challenges patriarchal order. When this national reconstitution becomes public however, it breaches the nationalization of place. The following vignette illustrates the identity implications of this type of spatial breach.

When the assertion of identity took on a Palestinian character, the university's reaction was defensive and became meaningful for the women. In experiencing and reacting to these university defined relations in the dormitory place, both their identity and the place was newly affected. Sabah, a devout Muslim and reserved young women, had taped a "Happy Ramadan" sign from the Islamic party picturing the Dome of the Rock on the outside of her door
in the Eidelson Dormitories. The Housing Authority sent a notice demanding removal of the sign claiming that it could damage the door, but an independent party also attached a sign to her door reading “The Temple Mount is in Our Power”? and picturing an Israeli flag. When the “Happy Ramadan” sign of her neighbors also evoked a similar response from the Housing Authority, a protracted discussion ensued among the women of the two Eidelson apartments involved. Comparing themselves to their hallmates, they protested discrimination on the grounds that their Jewish neighbors had not been reprimanded for nailing a sign to their door—an even more damaging act. Emphasizing their common status as students, Jumana, a member of the Islamic party, avowed, “In the end, we are all here to study.” Therefore, she believed she should be treated equally and not discriminated against on the basis of what could be interpreted as un-Israeli and un-Jewish.

This series of events was a struggle for presence in public space and over the meaning of the Jerusalem landscape. The meaning imbued into landscape connects between everyday existence and cosmological meaning of social life (Hirsch 1995; Rose 1993). Though the women did not discuss the Palestinian nature of their signs, the implications were present. In the context of the on-going Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Dome of the Rock is not only a religious symbol, but also a symbol of the question of rights of sovereignty over the Old City and all of Palestine/Israel. Competition over the naming, archaeology and history, ceremonies, and building of the Jerusalem landscape is a major locus for competing narratives or readings of space/identity (Khalidi 1996).

The reaction of the anonymous party who posted the Temple Mount sign shows that Sabah’s poster had meaning and was interpreted not only as a religious expression, but as a Palestinian symbol. The Jews were defending their national identity and domination over space via their nationalized view of the landscape. They were also defending their right to further this domination in the space of the university and to keep it void of nationalized meanings and presence. The women responded to challenges to their Palestinization practices in the dorms, and thus to their presence, through reliance on the terms of the universal codes of the university and their equal right to post things on their doors. Yet they learn that although both are students, Jews have more legitimacy in public spaces. The moment their Palestininess filters out, students are not accepted in university and universal space.

De Certeau says of tactics, “what it wins it cannot keep” (ibid:37). While the women’s readings and contest of gender were tactics that did not keep their power when the women went home,
their readings of nationalized space are tactics that do not seem to win at all. In both however, even when space is not changed permanently, the women involve themselves in acts of spatial literacy that change them.

By experiencing spatial discrimination and confronting it, the women apprehend the nature of relations between Jews and Palestinians in the university space. Whereas before they negotiated space with their Jewish female peers, here they negotiate space with an institutional authority. Through a symbolic occupation of place, they had Palestinianized the Jewish space of the Hebrew University. By supervising the women’s doors, the threshold between private and public space, the authority passes on the message that the possibility of Palestinianess is a threat to public space. The door is a border that can be opened and facilitate exchange (Simmel 1994), and the women are taught not to open it to national exchange. Through relations with the Jewish institution, the women are confronted with their marginality in Israel. They are jettisoned into the center of the Palestinian collective as together they become first-hand veterans of national discrimination.

Breaching place:
Bounded in Jerusalem

The city too is informative about the marginal and oppressive meaning of being a Palestinian in Israel. Jerusalem can be experienced as a space of open opportunities, that allowed the women to contest gender restrictions, but that can also pose nationalized limitations. Theoretical discussions of women in the city often focus on the spatial division of labor, the distance between work and home, the location of day care centers, and the safety of urban design. As mentioned, the sexual division of labor is partially neutralized by being at university, so work takes on another meaning. Limited to Palestinian jobs or spaces within the Jewish city, the Palestinian women learn to read the different positions they occupy as a Palestinian citizen in west and east Jerusalem.

