JERUSALEM QUARTERLY

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Winter 2024

JQ 100 – Studies in Honor of Salim Tamari (Part 1)

Writing While Fighting: Salim Tamari, His Generation, and the First Intifada
Penny Johnson

Amman as Jerusalem's Alter Ego? Or How to Write about Jerusalem's Past Futures
Falestin Naïli

Why Is Ahmad Hilmi Pasha 'Abd al-Baqi Absent from the History of the Palestinian National Movement?
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Before Painting: Nicola Saig, Painting, and Photographic Seeing
Stephen Sheehi

Reflections on Certain Theories to Do with the History of Early Islam
Tarif Khalidi

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JQ 100 – Studies in Honor of Salim Tamari (Part 1)

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EDITORIAL

The Journey of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*

Welcome to the one hundredth issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*, which was first published under the name *Jerusalem Quarterly File* in the summer of 1998.[1] Over the past quarter century, *JQ* has established itself as the leading journal on the past, present, and future of Jerusalem, as well as the most robust and innovative platform for studies on the social and cultural life of Palestinians in general. *JQ* contributed significantly to the historical shift in knowledge production over the past generation from policy-oriented geopolitical and nationalist analysis to centering the lives of ordinary Palestinians and expanding the notion of the "political" to include the agency, contradictions, intimacy, and textures of everyday life. *JQ*'s role in this shift, especially when it comes to the late Ottoman and British colonial periods, was largely driven by Salim Tamari, the founding editor of *JQ* and the founding director of the Institute for Jerusalem Studies, which publishes the journal.

This special issue, the first of two, honors Salim Tamari and his legacy in and beyond *JQ*. In his introduction, guest editor Issam Nassar, Tamari's long-time colleague and fellow *JQ* collaborator, reflects on Tamari's scholarship, which inspired many of the articles and essays curated here. While these two issues celebrate Tamari's impact on the field of Palestinian studies, his influence can be seen more broadly in the numerous contributions to the pages of the *JQ*. This editorial connects the journey of *JQ* to the larger context of Palestinian studies and to the current war on the Palestinian people, including the ongoing genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza.

1 The name change took effect with the double issue 22–23 (Winter–Autumn 2005).

Palestinians are all too familiar with generational catastrophes (World War I, 1936–1939, 1948–1949, 1967, 1982, and 2023 to the present) characterized by large-scale killing, destruction of built environments, forced displacement, and ghettoization. Yet, after every political and military defeat, they remain more tenacious than ever. Over time, the practices of regeneration, reconstitution, and resistance in the face of erasure have become inherent to the modern Palestinian condition. In this issue of *JQ*, for example, an interview with Hadeel Assali on the Gaza Mutual Aid Solidarity group testifies to how, in the face of the current genocide in Gaza, Palestinians continue to find innovative ways to (re)assemble, repair, and live. With fuel and electricity cut off, people turned to clay pots and repaired solar panels. Tragically, these micro practices carry their own risks, as Israel targets the Palestinian social fabric and assassinates doctors, academics, and community workers. Also in this issue, Kegham Balian's letter from Jerusalem is a timely first-hand testimony from the Save the Armenian Quarter movement, illuminating diverse forms of community mobilization under threat of dispossession, settler encroachment, and attacks. These practices often lie below the political radar and remain hidden in the shadows of large transformative events. It is more crucial than ever to understand how Palestinians (re) assemble their families, communities, and body politic during and after each catastrophe, and throughout the relentless everyday structural violence of settler colonial domination.

The pages of *JQ* over the past twenty-five years have shone inspiring light on the micro level practices of Palestinians that built foundations for resilience and resistance against all odds. The studies range from reconstituting social and cultural fabrics through memoirs and photographs to in-depth ethnographies of neighborhoods and "discoveries" of locally produced archival sources. The perceptive insights and relevance of these studies are due, in large part, to the fact that *JQ* is the primary English-language journal for Palestinian and non-Palestinian authors who live in Palestine and who are able to produce intimate and grounded knowledge concerning everyday conditions in Palestine.

That *JQ* became such a platform is due to the circumstances of its founding. In the heady years immediately following the Oslo agreements in the mid-1990s, the Beirut-based Institute for Palestine Studies (IPS), under the leadership of Walid Khalidi at the time, sought to establish a presence on Palestinian soil, just as tens of thousands of returnees, including Yassir Arafat, were doing, with the hope of establishing a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital. One of the tasks was to locally print *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filistiniyya*, the Arabic journal of IPS, as well as to distribute its English language *Journal of Palestine Studies*. Salim Tamari suggested a third publication: an informational bulletin to report from the ground up on the battle for Palestinian Jerusalem by local academics, journalists, and writers. It was envisioned to provide locally informed historical context and structural analysis to the unfolding of current events through the long-form investigative essay format that was the hallmark of MERIP's *Middle East Report* and other politically engaged journals at the time.

The first eight issues of the *Jerusalem Quarterly File* focused solely on Jerusalem, analyzing Israeli government attempts to transform the city and documenting a chronology of relevant developments from issue to issue. But even within the "facts, facts, facts" positivist political history model that long defined IPS, the authors paid special attention to contextualizing how Palestinians in Jerusalem perceived, experienced, and resisted these

attempts. From the beginning, therefore, the analytical themes that would dominate later issues can be discerned. These included historical perspectives on landscape, the built environment, and archaeology, and the use of locally generated sources (such as letters, photographs, and memoirs) to construct social biographies of individuals, families, and institutions that defined the cultural life of pre-1948 Jerusalem.

