Real Jordanians Don't Decorate Like That! the politics of taste among Amman's elites

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Elites in Amman are divided over matters of taste, and preferences for particular villas, furnishings, and clothing extend far beyond the problem of keeping up with the Husseini's; more broadly, ideas about taste and corresponding consumption practices instantiate Jordanian conceptions of membership in various moral and political communities. This paper explores the articulation of elites' consumption practices with conceptions of the modern and the traditional as well as the role of consumption in ongoing disputes among elites over the question of who is and who is not a legitimate Jordanian citizen. [Middle East, taste, consumption, national identity, modernity]

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WHILE A POOR COUNTRY SUCH as Jordan might seem an odd choice for the study of the extravagant consumption practices explored here, a culture of elite consumerism is evident in the capital city of Amman among both established elites and newcomers arriving in the aftermath of the Persian Gulf War. As Veblen so astutely observed, conspicuous consumption is critical to the expression and creation of status boundaries, and the relationship between consumption and what Bourdieu has termed the struggle to "win" in the social world—to achieve renown, prestige, honor, and so forth—is illuminated particularly well by the patterns of consumption described below (Veblen 1934; Bourdieu 1984:251). At the same time, however, categories of taste as well as the consumption practices that express and inform those categories are significant in ways that extend far beyond the problem of "keeping up with the Joneses" (or the Husseini's); more broadly, ideas about taste and corresponding practices such as villa design, interior decoration, and clothing selection instantiate conceptions of membership in various moral and political communities. This paper investigates in particular

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the articulation of elites' consumption practices with conceptions of the modern and the traditional as well as the role consumption plays in elites' disputes over the question of who is and who is not a legitimate citizen of Jordan—an explosive issue in a nation where the chasm between a Palestinian majority and a Jordanian minority is viewed as a significant threat to both internal political unity and regional stability.[1]

Although this article focuses on elites, some background information concerning Jordanian society will provide a useful context for the material to follow. Jordan is a small country with an estimated population of 4.4 million people and an economy of a little over U.S. $6 billion (*Jordan Diary* 1998:75; Minhas 1995:67). The last several decades have witnessed the increasing urbanization of the country, with the percentage of the urban population increasing from approximately 44 percent in 1961 (Saleh 1991:26) to approximately 70 percent by 1993 (*World Tables* 1995:387). The vast majority of the country's inhabitants are Sunni Arabs and are concentrated in the central and northern regions of the country in the governorates of Amman, Irbid and Zarqa, which together accounted for 83.8 percent of the population in 1985 (Saleh 1991:25). The largest city is Amman, with an estimated population in 1995 of 1,183,000 (*Human Development Report* 1996:176).

The Jordanian economy is primarily a service economy, with the percentage of the labor force engaged in this sector expanding from 29 percent in 1961 to 61 percent in 1990 (*Human Development Report* 1996:168). With few natural resources, Jordan has had to rely heavily on the development of its human capital, and the country's literacy rates are among the highest in the Arab world, with adult literacy in 1993 standing at nearly 85 percent, up from 33 percent in 1960 (*Jordan Diary* 1998:59; *Human Development Report* 1996:136). Given the youthfulness of the population, with 42.2 percent fourteen years or younger, and 31.4 percent falling between the ages of fifteen and twenty-nine, almost one-third of all Jordanians are enrolled in educational facilities (*Jordan Diary* 1998:58).

Jordanian Elite Consumption

ALTHOUGH, AS GEORGE MARCUS HAS pointed out, the term elite is clear in what it signifies (namely, the rich, powerful, and privileged in any society), it is nonetheless ambiguous as

to its precise referents (Marcus 1983:7). Within the social scientific literature, the term elite has been applied generally to groups who have achieved high status within a society for whatever reason (Bottomore 1993:7). In this paper, the term is used to signify individuals possessing superior economic resources such that they are wealthy not only within the framework of Jordanian society but by virtually any standard. Before addressing categories of Jordanian taste and consumption practices more specifically, it is necessary to sketch some general features of elite lifestyles in Jordan.

Expansive villas, exquisite furnishings, copious quantities of clothing and jewelry, private cars, personal computers, and satellite dishes are characteristic accoutrements of up-scale consumer culture in Amman. Elites employ guest workers (usually from Egypt, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines) as nannies, housekeepers, cooks, drivers, and gardeners, and these mini-armies of domestic employees have significant implications for the world of women's socializing and networking; freed from the burdens of routine household chores, elite women participate in ferocious rounds of socializing and reciprocal hospitality. Social occasions of all types are marked by an abundance of costly (often imported) food, with wedding parties an especially important occasion for the display of wealth. Wedding parties are typically held in major hotels, and the purported costs of such affairs are a subject of open speculation among both invitees and nonparticipants. While virtually all Jordanians place a high value on education as an investment for future success, elites enjoy unparalleled access to educational opportunities as a result of their financial resources. They send their children to prestigious private schools in Amman that virtually guarantee their students acceptance by universities (and in many cases by foreign universities), graduation from which confers significant prestige (Cunningham and Sarayrah 1993:145).[2]

Finally, the leisure world of elites is characterized by a level of expenditure that far exceeds that associated with the middle class. While a middle class family might enjoy a car trip to the beaches of Syria, for example, an elite family would be more likely to plan a vacation on the Italian Riviera. International travel is the primary avenue for recreation among this group. The elites I knew were either making plans for a trip abroad or describing their activities (often in tones conveying a jaded world-weariness) on a trip recently made. The very possibility of mobility beyond the borders of the country and particularly to the U.S. is a status marker within Amman in light of the reluctance by U.S. embassy personnel to

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issue visas to Jordanians in the wake of the Gulf War. Many elites hold U.S., British, or other foreign passports, a fact which they were eager to make known to me during my visits to their homes. While mobility in and of itself represents a source of social status within a society in which many individuals express a desire to leave, the relationship between wealth and mobility is evident, with the issuance of U.S. travel visas, for example, contingent on the applicant's demonstration of ownership of significant material resources (such as a house) within Jordan.

The fact of elites' wealth is evident from their level of expenditure, while the sources of their income are sometimes less apparent. A particular family relationship to riches may be cloaked in an aura of mystery (at least from the perspective of observers outside the family), a fact at the heart of much gossip concerning the likelihood that some fortunes have resulted from the illegal siphoning of government funds into private coffers. The connection between corruption and wealth is of course directed most often toward those occupying exalted positions within the government. Yet the elites at issue here are largely uninvolved in national leadership and so are spared the whispered accusations of corrupt appropriation of public funds heard so often in Amman regarding the opulent lifestyles of those occupying positions of power within the government. In general, they have come by their wealth in less controversial ways as a result of land ownership, industrial enterprises, commercial success, or some combination of these. Unlike middle-class professionals who also enjoy a relatively high level of consumption vis-a-vis Jordan's economically-disadvantaged majority, elites, although they may draw salaries as professionals, do not depend upon their salaries. Instead they have access to reserves of wealth which they utilize to create the sort of sumptuous lifestyles depicted here (Qutub 1970:128).