Hanan and Raneen told about how they confronted outright discrimination when looking for work. Hanan recounted:

Yes, we were looking for work in a hotel. I filled out a long form and went in to the interview. He saw that I was Arab, asked me two questions, and didn’t even let me sit down. That was it. Then he tore up my form.
Raneen continued:

I went in after her. He asked me if we were together and I said yes. He said my hours weren’t appropriate, and I was free all week! It was still summer. I just looked at him. I took my form back and left. What am I? How? It can’t be like that, but to change—it’s impossible. One whole month we looked for work. The stores, surely they knew we were Arab by the names. They had help wanted signs, but when we applied they said they didn’t need help.

Hanan and Raneen’s job search highlight the marginality of Palestinians in Israel, reinforcing a set view of nationality-based geometries of power. By moving into Jewish Jerusalem, they learn that the city-space of opportunities is constituted along national lines and that Jews are in power.

Hanan and Raneen’s attempt to penetrate into the workplace disrupts the meaning that the hegemonic culture is trying to construct into this place. In his study of shopping malls, Sibley (1995) illustrates how the regulation of a place’s function can construct groups as deviant by defining them as not-belonging. Spatial boundaries become a means for preserving moral boundaries by keeping out the threat of contamination. Although the center of town where the hotel was located was presented as open and offering employment opportunities, the potential employer takes care not to let Hanan and Raneen cross the moral boundary. More than this practice of exclusion however, we also see how the women’s spatial experience illustrate power relations.

When they were not granted jobs despite their qualifications, Hanan and Raneen were forced to ask themselves, “What am I?”—what is it about me that prohibited this opportunity? Understanding that this discrimination is based on their Palestinianness exposes them to the nationalized dimension of power geometries in Jewish spaces of Israel. It shows them how they are restricted in new ways—on basis of nationality as opposed to gender.

Raneen, an education student, who sees this as unchangeable, subsequently sought and found work in the Palestinian area of Beit Hanina. Hanan, a student of Law, sought to change the spatial order by filing a discrimination suit. Others worked as shabbos goys in religious hospitals—a job based on Jewish religious injunctions that Jews do not work on the Sabbath, but that non-Jews, usually servants, do work for them. Others found that their Hebrew skills could get them jobs as teachers in East Jerusalem even while still students. Others worked in exchange for scholarships through the
popular Big Sisters program where they were exposed to the poverty of non-citizen Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem neighborhoods. Through these job searches the students learned how their status changes from place to place and learned to read the changing constellations of nation, citizenship, and class throughout the city. Their nationality dictated how they experienced spaces and how they identified themselves.

Breaching place: Unfettered in Jerusalem

While the city can be read as nationally oppressive, it can also facilitate challenges to patriarchy by its inclusion of women in the public space. According to feminist conceptions of urban space, the city can facilitate challenges to hegemony. It makes available to women new knowledge that is not accessible from within the domestic space, and it provides places and space for liberation (Rose 1993).

Howla, the head of a nationalist, secular Palestinian student political party, comes from a northern village and went to a private girls’ school in Nazareth. She related that she chose to study in Jerusalem because “I come from a village and the city is more open than the village.” Her interest in politics led her to begin working for a Member of Knesset, and through her connections with him she was able to bring him to her village during the elections:

I wasn’t very known because I studied outside of the village, and went straight from Nazareth to Jerusalem, but during the election period I was active with Balad [Democracy National Alliance]. I did a huge parlor meeting and [the MK] came. All people came—big people, neighbors, people from the next village, my dad’s friends...I made a big deal, so they said, ‘wow, such a young girl, and she does such big things, even bigger than her father could do. She’s the youngest.’ And now they know me.