Issue 9 (Summer 2000) marked the moment when *JQ* took on its current shape. It decentered the primacy of Israel's actions as frames for understanding Jerusalem and centered the Palestinian experience. In place of the usual lead article on Israeli policies, we find the story of Wasif Jawhariyya. The issue also included an account of the Arab College of Jerusalem by Sadiq Ibrahim ‘Odeh, who attended from 1940 to 1944. The editorial, titled "Memoirs as History," defended this move:

> This issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly File* is devoted largely to the history of everyday life in Jerusalem. Featuring two memoirs – one recounting the life and times of a noted Jerusalemite popular musician, the other providing personal recollections of the Arab College of Jerusalem … . Memoirs fill the gaps that exist in our understanding of the histories with which we often claim familiarity, but which often prove elusive.

By Winter 2001 (double issue 11–12), the transformation was complete, as the entire issue was devoted to an irreverent historical exploration of Jerusalem's cultural elite by Tamari, vernacular photographers by Nassar, subversive (in the good sense of the word) ethnography by Rema Hammami, and a poignant cultural essay by Penny Johnson, to name but a few of the local contributors whose work on behalf of *JQ* spanned decades. Issue 30 (Autum 2006), "My Grandmother and Other Stories," was the first not to have Jerusalem as the focus and the first fully thematic guest edited issue. It was also at that time that the chronology section faded out.

JQ continues to give pride of place to Jerusalem and ground-up journalism by local writers is a consistent thread. It also remains a robust platform for social and cultural histories of all Palestinians, regardless of geography. In recent years, *JQ* added a double-blind peer review process for lead research articles. Most important, *JQ* continues to innovate new lines of inquiry about the Palestinian condition, largely through special issues, with particular attention to cultivating emerging scholars. Some recent examples of the expanded horizons of Palestinian studies have been special issues on discursive and materialist dimensions of the built environment (*JQ* 83 and 84, "Home and House"), formal and informal property regimes (*JQ* 88 and 89, "Who Owns Palestine?"), subaltern archaeology (*JQ* 90 and 91), Jerusalem's interrupted futures (*JQ* 92), UNRWA's archives (*JQ* 93 and 94), saints, festivals, and everyday religion (*JQ* 95), and Palestinian food and foodways (*JQ* 98 and 99).

The concurrence of the publication of the one hundredth issue of *JQ* during the most devastating Palestinian catastrophe of living memory serves as a reminder that engaged scholarship that centers Palestinians is more important than ever. We offer our sincere thanks to our devoted readers, our contributors, our staff, our contributing editors, and our editorial teams. Together, we continue the journey of *JQ* and the struggle for freedom, justice, and equality.

INTRODUCTION

Honoring Salim Tamari

Issam Nassar

Guest Editor

This special issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*, and the next, celebrate the distinguished work that renowned sociologist Salim Tamari – *JQ*'s founder – has made toward the social history of Palestine. Here, a number of his colleagues and former students contribute writings that reflect on themes Tamari explored throughout his distinguished career.

Tamari's work spans decades, providing groundbreaking insights into Palestinian history and society. In the 1980s, he examined the integration of the Palestinian peasantry into the Israeli economy and explored issues such as factionalism, collaboration with Israeli authorities, and the political role of Palestinian communists. His work also addressed the 1987 intifada, and the involvement of the merchant class in resistance during the uprising.

In the 1990s, Tamari focused on the position of Palestinian refugees and the history of Jerusalem's western neighborhoods before and during the Nakba. His later work explored Palestine's social history more deeply, utilizing memoirs, diaries, and photography to examine daily life under the Ottomans and the British Mandate, and the cultural dimensions of Palestinian resistance. Through these innovative approaches, he redefined the field of Palestinian social history, expanding the focus and including an eclectic range of characters and groups who made up Jerusalem's varied social fabric prior to the Nakba.

Beyond his own scholarly work, Tamari founded the Institute of Jerusalem Studies in 1997 and launched the *Jerusalem Quarterly*, a much valued

journal now publishing its one hundredth issue, and a key resource for the study of Jerusalem's history and politics.

Tamari's contributions to the social history of Palestine are particularly significant. His scholarship shifted the focus of Palestinian studies beyond political events to the everyday lives, memories, and cultural expressions of Palestinians. His use of personal narratives – such as diaries and letters – humanized Palestinian history, offering nuanced perspectives on colonial rule, displacement, and social change.

Tamari has also critiqued traditional nationalist historiography by emphasizing the complex social and cultural transformations within Palestinian society, moving beyond monolithic narratives of victimhood and resistance. His work situates Palestine within broader global contexts, connecting local experiences to Ottoman reforms, European colonialism, and Arab nationalism.

Additionally, Tamari's research on nostalgia, memory, and modernity has reshaped how Palestinians relate to their past, especially the pre-Nakba period. His exploration of urban history in Jerusalem, particularly its western suburbs, underscores the city's social and cultural life before displacement and occupation, revealing the impact of colonial policies on Palestinian communities.

Tamari's pioneering work in social history, his use of diverse sources like photography, and his interdisciplinary approach have enriched Palestinian studies, offering new avenues for understanding the complexities of Palestinian life. His legacy as a scholar, mentor, and institution-builder continues to inspire and shape the field.

In this issue, Penny Johnson, a longtime friend of Salim, provides an overall review of his writings and political contributions, while Falestin Naïli describes how stories and voices of the past guide our perceptions of the present, as she examines similarities between Amman and Jerusalem. As Naïli walks us through Amman, scenes from Jerusalem are evoked – architecture, scents, and experiences, such as the aroma of Zalatimo's traditional pastries. Her contribution highlights how, after 1948, Amman evolved into an Arab metropolis, filling a role that Jerusalem could not, due to its geographic and socioeconomic divisions under Israeli colonialism.