Significant to elites' conceptions of themselves and their relationship to the remainder of Jordanian society is their widely-held self-image as occupying the upper levels of Jordanian society, in contrast with middle-class discourses of social positioning that rely heavily on the metaphor of being between the poor and the rich. The individuals described here can thus be characterized succinctly as exceptionally wealthy individuals engaging in high levels of consumption and possessing a conscious awareness of themselves as occupying the lofty echelons of Jordanian society.

People of extraordinary means exist in many societies, and issues pertaining to elite social positioning and resource consumption are to some degree generalizable across cultures. The wealthy

boulevards of West Amman are reminiscent of those of Palm Springs or Los Angeles from the perspective of Jordanians and non-Jordanians alike. At the same time, there are wrinkles, so to speak, in the social fabric of Jordanian life more generally, and among Amman's elites more specifically, that demarcate this study from a study of wealthy consumers elsewhere in the world.

First, the majority of Jordan's citizens are Palestinian, and tensions between Jordanians and Palestinians are widely taken as constitutive of a potentially nation-threatening cleavage within the overall society (Layne 1994:14). The term Jordanian, when opposed to Palestinian, refers mainly to those people and their descendants who were living in what is now called Jordan at the time of the nation's founding in 1921. Although the distinction between those living on the East Bank of the Jordan River in 1921 and those arriving in subsequent years from the West Bank of the river may seem clear enough, there had been back-and-forth population movements across the banks of the river for centuries, blurring sharp distinctions between "original" Jordanians and Palestinians.[3] In general usage, the term Jordanian encompasses individuals of both original Jordanian as well as Palestinian heritage in light of the fact that individuals of Palestinian origin enjoy full citizenship in Jordan. Despite widespread scholarly agreement that Palestinians constitute a majority in Jordan today (at approximately 55 to 60 percent of the population), the issue of Palestinian numbers remains fraught with political significance (Brand 1995:60; Pappe 1994:88). The Jordanian national census of 1995, for example, estimated the size of the total Palestinian population, yet the government has refused to make the figures public for fear of fomenting national divisions (Zureik 1996:33).

Palestinian migration to Jordan has been concentrated in three major waves over the last half century: during the Arab-Israeli war of 1947–48; the 1967 Arab-Israeli war; and, most recently, the Gulf crisis of 1990–1991. This last influx in which more than 300,000 Palestinians, most with Jordanian passports, returned from Kuwait, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the other Gulf States has influenced profoundly local ideas about taste and consumption, as I will discuss below.

The status of Jordanian-Palestinian relations is a complicated issue, with relations between the two groups waxing and waning over time, in large part as a result of political and economic events within the region and beyond. The closeness of the relationship between Jordanians and Palestinians, given the fact that Jordan administered the West Bank from 1950 until 1967 as well as the

obvious fact of the significant Palestinian component of the population, is generally acknowledged by people of all political views in Jordan, with the regime promulgating a strong rhetoric of inclusion and Jordanian-Palestinian solidarity.

On the other hand, it is undeniable that the Jordanian-Palestinian divide has been and continues to be an issue of major conflict within the country, with tensions between the two communal groups a persistent if suppressed feature of domestic politics (Brand 1995:46). Palestinian raids from Jordanian territory into Israel created difficulties for the Jordanian regime from as early as 1948, as such raids were met by potent Israeli reprisals. Palestinian raids increased so drastically in 1965 after the founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) that Jordan banned the PLO in 1966, although the PLO continued to operate within the country illegally. In 1970, King Hussein was ambushed by a PLO force, an act which precipitated Jordanian army attacks on PLO units. In September of 1970, known among Palestinians as Black September, King Hussein sent the army into action against the PLO, leading to the elimination of PLO militias within the country by the following July (Day 1986:31–33).

In Jordan today the tensions between the two communal groups are expressed primarily in terms of competition for political power and economic opportunities. The regime generally views Jordanians as more loyal than Palestinians, with the result that Jordanians are dominant within the army, the internal security services, and within the king's closest circle of advisors. Within the economy, however, Palestinians are dominant, with such private sector areas as trade, construction, and tourism controlled by Palestinian interests. In the best of circumstances, Jordanians question Palestinian loyalty to the regime and the scope of their commercial transactions; in the worst, they advocate mass deportations of Palestinians to the Palestinian National Authority. From the Palestinian perspective, Jordan remains an essentially tribal-based society in which political perks go to Jordanians, leaving many Palestinians to feel like second-class citizens, even if they enjoy luxurious lifestyles.

Related to the issue of Jordanian-Palestinian relations is the question of elites' exercise of political power. While much of the social scientific literature on elites focuses on individuals who exert, either directly or indirectly, significant influence over the political life of a society, the individuals I discuss here lack potency within the Jordanian political arena (Domhoff 1970; Lenczowski 1975; Lundberg 1968; Mills 1956; Zartman 1980,

1982). This is because avenues for political expression in Jordan are limited, with real power centered almost exclusively around the monarch and his close associates. These limitations are particularly salient for Palestinian elites, who, as noted above, are considered generally unsuitable for positions of significant political power. Although Palestinians have occupied important administrative and technical roles throughout the government, they have been largely excluded from positions where they could seriously interfere with the army's defense of the monarchy (Day 1986:80). For the vast majority of elites, then, there is little opportunity for action beyond the realm of money-making and private consumption, a point of contrast with U.S. economic elites who exert a significant influence on the political process.

Given the domination of Jordanian political life by the Hashemites, it is perhaps unsurprising that many Jordanians, and particularly those of Palestinian background, focus on the accumulation of private resources in the absence of outlets for political expression. The frustrations inherent in the lack of political valency for the vast majority of Palestinians in Jordan have major repercussions for their attitudes toward expenditure and consumption.

Traditional and Modern

AMONG THE MOST LASTING IMPRESSIONS to emerge from my fieldwork in Amman are those pertaining to the antagonisms that characterized elites' relationships with one another. It was only rarely that I visited a household without hearing bitter complaints about other wealthy people who were, in contrast to my hosts, pretenders to "authentic" elite status. Moreover, I quickly discovered a primary means by which Jordanians demonstrated their authentic status as elites was through consumption in a manner consistent with standards of quality and aesthetics glossed as keeping with "good taste."