The opportunities of which she took advantage in the city empowered her to change status in her home place. With the power she had accrued in the city, she traveled back to the village. There she gave a new reading to her marginal position as a young woman. Not only did she become known, but her fellow villagers also began to doubt that the categories of age and gender were what defined her capabilities. For her, the city was a space in which she practiced/read new roles, and took them with her to reinterpret and re-inform the home place.
Basma, whose mother and father both work and are college-educated, felt restricted despite her parents’ support of her education. Her father had discouraged her from studying nursing, because “Why do that? You will have to work nights and that’s hard.” Like other women, she worked as a shabbos goy at the major religious hospital in Jewish Jerusalem. She read this opportunity differently than other women. She liked the work, because it gave her a chance to practice nursing, and gave her financial independence. She often worked night shifts over the weekend instead of going home. With her salary she paid for everything: housing, food, and clothes. According to her, her parents had forgotten that they used to pay for everything. Utilizing urban opportunities allowed her to change status and identity. Basma’s financial independence allowed her to change her status in the family and seek personal fulfillment.

Both women were able to negotiate the social order by asserting financial independence and gathering accomplishments—things they were only able to achieve through their urban access to opportunities. Through their experience, they read and contested the spatial restrictions placed on women as more than a matter of family honor. Through their practices in the city and vis-a-vis their families, they interpreted restrictions placed on them as young women. They applied their knowledge to acquire resources of status, connection, and money—key elements for challenging patriarchal conceptions of power.

The women’s readings of city limits and opportunities, and their applications of this knowledge illustrate that space can both reproduce oppression and provide solutions (Harvey 2000). It can grant their status as women, as Palestinians, as Israeli citizens different meanings of dominance and subordination. It is not their attachment to a different category that changes their position in matrixes of domination, but the meaning of the matrix itself as it is inscribed in different spaces. The women read the city spaces for lessons about gender and national oppression, and as sites of opportunities.

Initiation in new places:
Il-Quds Il-Arabiyyee, blurring borders

The space of Jerusalem is more extensive than its Jewish areas. Since the 1967 War, it has been comprised of a metropolis of Palestinian and Jewish neighborhoods, in close proximity to Ramallah, Bethlehem, and other areas of the PA. The distinction
between these spaces is a political construction of the Jewish-Israeli regime—fabricated by gerrymandering, municipal zoning, and the establishment of checkpoints. While we could see the university’s position atop a semi-isolate hill as involved in a type of zoning (Women and Geography 1984) that constructs an erasure of gender and nationality in favor of construction of class, we would be ignoring how subjects connect between zones. Palestinian Israeli women moved through and read these spaces as a continuum, and through their practices within them, perceive the spaces as somewhat contiguous. Their movements at once blur and bring them up against the spatial organization of gender and nation.

Most of the women go to Il-Quds Il-Arabiyyee (Arab Jerusalem), as they call the area in and around the Damascus Gate of the Old City of Jerusalem, to buy food, clothes and gifts, and spend leisure time. This area of Jerusalem is both familiar and unfamiliar to them. It is intensely Arab in character. Accessing it from the university involves traveling through Palestinian neighborhoods using Palestinian transportation. It is urban and more connected with the PA than their home villages. Products and people come from the West Bank. The students choose to shop and spend a greater amount of their leisure time here, as opposed to Jewish places such as the near-by French Hill supermarket, the mall, or popular downtown cafes. Il-Quds Il-Arabiyyee is the focal point of their map of Jerusalem, granting it a special role in their subjective cartography.

Lauren accompanied Basma and her religious friend Intisar, who wears a headscarf, to Il-Quds Il-Arabiyyee one evening. As they went in and out of stores, Basma and Intisar admired the traditionally embroidered dresses, explaining to each other which patterns were from which regions. When they encountered one they could not identify, they asked the shopkeeper. The two of them, like other women in the market, were politely greeted by all the shopkeepers, waited on, and engaged in conversation. Although the usual language of communication with Intisar and Basma at the time was Hebrew, both spoke to Lauren solely in Arabic in these places. There seemed to be a sort of symmetry between them and the locals, which was predicated on their status as Palestinians, which would have been destroyed by speaking Hebrew or associating with the occupier.