Tarif Khalidi's essay, on the other hand, explores critiques of early Arabic Islamic historical sources, focusing on their perceived teleological nature ("salvation history"), the time gap between events and their documentation, and the lack of contemporary historians. While some argue these issues undermine reliability, recent research highlights the coexistence of oral and written traditions and argues that temporal distance alone does not invalidate historical reports. The text concludes that despite flaws, early Islamic sources remain valuable and should not be dismissed outright.

In Adel Manna's essay, the life of the prominent yet overlooked Palestinian leader of the early twentieth century, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha 'Abd al-Baqi, is explored. Manna highlights the diverse career of 'Abd al-Baqi that spanned political, economic, cultural, and military roles, including defending Jerusalem during the Nakba in 1948. As the sole Arab Higher Committee member in the city, he provided crucial leadership and avoided divisive politics. He is remembered primarily for his role in the short-lived All-Palestine Government in Gaza, which faced opposition from British, Zionist, and

Hashemite forces, while his significant earlier contributions remain underrecognized in historical accounts.

Stephen Sheehi's contribution critically highlights the work of Nicola Saig (1863–1942), a prominent iconographer and painter in Jerusalem, who played a central role in shaping the city's distinct Qudsi style of Orthodox iconography. Saig bridged religious and secular art, blending iconographic techniques with European secular painting to create a hybrid style that reflected his generation's multifocal identity. His atelier became a hub for producing religious icons and training future artists. His historical paintings metaphorically interpreted Palestinian political struggles, embodying the transformations of modernity in early twentieth-century Palestine. Sheehi credits the late Kamal Boullata for his role in highlighting Saig's innovative synthesis as a cornerstone in the evolution of Palestinian and Arab art.

The various contributions mentioned above align with Salim Tamari's emphasis on micro social history, memory, biography, and visual culture – each a central theme. Together, they serve as both a tribute to his work and meaningful contributions to the study of Palestine.

The next *JQ* issue will present additional contributions honoring Tamari's work, including essays by: Anton Shammas on Israel's appropriation of Palestinian cuisine; Talha Çiçek on state and society in late Ottoman Gaza; Alex Winder on the legacy of Abu Jilda, the rebel bandit from British Mandate Palestine; and Issam Nassar on the war memoirs of Anwar Nussiebeh.

Issam Nassar is a professor of modern Middle East cultural history with an interest in visual culture, in particular photography. Nassar chairs the history program at the Doha Institute for Graduate Studies and has served as a professor of history at Illinois State University and other universities.

Writing While Fighting: Salim Tamari, His Generation, and the First Intifada

Penny Johnson

Abstract

In five essays written by Salim Tamari during the first Palestinian intifada, 1987–91, he examined the role of urban merchants, the strategies of Israel's intelligence services, and the dilemmas of the intifada's leadership and Palestinian civil society's "limited rebellion" in the ongoing intifada. Penny Johnson – writing in the context of the Palestinian *habbat* al-Shaykh Jarrah of 2021, often referred to as the Unity Intifada – draws on Tamari's essays to consider the legacy left by the first intifada on more recent Palestinian politics. She also uses Tamari's first intifada essays to suggest several aspects of the first intifada worth revisiting by scholars after three decades.

Keywords:

Salim Tamari; intifada; Palestinian leadership; Palestinian left; Ramallah.

I began writing this essay on 15 May 2021 – Nakba Day – the first quiet morning in Ramallah after some time. The day before, in confrontations with the Israeli army in about two hundred locations in the West Bank, eleven young Palestinians were killed, including a student at Birzeit University, Fadi Washaha. In Gaza on Nakba Day, however, there was no lull: intensive Israeli shelling and airstrikes continued destroying lives, homes, and vital infrastructure, the death toll mounting into the hundreds. For eleven days in May, Hamas fired its rockets and Palestinians protested in Jerusalem, throughout the West Bank, and in cities inside the Green Line. Some were

calling it a third intifada or, even more grandly, the Unity Intifada.

In this tense atmosphere, I returned to five essays written by Salim Tamari in the heat of the first Palestinian intifada, three decades earlier. All but one were published in *Middle East Report* (the magazine of MERIP, the Middle East Research and Information Project), where several other writers in the occupied territories also found a voice. I wanted to consider how Salim and other writers of my generation approached "writing while fighting," and whether these analyses of the first intifada have resonance for us today.

A first observation: Salim had a cooler head than many of us. He began his incisive essay on urban merchants and the Palestinian uprising by noting: "Reflections on the intifada are permeated with the ideological predispositions of their writers. It evokes the parable of the blind men and the elephant: every perception reveals the perspective of the beholder."[1] In his essay, first presented as a talk at Georgetown University in May 1989 and then published in a book edited by Birzeit University faculty members Roger Heacock and Jamal Nassar, Salim brought into focus the collective agency of urban shopkeepers in what he termed in his title the "revolt of the petite bourgeoisie." This was a perspective those of us on the other side of the elephant had not considered as we penned urgent articles on the war of the camps that initiated the uprising, the rising of villages in collective resistance, and the ubiquitous courage displayed by young people and women in demonstrations everywhere confronting the Israeli army.[2]