Although I encountered a range of opinions in Amman over the details of what constituted good taste, most elites fell into one of two broad and opposing camps with regard to this issue. The first group, whom I term traditionalists in light of their self-stated preference for traditional decorations and clothing, claimed to view with abhorrence the modern (sometimes referred to as Western) consumption patterns evident to even the most casual observer of the Amman social scene. Opposed to the traditional-

ists were supporters of a modern lifestyle, who in turn devalued the consumption practices of the traditionalists as backward and unsophisticated. Each group, in short, accused the other of lacking good taste or, more pointedly, as exhibiting bad taste.

In centering a discussion of Amman's elites around the terms traditional and modern, I wish to make clear that the predominant language of inquiry throughout my interviews was English, despite the fact that I had studied Arabic for several years before arriving in Amman and could claim competence in the written and spoken language. The elites with whom I worked were fluent in English, and employed English not only with me but in social and business settings as well. The fact that I was able to gather a great deal of information about elites' lifestyles using English should not be taken to suggest that I am entirely satisfied with this situation. At the same time, however, widespread English usage among elites constitutes an integral means by which individuals discuss their place in the modern world and is not, therefore, an artifact of the fieldwork situation. In particular, the English terms modern and traditional discussed here are not uncommon in elites' everyday conversations.[4]

While the dichotomy of traditional and modern seemed to dominate discussions of taste among Amman's elites, this distinction, seemingly obvious to all around me, was perplexing, to say the least. Almost all of the homes characterized by their owners as traditional were brimming over with imported gadgets and appliances such as microwave ovens, breadmakers, electric can openers, VCR's, and televisions with satellite hookups competing for space with handmade objects such as vases and embroidered pillows, in many cases sewn by the mistress of the household. As for the modern homes, they also contained handicrafts as well as the sorts of imported goods described above, although handicraft items invariably were purchased rather than made in the household. Moreover, the division of villa interior spaces into a sitting room, family room, dining room, kitchen, bedrooms, and so forth was essentially the same in both types of houses. In general, then, traditional and modern homes shared significant elements, despite the passion with which proponents of traditional or modern lifestyles defended their own tastes and attacked their opponents' decorating choices. More specifically, both groups consumed imported and technologically sophisticated products popularly identified as modern, both in Jordan and the West alike, as well as products conveying familiarity with traditional cultural forms.

The incorporation of traditional and modern elements in both

types of homes suggested to me that the distinction between traditional and modern, despite its potency within local discourses of taste, could not in itself be regarded as an adequate explanation for the antagonism that I observed among Amman's elites, at least not in terms of a fundamental distinction between consumers who reject and consumers who embrace the trappings of modern consumer culture. Among Amman's elites, identification with either traditional or modern circles cannot be explained in terms of an individual's rejection or embrace of so-called modern goods for the simple reason that everyone with the requisite financial resources consumes modern products. And yet consumption does seem to matter very much, as I have hinted above, to the constitution of these two different and antagonistic groups. So a puzzle exists: All the wealthy Jordanians depicted here consume modern goods, yet they persist in differentiating themselves along lines of traditional and modern taste. In order to make headway toward a solution to this dilemma, it is necessary to say something about the distinction between old and new money in Amman.

The increase in oil prices in 1973 . . . represents a critical point of reference for distinguishing between old and new-money elites in contemporary Amman.

Old and New Money

THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN OLD AND new money has long been recognized as a fault line within wealthy communities, with old money elites perceiving the nouveau riche as unsophisticated and lacking in the cultural capital necessary to make the transition from what C. Wright Mills has termed the "merely rich" into the "old upper classes" (Bourdieu 1984:53–4; Mills 1956:61). Understanding the basis for the distinction between old money and new money in Amman is critical to unraveling the problem of traditional and modern taste. Yet given the country's relative youth, what does it mean to say that a Jordanian possesses old as opposed to new wealth?

The increase in oil prices in 1973, a watershed in the development of the Jordanian economy, represents a critical point of reference for distinguishing between old and new-money elites in contemporary Amman. Although some Jordanians (primarily of Palestinian origin) were working abroad and sending remittance money to family members in the years immediately following Jordan's founding in 1921, it was after 1973 that thousands of Jordanians streamed to the Gulf States to work in the rapidly expanding construction and service sectors. By 1975, 28 percent of

Jordan's domestic labor force was working outside the country; foreign remittance figures from Jordanians working abroad increased from 7.5 million JD (Jordanian dinars) in 1970 to 475 million JD in 1984, a figure representing approximately one quarter of Jordan's GNP. By the early 1980s, Jordan was experiencing an economic boom of unprecedented proportions in the country's history, in which direct and indirect aid from the oil-rich countries reached JD 432.5 million, about one-third of the GNP (Razzaz 1993:11–12).

Declining oil prices from 1984 on brought an abrupt halt to Jordan's economic boom, as the precipitous drop in oil revenues translated into dwindling aid from the Gulf States as well as a shrinking labor market, resulting in significantly reduced remittance revenues (Al-Zuhd 1992:55–56; Shteiwi 1995:10). By 1987, negative rates of growth had set in, and Jordan began borrowing foreign currencies in increasing amounts in order to maintain its level of public expenditure and commodity imports. The decreasing value of the JD led to capital flight as investors scrambled to avoid major losses. Between 1988 and 1989, for example, the JD lost 50 percent of its value (Fathi 1994:171–172). The Gulf War of 1991 dealt a further blow to the Jordanian economy, as U.N.-imposed trade sanctions against Iraq had a significant and negative impact on Jordan's shipping and trucking sectors. Despite the contraction of the Jordanian economy from the mid-1980s onward, the Jordanian demand for imports remained strong throughout the 1990s, a fact that can be attributed at least in part to the consumption demands of the flood of Gulf workers who migrated to Jordan during and after the Gulf War.

Abdallah Bujra has observed that remittance income is frequently associated with new and extravagant consumption patterns, and this is true for Jordan, where the period of oil wealth is identified popularly as marking the start of a style of conspicuous (and to many eyes, egregious) style of consumption by a highly visible minority of Amman's residents that continues to this day (Bujra 1971:65). The fashionable residential districts of West Amman are generally cited as the epicenter of this sort of boastful or vain consumption (*'al-istihlak 'al-tafakhuri*), exemplified by the construction of outlandish villas which are interpreted by many Jordanians, including elites who choose more subdued lifestyles, as an arrogant assertion of wealth in a poor country. The conspicuous mode of consumption from the 1970s onward is viewed by elites as a new phenomenon in Jordan's social history, with the years prior to the oil boom perceived as relatively egalitarian. Although this

idyllic vision of Jordanian social life conflicts with scholarly depictions of early Jordanian society as highly stratified, many elites nonetheless enshrine the period prior to the 1970s as relatively free of class conflict and social inequality, despite the presence of other sources of tension and division within the society, namely, the Jordanian-Palestinian schism (Qutub 1970:116). The 1970s and early 1980s represent, therefore, a watershed not only in economic but also in social terms in the eyes of the elites I came to know through my research.