In this space, the code of conduct for social relations dictated that they be respected as customers and treated friendly, as opposed to the discrimination and disrespect they often experienced in Jewish Jerusalem. The marketplace is a public place where unchaperoned women can legitimately be present and respected as they
are continuing their private role. It is also a site for interpersonal contact, sharing news, and community gossip (Drucker and Gumpert 1997). In this case, the gender freedom also facilitates national identity construction. Basma and Intisar used the shop-keeper as a source of national information about embroidery and Palestinian regions. Although the excursion seemed to be merely a leisure activity, it provided a space and social context where they engaged in the political activity of expanding their national knowledge and connections to other Palestinians and Palestinian spaces. As Palestinian Israelis their connection to Palestinians in the PA is unclear. By their actions they took an active role in reading the space and using it to re-construct identity.

Other students told of a different experience in the market of Il-Quds Il-Arabiyyee. Wandering among the local women with more modest Muslim dresses, the university women found that their tight pants, small t-shirts, and styled hair elicited rude remarks, improper propositions, and even catcalls in Hebrew (from young Palestinian men). Distinction was made among women, based on local definitions of propriety. Hanadi, a fashionable young woman from a mixed Jewish-Palestinian city, related, “Now I always make sure to wear modest clothing when I go,” in order to deal with the confusion her attire created.

Through experiences in Il-Quds Il-Arabiyyee, the women learn to play with the possibility of taking conceptions from one space to another. They also learn its limitations. On the one hand, employing accepted images of Arab women brings them respect. On the other hand, their western appearance may result in disrespect and harassment. While in the city and at the university they struggle to be independent and gain respect according to western notions of modern women, in Il-Quds Il-Arabiyyee respect is allotted to the traditional woman.

Sack (1997) points out that when traveling we bring culture with us in order to familiarize the world, to simplify it for our understanding. Here we see how the women use culture not to simplify, but to navigate the complications of differences in arrangement of social relations between spaces. Realizing the different moralities in the spaces they travel through, they also face the inextricable link between gender and national boundaries. They learn to read space and how to accommodate themselves to its social expectations. They realize that a nationally empowering space is not necessarily so gender-wise, and vice versa.
The land itself also became a resource for forming nationalized identity. Landscape maps insiders and outsiders by separating between people who share meanings and views of space. Thus to position oneself in landscape, one needs to read its meanings. After an evening excursion to Jifna, a Palestinian village outside Jerusalem, Basma, Samah, several American friends, and Lauren returned to Jerusalem in a Palestinian cab. The driver was a local Palestinian who had recently returned from several years of working in Kuwait. On the way he told his life story to Basma, who sat in front and Samah who sat on the edge of her seat in the middle of the first row. The route he took was unfamiliar to them, and they asked him questions about it. “This is your first time on this road?” he asked surprised, and began narrating the territorial and political history of the road. As we drove through the village of Anata, he explained that its residents were from the nearby refugee camp and that their homes had been built right on top of a new road because of over-crowding. Basma responded with a story of her trip to the Dehaisha Refugee Camp. Later, Samah turned to Lauren and said, “This is a camp. You can tell because it is so crowded.”

This experience was linked to the university in two ways. First, there is the geographical proximity of the university to Jifna. Second, Basma’s trip to Dehaisha had been a fieldtrip with university class. Basma chose this class as an elective, enjoyed it, and studied hard for a good grade. She had also hung in her and Samah’s dorm room a poster of a Palestinian identity card, received as a present on this fieldtrip. Through their relations with the driver and using physical space as a text, Basma and Samah gained new knowledge. Listening to the driver’s plight and his narration of the landscape they enriched their literacy of the Palestinian identity symbolized by the poster in their room. The driver’s narration helped them to attach a specific meaning to the place, and locate it in their Palestinian consciousness.