This is not to say, of course, that Salim was always correct and always prescient – who could be in those shifting and turbulent times? Like most of us, he first relied on personal observation – hence a focus on the Ramallah-Jerusalem axis in his writing on urban merchants – with additional documentation coming either from the communiqués of the uprising or the equally breathless reports in the Palestinian and Israeli press. Salim began by delineating the initial successes of the merchant boycott on paying taxes to Israel and the ensuing tensions, problems, and internal resistance (rising from chambers of commerce to peddlers). These led, in his view, to that boycott's collapse in the summer of 1988, although the commercial strike continued. Somewhat earlier than most of those writing while fighting in the occupied territories, Salim identified an "organizational crisis" of the intifada. As early as August 1988, he noted that "while the commercial strike formed the backdrop for the routinization of the uprising, the institutional development of the intifada was not galvanizing around the popular committees, as anticipated by the United Leadership."[3] Hindsight (over three decades later!) makes me wonder why he did not consider why and how that boycott was observed longer, and indeed intensified, in the small town of Bayt Sahur.

Reviewing Salim's intifada texts also brings back forgotten histories, at least for me. In "Eyeless in Judea," published in the summer of 1990, Salim examined Israel's strategy of using human collaborators and creating paper forgeries.[4] His meticulous examination of the fake *bayanat* produced by the Shin Bet (deploying the name of the Unified National Leadership of the Uprising) is fascinating. Salim exposed one interesting twist when Shin Bet collaborators accessed the United Leadership's communiques before they were published: "There were even cases when reality – to paraphrase Umberto Eco – was imitating forgery. Fake *bayanat* were distributed one or two days before UNLU

circulars hit the streets, and when the latter appeared they literally corresponded to the forged ones, insinuating that the leadership had been penetrated from within."[5] This also serves as a reminder that fake news is not only a province of our new social media but can be tossed on a street or posted on an olive tree.

Another essay published in the summer of 1990 had a surprising resonance with me in the 2021 summer of discontent in Palestine and our own limited rebellion. In "The Uprising's Dilemma: Limited Rebellion and Civil Society," Salim deepened his analysis of the "crisis of direction" facing the intifada and the political forces leading it. He argued that the intifada's main achievement of mobilizing "whole sectors of a civilian population" had reached its limit, while routinized revolt had neither led to "total civil disobedience – and complete disengagement from Israeli rule – nor transformed into a political initiative that can engage the enemy in negotiations on terms favorable to the Palestinians."[6] But perhaps most relevant for our times is his search, in his words, "to locate the social base of the intifada in more specific terms."[7] Noting again that urban merchants "played the only corporate class action in the uprising," he identified other forces as urban refugees, village youth, and students. Attentive to class analysis, he saw the rising of urban refugees as an "upheaval of the urban poor," rather than the emergence of a working class revolt, arguing, perhaps controversially, that the "working class has not made its presence felt."[8] Israeli rule, he observed, has had "the unintended consequence of homogenizing the social base of the Palestinian communities," but "did not destroy or even radically modify their social hierarchies." It is well worth pondering the role of those social hierarchies in the ensuing three decades.

Also worthy of reflection, as our aging first intifada generation places hope in the new youthful generation to challenge authoritarianism in Palestinian rule and Israeli apartheid (a tall order), is Salim's observation on the rather flexible category of "youth": "The fact that the generic category of 'youth' (and later 'children') came to be seen as the primary force propelling the *intifada* underscores the indeterminate class character of the movement itself (although perhaps not its leadership)."[9] Reading this observation thirty years later, we might well wonder at our lack of rigor in unpacking this generic category. To date, some herald "youth" as the main force resisting both the occupation and internal authoritarianism, while others decry the youth of Ramallah cafes and their middle-class aspirations. What binds together youth today and what separates them?

Salim could not have predicted the events that ended that summer of 1990 and brought us into a new era: Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on 2 August 1990 and the subsequent U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. However, in an essay two years after these invasions with the intriguing title "Left in Limbo: Leninist Heritage and Islamist Challenge," Salim obliquely considers this new reality, including the 1991 Madrid peace conference, through a careful dissection of the dilemmas of a weakened Palestinian left.[10] He begins with a wider lens, asserting, "The late 1970s saw the demise of the organized left as a viable political force in Arab society." Against this dismal background, he does laud some of the Palestinian left's achievements in the intifada, including the "forging of democratic and largely autonomous movements in which large sectors of youth and women became involved."[11]

But at the time in which he wrote (in 1992), he saw the Palestinian left retreating in a crucial battle over women's dress and behavior. He described the acute disarray of leftist political parties and factions after the fall of the Soviet Union, and found "the reformed Palestinian left," such as the People's Party and the break-away Democratic Front (FIDA), offering "an eclectic glasnost toward all former taboos: social democracy, liberalism, Trotskyism [where did he get that?], and religion."[12] Perhaps his key observation: "Behind this visible retreat of the left (Arab as well as Palestinian) is a venerable tradition of divorcing the political from the cultural and social sphere."[13] Here he cited the failure of the three main Palestinian socialist tendencies to challenge the personal status code, presumably for fear of alienating the religious street (and mass sentiment). Interestingly, he termed this failure a "myopia" and located in it two features that bring us back to his analysis of urban merchants, "the absence of cosmopolitan urban centers and the decline in number and weight of the urban middle classes (caused by war and migration)."[14]

One might contest this very broad assertion, but it brings us to the central features of Salim's scholarly preoccupations, both with class analysis and, increasingly, with cities. I cannot presume to say why, as the Oslo years rolled on, Salim took his enormously productive turn into memoirs and the social history of the late Ottoman and British Mandate period. One possible reason is simply the dreary policy orientation of sociological research in the post-Oslo period, what Salim and Rema Hammami in a 1997 review of Palestinian sociology called "quantitative fetishism."[15] Another, however, might be to bring that cosmopolitan history of Palestinian cities and their inhabitants out of the shadows.