The dual economic and social significance of the oil wealth years is reflected in the division of Amman's elites into two distinct and conflicting factions—old-money elites whose wealth was established prior to the flood of petrodollars into the country and new-money elites who came by their wealth primarily after 1973. Beyond the question of timing, differences exist between the sorts of enterprises that have given way to old money and new money fortunes. The sources of new-money wealth typically lie either in income amassed from work in service industries such as banking, engineering, and medicine in the Gulf, or from commercial and industrial enterprises within Jordan that focus on the production and sale of consumer goods, as opposed to the involvement in heavy industries more characteristic of the old elites. New elites are more likely to be involved in the production of consumer goods such as clothing, snack foods, cosmetics, and toys, for example, rather than in the phosphate or electrical industries more characteristic of old money. And while many old elites hold family estates a significant distance from the city, new elites are more likely to owe land wealth to sales in and around Amman in the wake of the city's rapid expansion since the 1970s.[5]

While the distinction between pre-oil boom and post-oil boom wealth that I identify here as old money and new money is, as I have argued, perceived as a significant line of demarcation by Amman's elites, the issue of the timing of one's acquisition of wealth was not in itself a concern readily voiced by elites themselves. In other words, old elites did not express to me the opinion that they were superior to new elites simply by virtue of the fact that they had been wealthy for a longer time. Differences between old and new elites were instead couched in terms of consumption practices, with old money consumption above all else associated in the minds of its possessors with restraint in lifestyle and new money consumption associated, as noted above, with conspicuousness. Moreover, restrained consumption was identified as traditional, while conspicuous consumption was deemed modern, both

by old and new elites alike. It is worth emphasizing that the distinction between restrained and conspicuous consumption at issue here is employed among elites and not necessarily among Jordanians of modest means; the consumption practices envisioned as modest by traditional elites are exceptionally comfortable and luxurious. In order to shed light on the distinction between traditional and modern taste raised earlier in this essay, it is therefore necessary to explore what is meant by modest and conspicuous consumption among Amman's elites.

Extravagance and Restraint

INDIVIDUALS FROM OLD-MONEY HOUSEHOLDS characterize their homes, clothings, cars, and, in general, their lifestyles as non-ostentatious and exemplifying good taste. Without denying their wealth and superior social status, old-money elites pride themselves on their choice of relatively restrained consumption practices that they characterize as traditional, in opposition to so-called modern homes, clothes, and lifestyles that are viewed with contempt and attributed to new-money elites.

Nabil, a 67 year-old Palestinian industrialist, and Nisreen, his wife of 59, who live with their two unmarried daughters and several domestic servants in a villa just outside of the up-scale neighborhood of Shmeisani in West Amman, are old-money elites. Nabil and Nisreen, who are parallel cousins, migrated independently of one another to Amman in 1948 from Jaffa in what is now Israel. The couple own three factories on the outskirts of Zarqa that specialize in the manufacture of lubricants for cars and heavy machinery. In addition, Nabil and Nisreen own three petrol stations in Zarqa. They also own considerable amounts of property, including three homes in Zarqa and a villa in Amman.

The villa, though large (14 rooms, including 6 bedrooms) is, in contrast to many of Amman's new villas, located a considerable distance from the road and rather nondescript in exterior appearance, appearing very much like a shoe box in a muted hue with only a bit of iron grillwork on the door to add visual interest.[6] According to a classification of villa exteriors developed by the Jordanian architects Ihsan Fethi and Kamel Mahadin, the villa is modernist, a style characterized by a formal composition, clear expression of the building's massing, large horizontal windows, flat roof, and little or no decoration, resulting in an overall appearance

of subdued austerity. Fethi and Mahadin have suggested that this style is intended to underscore the owner's good taste and lack of egotism (Fethi and Mahadin 1993:6).

The villa was only one year old, yet the restrained design and setting amidst a flourishing garden lent an air of age to the scene. The interior of the home was laid out along a simple plan, with the rooms of the house opening onto a corridor that ran the length of the building. The sitting room was stuffed full of richly embroidered and gilded furniture; old elites restrict displays of such material luxury to their home interiors. The remainder of the home was furnished with good-quality items in subdued hues. A large lighted photograph of Mecca dominated the main corridor of the house, and framed passages of Koranic verses were displayed throughout the villa.

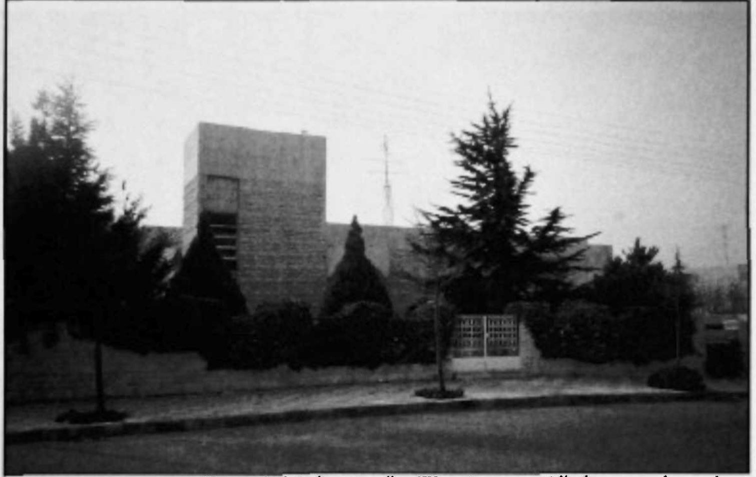

Figure 1. Modernist villa, West Amman. All photos are by author.

Nisreen emphasized to me that she was a hard-working woman, not like "those ladies who do nothing but shop all day." She explained that she liked to do much of the work around the home herself (despite having several maids and gardeners) and pointed out several meters of black fabric spread across her kitchen table that she was planning to use for a dress of a simple and modest cut, like the one she was wearing.[7] In addition to sewing for herself, she asserted that she herself often bought the necessities for the household rather than delegating the tasks to domestic employees. She also did much of the baking and cooking. She enjoyed making things by hand, and numerous sculptures, vases, dried flower arrangements, and other items of her own creation were on display throughout the home. These homemade objects were important to the household, according to Nisreen, because they reminded the family of its connection to traditional Palestinian life. Notably absent from the house were Jordanian handicrafts produced for the market. Nisreen's opinion of commercial crafts such as the well-known Bani Hamida rugs promoted by Queen Noor was that such things were exorbitantly priced, and

there was no reason to purchase crafts when she enjoyed making them herself.