Nonetheless, the very process of having to locate it reinforced the Israeli nature of their subjective location. Samah’s comment to me shows the importance of moving in and of understanding power relations in place. She identifies camps, because she understands the meaning of space—a place you are not comfortable and free, but crowded in. By sharing her experience in Daahaisha with the driver, Basma showed to a co-patriot, that she knew the spaces and participated in the national consciousness. They witnessed
a type of spatial oppression that they themselves did not experience. The poverty and the authenticity of these places stand in opposition to their experience in Israel. These practices drew a link between themselves and their self-expression in the dorms and the Palestinian translocality, a group of people and relations that belong to a nation and cross borders (Appadurai 1996:44).

The women use knowledge of Palestinian spaces to extend their maps, but not to exchange them. They blur borders, but do not erase them. Knowledge and proficiency in Palestinian places of everyday live (market and work), suffering (refugee camps), and politics and enlightenment (universities) challenge the national messages received in Jewish Jerusalem. Nationality is not only a basis for inferiority, but can also provide access to the center of social relations. Gender, they learn, can also change over spaces. The two are not always contestable or empowering in the same places.

Spatial Literacy—subjects make space into place

As Palestinian women read spaces, they employ spatial literacy practices to construct identity. They maneuver between spaces (home/city, universities in Israel/PA), making comparisons and choices about practices to employ in different spatial settings. They take advantage of informants in new places (Jifna, Il-Quds Il-Arabiiyyee, veteran students), who provide them with different perspectives of national heritage and gendered behavior. And they occupy and conquer new spaces (dorms, work place), making them into places of their own. Sometimes they succeed in changing place and clarifying their position in spatialized power relations. Following their practices, we can watch place being read or interpreted into identity.

We call this type of reading spatial literacy. It is the acquisition of knowledge of the sociopolitical organization of space combined with the development of practices that utilize this knowledge to negotiate power relations. Through spatial interactions a subject learns about the variety of constructions of space and the variety of meanings her own subjectivity can take on. The juxtaposition of different places creates an awareness of place as constructed and replete with contextually determined power relations. This reflexive awareness constitutes a subjective understanding, or a literacy of the world as filled with meaning and imparted with meaning by actors.
This concept of spatial literacy departs from previous theorists’ views of spatial practice in the way it conceives space. Unlike Lefebvre, de Certeau, and Moore, we do not see space as symbolic or representative of power relations. Instead space is a real structure that organizes the power allocated to social groups. This explains why people tend to perceive and articulate the social spatially. We speak about “a woman’s place” or one’s “place in society” or that “he didn’t know his place.” Though these are metaphors, the experience of dominance in spatial organization, and the resistance to it through spatial practices are not metaphors.

This brings us to the second way in which spatial literacy diverts from previous theoretical discussions of spatial practice. The concept of literacy is not a space/text metaphor. It is the application of the theoretical concept of ideological literacy to the medium of space. Ideological literacy implies that knowledge is a medium embued with power and social hierarchies. Therefore any encounter with it entails encountering social hierarchies and choosing how one relates to them. Similarly, space is a medium embued with power. Social hierarchies are organized not just by the “truth” represented in knowledge but also by the structure of spaces and the rules that determine them. Experiencing space then entails experiencing power. Experiences of space involve actors in space and thus involve actions on space, and choices, whether conscious or not, about self-positioning in social power relations.

Just as radical pedagouges realized the empowering potential of literacy in knowledge, we insist on the empowering potential of spatial literacy. The repression of marginal groups is often explicitly explained spatially. Feminist theory, in particular, explains that gendered inequality is reproduced through the spatial separation of the private and public. It is legitimizined as intended to preserve the honor and modesty of women by creating protective spaces, but actually it limits women’s access to power. Yet the production of place does not only entrap minorities or hide national, gender, or other hegemonies, but can be a tool or resource for re-identifying ourselves and creating up new positionings. Just as the production of new knowledge can result in new self-understanding or identity, the production of place from space can do the same. We suggest that the concept of spatial literacy can be understood as one of the experiential “new ways of knowing that allow subordinate groups to define their own reality” (Collins 1991:222).