Salim's last writing (while perhaps no longer fighting) on the first intifada and its aftermath came in a 1995 article entitled "Fading Flags: The Crises of Palestinian Legitimacy," after the Palestinian Authority arrived in Gaza and Jericho.[16] The plural crises of the title is significant – we were no longer facing, Salim argued, a simple "crisis of direction," as he posited earlier, but a crisis both of legitimacy and of Palestinian national identity. He vividly contrasted the ubiquitous defiant (because forbidden) Palestinian flags of the first intifada and those of the subsequent period where "the Palestinian flag lies forsaken and virtually ignored, its green margins turned dusty blue from the double exposure of sun and neglect."[17] But even more telling for our times, Salim asked if the civil society and grassroots initiatives of the intifada – whose power, he also noted, is sometimes exaggerated – could put the brakes on "the emerging authoritarian and antidemocratic tendencies of the new Palestinian regime."[18] A quarter of a century later, we are faced with the same question.

What can we draw from Salim's and other scholars' reports on the first intifada, that signal event that is still in history's shadows? In the same 1997 review of Palestinian sociology, Salim and Rema observe that it is "striking that ten years later such a critical review of one of the most significant events in Palestinian history has yet to be written."[19] Perhaps we are still blind women and men trying to examine an elephant – or perhaps those of my generation simply have bad eyesight. We await a younger generation, where indeed an interest in the first intifada has begun to stir. And we may be entering a new period of writing while fighting. I finished this essay in the summer

of 2021, in the wake of demonstrations – with youth prominent – protesting the death in Palestinian detention of activist Nizar Banat that were violently suppressed by Palestinian police and security forces.

Salim's critical eye in his writing on the first intifada can help us use our common history for the present. However, as he warned in 1990: "The mythologies of the intifada have to be brought into synchrony with people's real potentialities."[20] I would add James Baldwin's apt warning in *The Fire Next Time*: "To accept one's past – one's history – is not the same thing as drowning in it. It is learning how to use it. An invented past can never be used. It cracks and crumbles under the pressure of life like clay in a season of drought."[21] Salim's essays on the first intifada – open to criticism, elaboration, and, crucially, discussion – steer us away from such an invented past and, hopefully, toward using that moment in Palestinian history thirty-five years ago to understand our troubled present.

Penny Johnson is a contributing editor of the Jerusalem Quarterly. *Her latest book*, Forgotten: Searching for Palestine's Lost Places and Hidden Memorials*, written with Raja Shehadeh, will be published by Profile UK in March 2025.*

Endnotes

1 Salim Tamari, "The Revolt of the Petite Bourgeoisie: Urban Merchants and the Palestinian Uprising," in *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads*, ed. Jamal Nassar and Roger Heacock (New York: Praeger, 1990), 159.
2 See Penny Johnson, Lee O'Brien, and Joost Hilterman, "The West Bank Rises Up," *Middle East Report* 152 (May–June 1988): 4–12, online at merip.org/1988/05/the-west-bank-rises-up/ (accessed 14 November 2024).
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4 See Salim Tamari, "Eyeless in Judea: Israel's Strategy of Collaborators and Forgeries," *Middle East Report* 164–165 (May–June 1990): 39–44, online at merip.org/1990/05/eyeless-in-judea/ (accessed 14 November 2024).
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7 Tamari, "Limited Rebellion," 5.
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Amman as Jerusalem's Alter Ego? Or How to Write about Jerusalem's Past Futures

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Abstract

After 1948, in a development that abides to its own geographical, socio-economic, and political context, Amman has gradually become what Jerusalem could not: an Arab metropolis. It did so, in part, by absorbing a significant number of Palestinian refugees, many of whom lived in the official camps established by the United Nations and others who did not. The latter included a significant number of the educated middle class who resided in neighborhoods outside the Old City walls, and who played a major role in the administrative, commercial, and cultural sectors of Amman in the second half of the twentieth century. In addition to its own destiny, then, Amman can also be taken to represent the aborted destiny of Jerusalem and thereby offers an opportunity to observe part of the potential that Jerusalem embodied before the Nakba. Indeed, the Jordanian capital somehow seems to have become the temporary conservatory of a Jerusalemite Palestinian Arab modernity nipped in the bud in 1948.

Keywords:

Amman; Jerusalem; Nakba; modernity; middle class.

> The past carries a secret index with it, by which it is referred to its resurrection. Are we not touched by the same breath of air which was among that which came before? Is there not an echo of those who have been silenced in the voices to which we lend our ears today?
>
> Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History"[1]

As social historians, we are inhabited by the people whose stories we hear or read. It is as though they accompany us, commenting and pointing their fingers as we walk through life. Walking through the streets of Amman, I heard voices whispering to me, pointing at houses and telling me that they looked a lot like the Jerusalem homes they had been forced to leave in 1948. I smelled the perfume of Zalatimo's *mutabbaq* coming out of fancy pastry stores nothing like the original Zalatimo shop behind the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. The voices asked me: Can you see it? Can you smell it? Slowly, I began to experience Amman differently. I began to think that this big city had links with Jerusalem that went beyond the obvious.