When I asked Nisreen what style she considered her home, she first said that it was not a style at all. "I don't like styles—modern, oriental, Andalusian—this is not for me." When I asked, however, if she considered her home traditional, she responded with an emphatic yes. From Nisreen's viewpoint, traditional taste reflected a way of life that bespoke practicality and restraint. She was vehemently opposed to consumption for the sake of consumption, and justified her family's luxurious expenditures on practical grounds. For example, the beautiful white marble floors throughout the villa were selected because "marble is the coolest material in the summer." She lived in a very large home, she explained, because she had a big family. Her large domestic staff was necessary because she was "an old woman who cannot do much."

Figure 2. The building's austere exterior belies the opulent interior of this old-money elite villa.

Despite Nisreen's characterization of her home as traditional, the villa was filled with consumer products including several televisions, a VCR, a large microwave oven, a water cooler, and an electric dough kneader, pointing to a level of consumption practice not in keeping with a naive reading of the term traditional. Thus, while the villa's inconspicuous exterior, copious quantity of homemade items as well as objects conveying religious piety, and Nisreen's conservative street attire were all construed by Nabil and Nisreen as consistent with a traditional lifestyle, the deployment within the home of an abundance of high-tech consumer products was in many respects indistinguishable from the modern style which Nisreen abhorred. For Nisreen, consuming "modern" products is not incompatible with living a "traditional" lifestyle. Traditional elites can, and do, consume a wide range of high-tech imports, but do so in such a manner as to keep the luxuries of their lifestyles behind firmly closed doors, presenting a relatively modest

face to the outside world.

Nabil and Nisreen emphasized the necessity of learning English, the importance of university education, and the value of international travel in inculcating a sense of worldliness and sophistication in their children. Significantly, Nisreen contrasted her family's concern with education and familiarity with the world with the lack of interest in such things by "peasants" and "bedouin" who maintained a "traditional" way of life. Nisreen valued her traditional lifestyle in comparison with that of modern elites whom she denigrated. Yet, in comparison with predominantly rural-dwelling individuals of lesser socioeconomic means, Nisreen viewed herself as modern. It must be kept in mind that the meanings ascribed to the terms traditional and modern are not fixed but shift according to the context of their use.

The circumstances underlying the elite decision to emphasize restraint despite abundant riches are undoubtedly complicated and not reducible to any one explanation. Old-money elites take exceptional pride in family name and reputation, with the result that individuals perhaps feel secure in their identities as elites without feeling the need to resort to displays of wealth. Some elites give pragmatic reasons for their consumption choices. As one industrialist suggested, the best path for people like himself was to stay out of sight and attend to their own affairs, which, in his own case, meant amassing large sums of money. All old-money elites emphasize the importance of comporting themselves in a manner that would not offend those in less favorable circumstances. The attempt to reduce the appearance of socioeconomic inequality is evident in strategies such as avoiding the conspicuous placement of large homes near busy thoroughfares, limiting the display of wealth to home interiors, and donning inconspicuous street clothes. Such practices serve to camouflage elite wealth within the city. They are accompanied by other practices, however, such as the creation and display of homemade objects within households, that are not visible outside of elite circles. Both sorts of practices help create and reinforce among traditional elites a discourse of social inclusion whereby privileged individuals such as Nisreen imagine themselves to be regular members of Jordanian society, participating in the ethics of hard work and self-reliance common both to elites and to individuals of lesser means. Despite (or because of) their obvious wealth, old elites engage in a sort of cognitive sleight-of-hand in which they attempt to convince themselves and others that they are essentially like everyone else in the city. To do otherwise would be to promote an intolerable divisive-

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ness within Jordanian social life that traditional elites perceive as undesirable and even immoral.

The importance for old elites of blending in with the surrounding community is evident in their characteristic loyalty to the Jordanian monarchy. It is "nothing but a lie" that "the Palestinians hate the Hashemites," exclaimed Nisreen. "We love the king even more than the Jordanians do," she continued. "The Jordanians are always complaining. They want this, they want that from the government. But the Palestinians are happy, they work, they take care of themselves." Traditional elites, Jordanian and Palestinian alike, express not only their loyalty to the king, but also their belief that Jordan is their true homeland. Inconspicuous consumption, within a political context, is construed by old elites as an important indicator of their allegiance to the monarchy and, more generally, of their support for Jordanian national unity. To consume conspicuously would be to arouse the anger and resentment of Jordanians of lesser means, fomenting national divisiveness and thus making the monarch's job of governing all the more difficult. In the view of old elites, loyal Jordanians simply do not behave in a conspicuous way because such behavior creates problems for the king.[8]

Bourdieu has suggested that aesthetic choices made by individuals are bound up with ethical choices contributing to the constitution of particular life-styles, and this link between the realms of taste and morality is evident in the close relationship between the demonstration of good taste, taken by old-money elites as synonymous with inconspicuous consumption, and an ethical framework privileging the importance of living in a manner that contributes to overall social harmony (Bourdieu 1984:283). To live in an ostentatious manner amidst the ambient deprivation of Jordanian society is not only indicative of bad taste and disloyalty to the king but more generally of a lack of moral character. The view that the display of ostentatious wealth is evidence of one's immorality is typically couched in religious terms, with relative frugality identified by traditional elites as consistent with their identities as devout Muslims. The idea of morality at issue here pertains to the desirability of promoting social solidarity and maintaining the status quo rather than to an activist approach that seeks the reduction of inequities of wealth through resource redistribution. Good taste, a traditional lifestyle, loyalty to the regime, piety, and commitment to the social status quo constitute a constellation of interconnecting elements which help to situate old-money elites both in relation to other elites in the capital as well as to the larg-

er society.

If restrained consumption is associated with good taste and traditional living, then it stands to reason that unrestrained consumption is associated with bad taste and modern living. From the old-money point of view, the conspicuous consumption of Amman's new-money elites exemplifies these negative attributes. Young women in provocative dress (miniskirts, tight pants, and stiletto heels) and expensive cars driven in a reckless fashion throughout Amman's residential neighborhoods are commonly cited as examples of how new-money elites incited hatred among long-term residents of the city.[9] "My family," huffed one young woman from an old-money family,

> is one of the richest in the country, but we don't race around the city in fast cars, making the people hate us the way these rich people do nowadays. Do you know, they will kill you if you don't get out of their way! These people, they don't know how to live here, how to get along. They don't show any respect for those who have lived here for a long time. They don't belong in Amman. This is why everybody hates them. . . .