The concept of spatial literacy then enlightens us not only to the repressive power of space, but also to its liberating power. By recognizing the power of spatial literacy, we recognize the hegemonic need to limit it. Relegation of women to specific spaces
for instance, not only distances them from opportunities, but also
insures that they not reach awareness of spatial dimensions of
power relations. Perhaps the logic of the gender regime is based on
limiting movement and body, because movement entails reading
and understanding—reflexive activities that construct identity. By
widening the boundaries of women’s spaces, moving and acting
differently in more public spaces, and by importing and reworking
relations in one place based on experiences in another, a woman
puts her spatial literacy into practices, redefining herself, “woman,”
and the construction of gendered hierarchies. Spatial limitations
on minorities, be they informal practices of discrimination, or for-
mal policies of segregation and restriction, like today’s checkpoints
in the territories, should be seen as attempts to distance minorities
from opportunities and prevent them from developing awareness of
the spatial dimension of power relations. Thus spatial literacy can
be a resource to a woman, or a member of a minority, with which
she can challenge patriarchal, national, ethnic, class, or other kinds
of power relations.

The concept of spatial literacy contributes to the interdisciplin-
ary lexicon of spatial dynamics. In human and cultural geography, it
explains how place is involved in the awareness of power relations.
Places are not only in dialogue. The very spatialization of social
relations allows us to become aware of them. Spatial literacy allows
us to elaborate the connection between space and identity, since
it focuses on how social power structures are negotiated, reformed,
sustained, and changed through mutual interaction of subjects and
spaces. To cultural anthropology, the concept of spatial literacy
reveals how spatial discourses such as nation and gender are broken
down by subjects. It is not enough to say that these discourses have
become irrelevant; we must realize that they are still strong but
are contested by subjects creating place in space, replete with the
meanings of these discourses. We hope that the concept of spatial
literacy will invite theoretical elaboration on the literacy applica-
tions or tactics that different marginal groups employ to contest the
social arrangement of power they encounter in everyday spaces.

Notes

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reviewers for their comments on earlier drafts.
Henceforth, Palestinians. We are referring to Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel (approximately 20% of the population). The women themselves alternate in referring to themselves casually as Palestinians and as Arabs. However, when making a declarative choice they prefer the term Palestinian Israelis. The choice of this term is meant to reflect a hybrid identity, which the women construct from their experience both as citizens of the Israeli state and as Palestinian Arabs (see Erdreich 2003; Erdreich and Rapoport 2002).

The fieldwork also included interviews with 23 female (and three male) Palestinian Israeli students as well as 29 interviews conducted by students.

The greatest concentrations of Arab populations in Israel are in the Northern Galilee and the Central Triangle Region—distances of approximately 150 and 75 km respectively.

Though only 3.7% of Palestinian women have higher education (Badar-Araf 1995), today women students make up 51% of all Palestinian university and college students (Rabinowitz and Abu Baker 2002). At the Hebrew University Palestinians comprise only 5% of the student body as compared to 20% of the population, and women are 45% of all Palestinian students (Manaa 1999). These women have great potential in Palestinian society—both as guardians of Palestinian values within the Israeli state and leaders in the fight for gender equality within the Palestinian Israeli community.

At the time of the research, political violence was at an ebb due to the hopes created by the Oslo Accords. The violence and destruction of the Israeli occupation of the territories and that of the Intifada still held and hold a place in social and collective memory of Palestinian and Jewish Israelis. What is most important however is to understand how these macro-political struggles affect the daily lives of Palestinian women living within the borders of the state.

All names are pseudonyms.

The Jewish name for the of the Dome of the Rock Mosque of which it is believed that the First and Second ancient Jewish Temples once stood.

A non-Jew who performs tasks forbidden to Jews on the Sabbath such as writing and using electricity.

The class, “Palestinian Society under Israeli Occupation and the National Political Conflict” was taught by a left-wing young woman lecturer, known for her radical, anti-Zionist views, her research in refugee camps, and her activism against Israeli occupation of the West Bank.

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