After 1948, in a development that abides to its own geographical, socio economic, and political context, Amman has gradually become what Jerusalem could not: an Arab metropolis. So, in some ways, in addition to its own destiny, Amman also represents what I call (taking a cue from Lena Jayyusi's *Jerusalem Interrupted*) the aborted destiny of Jerusalem.[2] Amman offers an opportunity to see part of the potential that Jerusalem embodied before the Nakba. Indeed, the Jordanian capital somehow seems to have become the temporary conservatory of a Jerusalemite Palestinian Arab modernity nipped in the bud in 1948.

Emboldened by the value that Janet Abu-Lughod attributed to induction in scientific endeavors in her *Grounded Theory* and inspired by Salim Tamari's multifaceted social history of Jerusalem, I decided to think more about this question and research its various dimensions. In this essay, which focuses specifically on the links between Amman and Jerusalem's western neighborhoods, there is some groundwork for future research concerning those links, namely questions that could be its starting points.[3] Of course, beyond intuition, there were numerous elements that led me to consider the particular relationship between Amman and Jerusalem, two cities that are separated by only seventy kilometers. Jordan's annexation of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, during the period of the "union of the two banks" (1950–67), brought the truncated city under the dominance of Amman.[4] Amman remained the undisputed capital of Jordan, although Jerusalem was declared the spiritual capital and even the second capital of the kingdom.[5] The more than eighteen years under a common political umbrella were marked by great mobility between the two banks, with "East Bank" families spending weekends and holidays in Jerusalem. On weekends, some would have lunch in Jerusalem and return to Amman in the evening.[6]

Most importantly, we know that a large number of Palestinian families from Jerusalem's new western neighborhoods migrated to Amman as a result of the Nakba. In the first four decades of the twentieth century, the Palestinian Arab middle class and emerging elite had built homes in Jerusalem's sparsely populated western areas. Mostly educated in foreign schools, many members of this class held leading positions in either the private or public sector during the Mandate years. After the war of 1948 and the subsequent division of the city, Jerusalem lost its status as a political capital and an economic hub, while Amman concentrated on

those functions for the Hashemite Kingdom on both sides of the Jordan River.[7] The city was thus a logical choice for Jerusalemite professionals seeking employment in their fields of expertise and a stable income for their families, after the dramatic loss of their homes and livelihoods. Indeed, statistics on 1948 refugees from what later became West Jerusalem show that Jordan was their second choice of refuge, after east Jerusalem and the West Bank.[8] This data, analyzed by Salim Tamari, excludes some middle-class families who did not register with UNRWA and so probably represents an underestimation of the total number of west Jerusalem refugees who ended up in Amman. Given the greater employment opportunities in the Jordanian capital, it is reasonable to assume that the majority left for Amman.

The many facets of this lifeworld that disappeared with Arab west Jerusalem in 1948 are examined in *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods and their Fate in the War*, which documents these neighborhoods in their social, cultural, and economic dimensions. In the introduction, Salim Tamari writes: "This book is an attempt to provide a reconstruction of this process of displacement and expulsion and to account for the fate of Arab Palestinians who lost not only their property and homes, but also a whole world that exemplified Jerusalem and Palestine before 1948."[9] Where did this world disappear to? Did it reappear somewhere, though in fragments? And could that place be Amman, the "much-maligned city" (to use Seteney Shami's expression)?[10] Before analyzing the traces of Jerusalem's modernity in Amman, it is important to try and take the measure what was lost in 1948.

Tender Buds of Cosmopolitan Arab Modernity

In the late Ottoman period, many Palestinian Arab families had left the Old City and moved to new neighborhoods outside of the walls. While several *a'yan* (notables) and the *ashraf* (descendants of nobility) had established family residencies in Shaykh Jarrah and Wadi al-Jawz, members of the emerging Arab Palestinian middle class (along with Greek and Armenian Palestinians) began to move to the Qatamun, Talbiyya, and Baq'a neighborhoods (known also as Wadi al-Ward) west of the Old City in the second half of the nineteenth century. The Nammari and Wa'ri quarters in upper and lower Baq'a were among the first to be established in that part of the city, in parallel with Jewish, Templer, and monastic communities.[11] The Greek Orthodox Patriarchate in particular had a significant amount of waqf land west of the Old City and rented or leased it to clergy and lay members of the community, a practice that was also prevalent in the Armenian church.[12] David Yellin, a member of the Ottoman municipal council of Jerusalem, provided a snapshot of construction activities in the city for the year 1900, most of which occurred in the "new city." According to him, Christian families constructed the most expensive homes.[13]

During the Mandate period, there was a building boom in Palestinian cities that indicated a particularly high level of investment in Jerusalem. In 1931, 1.8

million Palestinian pounds were invested in building works in Jerusalem, compared to a little less than 200,000 in Haifa and 175,000 in Tel Aviv.[14] The new city's Talbiyya, al-Namamra, Qatamun, and Baq'a neighborhoods drew a large part of this investment, as families spent years saving money to buy a plot of land and build a house. These neighborhoods were made up of large family homes, many surrounded by lush gardens. Hala Sakakini, the daughter of the famous Palestinian educator and intellectual Khalil Sakakini, who grew up in Talbiyya, recalls that "every house had individuality; somehow it was marked by the personality of the owner."[15] Homes were generally surrounded by a stone fence and the gates leading to the front yard were often ornate and decorative. Houses had no numbers and were frequently known by the owners' family name: Villa Salama was the home of Hanna Salama, the commercial agent of General Motors. Other families chose historical names for their houses, such as Hanna Ibrahim Bisharat, who called his home Villa Harun al-Rashid.[16]

Rochelle Davis points out that a "material expression of the family's investment in building a home was often the highly individualized architectural detail, creative stone cutting around doors and windows, stylized facades, and elaborate stonework."[17] These homes did not imitate Old City architecture: rather than domed roofs, they often had red tile or flat roofs. Davis's historical approach allows her to grasp the ambitions expressed by the residents of these homes. This contrasts with the essentialist and sectarian interpretation employed by Israeli architect David Kroyanker, who has carefully documented the fine architecture of these neighborhoods in a detailed website and several books.[18] Kroyanker's approach is very far from the cosmopolitan modernist referent that many of the Arab residents of west Jerusalem called their own, whether they were Christians or Muslims.