If the display of flashy clothes and cars angers the old elites (not to mention other Jordanians), the construction of immense villas in prominent locations throughout Amman drives them into a fury. Home ownership is the most-talked about indicator of the influx of new wealth into the country since the 1970s. As noted above, traditional elite homes, though quite large and well-furnished, exemplify restraint both in design and in location, often placed a respectable distance from major thoroughfares so as to escape notice by vehicular and pedestrian traffic. The homes of the new elite, in contrast, scream their owners' opulence at passers-by, dominating the landscape not only on account of their large size, but by virtue of their architectural derring-do and their positioning on dominant sites. It is the presence of these outlandish villas that is frequently cited as an example of the vast disparities in income that have arisen within Jordanian society since the oil boom as well as evidence of the alienation of Jordan's wealthiest citizens from the lives of those around them. The ostentatious nature of many of these villas, calling attention to their exterior design, is widely viewed as an intrusion of alien cultural norms, given the emphasis in traditional Islamic architecture on interior rather than exterior space (Grube 1984:10).

Zaki and Samira are a married Palestinian couple in their late forties who reside with their two young sons in a villa of large pro-

portions in the pricey West Amman district of 'Abdoun. Zaki was born in Amman, but resided in Kuwait for nineteen years before returning to Amman during the Gulf War in 1991. He did not come from a privileged background and described with passion his father's struggles as a small shopkeeper in Amman to provide a decent lifestyle for his family as well as an education for his children. Samira was born in Lebanon, and had moved to Amman as a young adult. Zaki described the family's expulsion from Kuwait in the harshest terms, explaining how he, like many other Palestinians, had been unjustly targeted as an Iraqi collaborator despite the fact that he had spent most of this adult life in Kuwait and considered it his home. In Kuwait, Zaki had headed a successful contracting firm that had boomed along with the Gulf economy in the 1970s and early 1980s. The profits from that business in addition to overseas investments enable Zaki and his family to enjoy an opulent lifestyle in Amman.

Figure 3. Cottage-style villa, West Amman

The villa itself, located on a busy thoroughfare, was a spectacular example of what the Jordanian architects Fethi and Mahadin term the cottage style, notable for the prominent use of colored tiles on pitched roofs that dominate the building exterior. Although pitched roofs have long been present in the Mediterranean region, they have never been the tradition in Jordan. The use of pitched roofs by elites like Zaki and Samira serves not only as a conspicuous means of attracting attention to the building but telegraphs a strong endorsement of foreign, notably Western, architectural forms (Fethi and Mahadin 1993:9). In addition to pitched roofs decorated with bright red Italian tiles, the villa boasted dormer windows, gables, and chimneys. Less than three years old, it not only dominated its immediate vicinity but could be seen from a good distance away, a shining beacon of wealth.

Although old-money elites often told me that the owners of extravagant villas such as the one owned by Zaki and Samira put all their money into the house with nothing left over for furniture, I found that, on the contrary, big flashy villas were furnished luxuriously. In Zaki and Samira's case, their home was a veritable museum of stunning furniture collected during their travels around the world, with objects from Japan, Pakistan, Peru, and Yemen intermingled with furniture from the U.S. and Italy. Interspersed among these furnishings were the kinds of imported high-tech consumer products found in traditional homes—televisions, VCR, personal computer, microwave, and so forth.

Conspicuously absent from the villa, however, were objects signifying religious devotion such as framed Koranic verses and photos of Mecca as well as the homemade craft items characteristic of traditional homes. Everything looked brand new. Samira laughed when I asked if she engaged in any craft activities. "No, I don't have time for any of that," she asserted. Nevertheless, the villa did include in the living room a hand-woven Bani Hamida rug that Samira had purchased, and when I asked her about this, she explained that the pattern was quite beautiful and worked well with the overall color scheme of the room. She did not connect the rug with a desire to appear "traditional" but rather focused on the rug's aesthetic fit with the surrounding furnishings.[10]

Figure 4. Villa incorporating eclectic mix of architectural elements and materials

Zaki and Samira considered their home as expressive not only of their good taste but also of their cosmopolitanism as sophisticated citizens of an emerging global culture. They spoke with pride about the pieces of furniture they had collected during their travels, with each piece eliciting a string of recollections about the cities, restaurants, museums, and so on that they had encountered on international trips. The villa was identified by both Zaki and Samira as modern both with respect to villa design and style of furnishing in deliberate contrast

with the homes of traditional types who "hide their money in their beds because they're afraid the Mukhabarat (the internal security police) will come and take it away." The restrained consumption characteristic of old elites was thus associated with fearfulness rather than good taste.

Figure 5. Japanese doll on stereo speaker of new elite living room.

The Jordanian nation, explained Zaki, was very much like the U.S. had been at the beginning of the twentieth century, with the Jordanian population shifting from a rural to an urban society. He noted that many of the old families had prestige and money, but they hadn't caught up with the modern world. He was surprised when I told him that the old-money elites I knew did in fact have modern conveniences such as microwave ovens, satellite dishes, and cellular phones. He then told me a story about the Jordanian state's attempt to settle Bedouin in the southern part of the country by providing two-room concrete houses for them. "But these people kept their camels in the houses," he laughed, "while they stayed in their tents!" His point was that there were many people in Jordan who were far from ready to embrace the modern world, and as far as he was concerned, old elites who veiled and hid their wealth were part of this old order, an order that included what Zaki and Samira felt was an unthinking acceptance of religious norms as well. Though raised as Muslims, both Zaki and Samira asserted that they no longer considered themselves devout practitioners of Islam. With so many ignorant people clinging to outdated religious beliefs, Samira added, it was difficult to feel at home in Jordan.

Aside from the issue of the backwardness of the population, Zaki and Samira expressed strong reservations about the viability of Jordan as a political entity, an opinion typical of new elites. "This country was sewn together from little pieces of land that had been controlled by other places like Damascus, Hebron, and Jerusalem. It isn't a country," Zaki explained. "And since we [Palestinians] are the majority here, people are worried about the country's future. Will there even be a Jordan in five years? Maybe it will be divided up among Palestine, Israel, and Syria." For Zaki

and Samira, the fact that the majority of the Jordanian population is Palestinian does little to increase their allegiance, as Palestinians, to the country. Instead, the significance of the Palestinian majority lies for them in the possibility that some portion of what is now labeled the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan will some day become part of an autonomous Palestinian state.

In contrast with old-money elites, new-money elites like Zaki and Samira typically express a certain disregard (or even contempt) for Jordan as a nation. And although new elites accord a grudging respect to the Hashemites on account of the royal family's education and sophistication, they reject the unquestioning loyalty to the regime evinced by traditional individuals. By choosing to expend their resources on luxury goods in such a manner as to create a gulf between themselves and their compatriots, new elites defy the regime's discursive attempts at nation-building, deconstructing the notion of a single unified Jordanian nation through their consumption decisions. Zaki and Samira, for example, were well aware that their ostentatious standard of living set them apart from the majority of Amman's residents and singled them out for criticism as outsiders without regard for the sensitivities of both Jordanian and long-time Palestinian residents. Their attitude, however, was one of defiance, of resistance to what they perceived as attempts by meddling outsiders to control them, their resources, and their right to choose a lifestyle in keeping with their own taste and background. By determinedly consuming luxury goods in the face of significant public disapproval, new-money elites like Zaki and Samira reject their incorporation into a unified nation under Hashemite leadership. The irony embedded in the decision by new-money elites to consume conspicuously as a sort of celebration of their "otherness" in Jordan, of course, is that in so doing they mirror the lavish consumption practices of the royal family itself.

. . . they mirror the lavish consumption practices of the royal family itself.

While the resistance of new-money elites to assimilation within the larger society is taken by old elites as a sign of disloyalty and even immorality, new elites do not perceive their consumption practices in such terms. Instead, new elites perceive themselves, conspicuous lifestyles and all, as participants in a modern and increasingly global world that has destroyed whatever incentives there once might have been for traditional allegiances. To be traditional in this view is to fail to understand and appreciate the rapidly changing world in which, as Zaki put it, "You must be ready to go anywhere, do anything; you cannot close your eyes and hide in the sand here." It is not so much that new elites behave without

regard to guidelines for principled behavior, as the old elites suppose, but rather that new elites have cast their lots with what they take to be a global, as opposed to a Jordanian, community. Given the recent and traumatic migration experiences of many of Amman's Palestinian elites, as well as the overall uncertainty about the political future of Jordan expressed by new elites of Jordanian and Palestinian origins alike, it is perhaps not surprising that many individuals are deeply skeptical of the utility of placing their faith in the Hashemite monarchy, or in Jordan as a nation, or in anything other than their capacity to survive in the world through their own initiative and resources. New elites are thus not particularly concerned with behaving "appropriately" as restrained and subdued Jordanians because they do not consider themselves Jordanian in any meaningful sense, but rather look beyond Jordan's borders for resources from which to forge their identities as well as the foundations of their material success.

The opposing consumption styles of traditional and modern elites function as a means of signalling information about relationships not only to other elites but also to the larger society and nation. For old-money elites, a traditional lifestyle is valorized as moral because it is sensitive to Jordan's social and political realities. Modern taste is, from this viewpoint, immoral precisely because it implies a concern with personal consumption divorced from larger social concerns. The terms modern and traditional are thus used by traditional elites as a means of distinguishing between good and bad Jordanians—those who belong in the country and those who should leave.[11] New elites, on the other hand, reject identification with the Hashemites, the larger society, or with Jordan as a national entity. They perceive the old-money elites' consumption practices as based in fear and a deluded preoccupation with local affairs in an increasingly global world. In this respect, it is reasonable to label traditional elites as more local and modern elites as more global in outlook, although it must be kept in mind that there is no simple relationship between such labels and the kinds of goods that elites actually consume; both groups, as discussed above, consume high-tech products marketed on a global level.

Jordanian-Palestinian Relations

ALTHOUGH THE JORDANIAN-PALESTINIAN distinction is typically taken by scholars and laymen alike as representing the defining axis of identification within Jordan, the distinction between traditional and modern elites in Amman cross-cuts this line of demarcation. The consumption styles of traditional elites of both Jordanian and Palestinian origins are indistinguishable according to Palestinians and Jordanians alike. In addition, Jordanian and Palestinian old-money elites are virtually indistinguishable with respect to their political views. Traditional Palestinian elites are typically staunch supporters of the monarchy who consider Jordan their home, rather than as a stopping place en route to another destination. One Palestinian man in his early 60s who had arrived in Amman in 1948 and had earned his fortune in banking explained to me:

> I am Jordanian . . . my children are Jordanian. I have my house, my business, my friends, my life here. . . . Palestine was a long time ago, a dream. The place where I was born, that's gone now, it's all changed, it's gone forever. I have no future there, my children have no future there. We are Jordanian now. . . .

The situation with respect to new-money elites is more complicated. On the one hand, there are Jordanians (as opposed to Palestinians) who have made their fortunes since the 1970s and indulge in the conspicuous displays of consumption characteristic of new elites. At the same time, however, it is Palestinians who dominate the commercial sector in Jordan and who have gained the most from opportunities for employment in the Gulf. Hence, the phenomenon of new-money elites, along with their flashy consumption styles and association of disloyalty to the nation, is glossed as Palestinian, both by Jordanians and the Palestinians themselves. Those Palestinians who returned to Jordan from Kuwait in 1990 and 1991 are popularly associated, both in and out of elite circles, as the flashiest and most insensitive to the mores of the surrounding community. This group incites traditional elites to extreme anger, as they decry the attempts of these "Gulfies" to seize control of the city. According to one traditional elite man:

> You can tell which ones are from the Gulf from the way they drive their cars, from the way they turn at intersections, screeching their tires. . . . They are changing everything. Five years ago,

> you couldn't find anyone on the streets after 10 o'clock, but now, even at midnight, the streets are busy, because the Gulfies like to stay up late. . . . They are taking Amman away from the people who live here.

This speaker was a Palestinian who had migrated to Amman in 1967 and felt himself to be representative of that group of Palestinians who "belong" in Jordan in opposition to the Palestinians from Kuwait who are, for him, outsiders.

Traditional Jordanians and Palestinians are unified in their opposition to the new elites, a fact which tends to diminish the significance of the Jordanian-Palestinian distinction among old-money elites. At the same time, however, the overall identification of conspicuous and egregious consumption with new Palestinian elites contributes to a discourse of Jordanian-Palestinian conflict among elites in general (as well as throughout other sectors of the society). Restraint in taste and associated political characteristics such as allegiance to the king are glossed among elites as Jordanian, even if the elites demonstrating these characteristics are of Palestinian heritage, while conspicuous consumption is identified largely as a Palestinian phenomenon, even if the conspicuous consumers are Jordanians. In short, within the realm of Jordanian-Palestinian communal relations, the category of the traditional is largely imagined as Jordanian in opposition to a Palestinian nouveau riche signifying the modern, regardless of the actual heritage of the elites themselves.

Conclusions

AMMAN'S ELITES ARE DIVIDED OVER matters of taste, and preferences for particular villas, furnishings, and clothing are linked to elites' identification as traditional or modern, a distinction best understood with reference to specific socio-economic events demarcating pre-oil boom and post-oil boom life. I have argued that elites' identification with traditional or modern lifestyles as signaled by their consumption choices is expressive of political and moral affiliations, with restrained consumption associated with loyalty to the Jordanian nation and conspicuous consumption viewed as a manifestation of a disregard not only for the monarchy but for the population at large. The ascription of good or bad taste thus signifies much more than differences over aesthetic preferences but reveals a good deal about elites' disagree-

ments over the meaning of "authentic" Jordanian nationality.

The meaning of traditional and modern as well as the nuances of political and moral signification accorded specific consumption practices by Amman's elites are, I have suggested, fruitfully analyzed within the context of Jordanian experience, and one should be wary of extrapolating the specifics of this case study to the region at large. Although the terms traditional and modern are in play throughout the Middle East (as well as the world beyond), it would be a mistake to assume that consumption practices such as villa construction and decoration are understood everywhere in the region in the same way. Tensions between Jordanians and Palestinians, income from Gulf sources, and the recent return of some 300,000 migrants to Jordan as a result of the Gulf War are all factors contributing to the particularities of consumption in Amman.

The significance of local factors to the interpretation of the consumption practices detailed here counters the commonplace assumption that ideas about the traditional and the modern among contemporary Middle Easterners have arisen primarily as a response to the infiltration of Western cultural, political, and economic influence throughout the region. This is not to ignore the role of Western and global factors in consumption practices but to suggest that local and regional contexts of sociocultural, political, and economic relationships imbue the consumption of products of Western provenance and global distribution with culturally-specific meanings, providing evidence of the revaluation through local systems of signification of elements participating in global cultural forms (Comaroff 1985:13).

Notes

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[1] The research on which this paper is based was conducted in Amman from April 1995 to January 1996. As I suspect is the case in most

fieldwork situations, my research spanned a spectrum of activities ranging from the relatively formal (merchant surveys, homeowner interviews, school tours) to the decidedly less formal (sharing meals, helping children with their English assignments, watching videos, attending weddings, and, of course, shopping). I attempted to make my selection of informants as representative as possible by including individuals from different backgrounds and circumstances (Muslims and Christians, Jordanians and Palestinians, old and new-money elites, long-term and short-term residents of Amman) in my study. In this article I rely heavily upon information gained from a series of approximately three dozen house tours that afforded me the opportunity to document photographically elite furnishings and architecture as well as instigate discussions of consumption and style. In keeping with standard anthropological practice, informants' names and details of their backgrounds and current circumstances have been altered somewhat to ensure anonymity.

[2] More than ninety percent of graduates from the American Community School (ACS) in Amman, an exclusive private school which counted two of King Hussein's children among its students during the 1995–96 school year, go on to the university level, with most of those going to schools in the U.S. Total enrollment in ACS during 1995–96 was 421, with approximately one-third of these Jordanian. To take another example, two-thirds of the graduates of the Amman Baccalaureate School (ABS), another well-known private school, go on to universities in the U.S. with the remainder going primarily to England. Very few remain in Jordan for advanced studies. Total enrollment in ABS during 1995–96 was 1,008, with 81 percent of the students Jordanian. (Data based on separate interviews with Brian Lahan, principal of ACS, and Samia Al-Farra, principal of ABS, conducted by the author on 13 December, 1995).

[3] The historian Beshara Doumani, for example, has documented the movement of one family, the al-Jarrars, from the al-Balqa region on the East Bank to the the area of Palestine around 1670 (Doumani 1995:37).

[4] The preference for these English terms by speakers of Arabic has been noted among West Bank Palestinians as well (Elizabeth Faier, University of Richmond, personal communication).

[5] Despite the importance accorded urban-rural differences in the anthropological and historical literature of the Middle East, such distinctions did not emerge as a significant factor in my investigation of consumption practices. In part this absence can be attributed to the fact that I worked entirely with people firmly rooted in urban life; even those who hailed from land-owning families such as the many Palestinians I encountered from Jaffa had long resided in urban centers and delegated the work of agricultural labor to others. Another consideration is that within the context of consumption practices, urban-rural differences, much like Jordanian-Palestinian distinctions, are cross-cut in Amman by more salient categories of identification such as whether or not one has amassed wealth prior to or after the oil boom years, and, more specifically, whether or not one is a recent returnee from the Gulf.

[6] Room count excludes bathrooms, alcoves, and walk-in closets.

[7] In addition to wearing simple dresses in dark colors, Nisreen always veiled when outside the villa.

[8] The discussion of political loyalty here is based on research conducted during the reign of King Hussein, who died in February 1999 after a protracted struggle against cancer. It appears that Jordan's current monarch, King Hussein's son, Abdullah, continues to enjoy the broadly-based popular support accorded his father. It is not clear whether this support reflects loyalty to Abdullah, to the memory of his esteemed father, to the institution of the monarchy itself, or some combination of these factors.

[9] Ignoring traffic signals and driving at speeds endangering drivers and pedestrians alike are the norm on Amman's busy streets. Nonetheless, complaints that I heard lodged against driving practices were directed primarily at the drivers of expensive cars.

[10] The impetus for the commercial production of handicrafts in Jordan has been spurred in large part by the National Handicrafts Development Project which trains settled tribal women to produce marketable woven goods (Noor Al-Hussein Foundation). It is worth noting that products like Bani Hamida rugs, though marketed as traditional objects, are produced as commodities intended for sale to both Jordanian and foreign consumers. The Jordanian anthropologist Seteney Shami remarked to me that it is rather doubtful if Bani Hamida women themselves ever practiced this sort of weaving as a traditional craft; tents and other supplies traditionally were produced by professional weavers. Moreover, the dark, rich colors traditionally associated with village weavings, such as red, black, and orange, have been "updated" in many of the Bani Hamida products to reflect a palette of colors more palatable to shoppers. The goods have, to some extent, been "modernized" (in the words of one new money elite) to make them acceptable to contemporary buyers who wish to incorporate "traditional" products as accent pieces amidst American and Western European furniture arrangements.

[11] The discussion here of the relationship between taste and ethics among Jordanian elites resonates with Bourdieu's analysis of the ethical aversion of the French petite bourgeoisie to "art for art's sake," an approach to aesthetics which is seen by certain fractions of the bourgeoisie as demonstrating an immoral separation of the artistic sensibilities of artists and intellectuals from the concerns of social life. Bourdieu's assertion that taste perceived as divorced from social issues is construed as immoral by some individuals appears valid within the Jordanian context, as old Jordanian elites perceive their taste as better (and more moral) than that of new elites precisely because of its sensitivity to larger social issues of inequality and class stratification (Bourdieu 1984:48–49).

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