Indeed, Talbiyya, al-Namamra, Qatamun, and Baq'a witnessed the development of what Davis calls "bourgeois modernity": cafés, cinemas, and social, literary, and sports clubs sprang up in great numbers during the Mandate period.[19] According to British statistics, by 1945 more than two thousand clubs and charities had been founded in Jerusalem, 85 percent of which were Palestinian of all denominations; only 15 percent were foreign.[20] Among the latter, the Jerusalem YMCA on King George Street, founded in 1933, was an important venue for leisure, sports, and socializing for Jerusalem's emergent middle class and is frequently mentioned in autobiographic accounts of life in the city's western neighborhoods, such as Hala Sakakini's memoirs.[21] The Arab Orthodox Club in upper Baq'a, founded in 1926, and the Arab Sports Club in Qatamun were two other important sites of this modern bourgeois lifestyle.[22] Cinemas and cafés provided evening entertainment; Jerusalem counted eight cinemas by the end of the Mandate period.[23] Ghada Karmi, who grew up in the Baq'a neighborhood, recalls the Jewish-owned Zion cinema and the Arab-owned Rex Cinema, and also Viennese-style cafés.[24] As Davis writes, "These suburban living areas were part of the expression of a rising middle-class and a new 'modern' value system, including an emphasis on education and public life."[25]

The Violent Abortion of the Budding Metropolis

By 1947, the Arab neighborhoods in south Jerusalem stood at approximately 22,000 inhabitants, 13,000 of whom were Christian (the vast majority of whom were Arab, but also there were Greek, Armenian, and other European Christians), 9,000 Muslims, and 550 Jews.[26] They were among the areas that were attacked by Zionist paramilitary groups and militia from late 1947 onward, along with Jerusalem district villages such as Lifta and Shaykh Badr.[27] In Qatamun, the Haganah bombing of the Semiramis Hotel on 4 January 1948, which killed twenty-six civilians, signaled the beginning of an outright bombing campaign in the course of which many families decided to – temporarily, as they hoped – leave the city. But the massacre of Dayr Yasin on 9 April 1948 was the decisive shock that convinced most of the remaining inhabitants to flee. As Kroyanker recalls:

> I lived not far from here [Talbiyya]. Dayr Yasin had a huge influence on the evacuation of Talbiyya. The Arabs were scared to death. They left their meals on their tables and the Haganah requested people in our neighborhood to clean the houses so that Jews could move into them. There really were meals on the tables. The Arabs thought it was a matter of two or three days before they would return to their homes, as had happened in 1936 and 1939.[28]

In keeping with Plan Dalet, the Zionist military plan devised in 1944 that "aimed to enlarge the boundaries allotted to the Jewish state and simultaneously conquer dozens of villages from which the Palestinian Arab inhabitants would be expelled," the homes and businesses belonging to Palestinian Arabs were first settled by Jews and were later declared absentee property.[29] Widespread looting was documented in these areas, as refugees from west Jerusalem lost everything they owned. UN mediator Count Folke Bernadotte described their dire situation:

> While those who left in the early days of the conflict had been able to take with them some personal effects and assets, many of the latecomers were deprived of everything except the clothes in which they stood, and apart from their homes (many of which were destroyed) lost all furniture and assets and even their tools of trade.[30]

The Palestinian population of west Jerusalem – altogether about thirty thousand people – fled first to the Old City of Jerusalem and then some of them gradually left for other destinations, Amman being one of the most important.[31] Many decided to stay in areas adjacent to the homes they had lost, in what is now East Jerusalem, sometimes living in areas where they could see their property.[32]

The migration to Amman was primarily a response to the war-time loss of property and capital, but Jerusalem's loss of status and functions after its annexation by Jordan presented an additional obstacle to displaced Palestinians' desire to rebuild their

lives and livelihoods. After more than two decades of being a colonial capital and administrative center, Jordanian-administered Jerusalem had been stripped of its ministries and higher administration offices and lacked employment opportunities for the educated elite.[33] Amman became a strong magnet for this elite.

While Jerusalem lost much of its former status under Jordanian administration, the city did continue to have its place in its Arab environment and was even an important crossroads for regional and international mobility. Until 1967, Jerusalem had a civil airport linking the city to major Arab capitals and facilitating tourism and pilgrimage. Built by the British army on land north of Jerusalem and east of Qalandiya village in 1925, it was primarily used as a military airport until the end of the Mandate. Under Jordanian jurisdiction it was upgraded and became a civil airport.[34] A little-known comprehensive urban plan for East Jerusalem under Jordanian rule submitted to the municipal council and to the Jordanian government in 1963 advocated further enlargement of Jerusalem's airport to handle jet aircraft.[35] The Jerusalem airport was actually used by two-thirds of all tourists heading to Jordan (including the West Bank) in the mid-1960s.[36]

Nahed Awwad documented the history of this airport through interviews and private archives of former airport employees:

> In the left wing of the building there were counters for the main airlines: Air Liban and Middle East Airline … Misr Air (Egypt Air), Trans Arabia Airline (the Kuwaiti Airline, to carry the big wave of Palestinians traveling to work in the Gulf in the fifties), and Air Jordan of the Holy Land (now Royal Jordanian). There was also a royal room, used mostly by King Hussein on his frequent visits to the airport, and for welcoming important guests.[37]

The 1967 war and subsequent military occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem closed this "gateway to the world" that had allowed Palestinians to stay connected to the Arab world and beyond, using Jerusalem as the point of departure.[38] It was also the end of direct access to Palestinian Jerusalem for international tourists and pilgrims, among them many Arabs. The closing of this airport had a devastating effect on West Bank Palestinians in general, and for Jerusalem it shattered any remaining hopes to maintain a close link to the Arab world and the ambition of becoming an Arab metropolis.

Today, Palestinians of the West Bank have only Queen Alia International Airport in Amman for air travel, since they are not permitted to use Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv. Queen Alia Airport was built in 1983 to meet Amman's increasing needs as a crossroads of mobility for the Mashreq and as an important tourist destination, which Marka Airport could no longer handle. There has been a reversal of roles between Amman and Jerusalem: whereas Jerusalem functioned as the main airport for both banks of the Jordan River until 1967, today Amman is the only gateway to the world for West Bank Palestinians.

Beyond a Site of Refuge

Modern Amman is known for having been a migrant village at the end of the nineteenth century, settled by Circassian refugees who were relocated by the Ottoman authorities in an attempt to increase security in what was to become Transjordan a few decades later. The city's refoundation narrative is thus inextricably linked to the narrative of Ammani Circassian identity, as Seteney Shami has pointed out.[39] These were not the only migrants who left an important mark on the city, though. While everyone is ready to admit that Palestinian refugees arriving after 1948 had an immense impact on the city, this impact is seen primarily as that of poor refugees settling in camps.

Since late Ottoman times, however, merchant migrants from Palestine and Syria have played an important role in the development of Amman as a city. This role only increased during the Mandate years and after the Palestinian Nakba. For example, one of the first mayors of Amman in the early twentieth century was the Damascene merchant Sa'id Khayr (1920–25).[40] Another important institution of urban development was the Amman Chamber of Commerce, founded in 1923. In the early 1940s it had twelve members, five of whom were Syrians and four Palestinians.[41]

Links across the Jordan River have always been strong, even before the eruption of colonialism and war, but the Nakba of 1948 marks a watershed. With the arrival of Palestinian refugees, Amman's population grew by almost 60 percent in three years: from 61,500 in 1948 to 97,500 in 1951.[42] In addition to becoming a city of refuge in 1948, Amman gradually evolved into the alter ego of post-Nakba western Jerusalem, ethnically cleansed of its Arab inhabitants. While most of the Jerusalemite refugees were impoverished, having lost their homes, businesses, and other properties, many arrived with cultural capital and a level of education that facilitated employment in the administration of the newly independent Jordanian state or in the private sector. Palestinian professionals who had been employed in the public sector in British Mandate Jerusalem indeed brought with them an experience of the same administrative system that had left a strong influence in Jordan. A detailed prosopography of these spheres is needed to trace their career paths and evaluate their significance.[43]

In the expanding neighborhoods of Jabal Amman (first known as Jabal Jadid) and Jabal al-Luwaybda, the new home to many of these families, we can see beginning from the early 1950s some of the characteristics of Jerusalem's new city lifestyle, notably in terms of architecture. Modern villas in Jabal Amman and Jabal al-Luwaybda date from that period, when one of Amman's key architects at the time was Nasri Muqhar from Jerusalem.[44] These are partial hints of links that would need study by specialists of architectural history. Other elements, however, do not necessitate a specialist's eye. The British Mandate era's restrictions limiting buildings to two stories and imposing the use of white limestone on the outer walls of buildings in Jerusalem were meant to preserve the image Mandate administrators had of the "medieval" and "holy" city, but they were also applied east of the Jordan and have thus contributed to shaping the image of Amman.[45]

The other important elements imported from Jerusalem to Amman were educational

Figure 1. “The Terra Santa family, Amman, first school bus, 1949,” online at: www.terrasanta.edu.jo/old-pictures-gallery (accessed 24 January 2025).

and cultural institutions. In the immediate aftermath of the 1948 war, institutions such as Terra Santa College (Jabal al-Luwaybda, 1949), College De La Salle (Jabal Husayn, 1950), and the Orthodox Club opened branches in Amman. Terra Santa school, which was established in western Jerusalem’s King George Street in the late 1920s, was an important institution for Jerusalem’s Arab families. In the aftermath of the war of 1948, with many of the school’s students finding themselves in Amman, the school’s administration decided to open a branch there to ensure the continuity of their education.[46]

On the Orthodox Club, Norig Neveu points out:

> The arrival in Jordan of Palestinian members of the Orthodox associations was a turning point in the life of the community there … Palestinian notables brought to Jordan new associative models they had already developed in Palestine. Thanks to their expertise and networks they opened new cultural associations and clubs, mainly in Amman.[47]

While Jaffawi families played a decisive role in the development of the Orthodox Club in Amman, Jerusalem also had an Orthodox Club as early as 1926 and it was

there that the Orthodox Union Club saw the light in the early 1940s to unify local structures and provide administrative and symbolic leadership.[48] Indeed, the Orthodox intelligentsia was an important element of the social milieu of Jerusalem's western neighborhoods, exemplified by Khalil Sakakini.

More recently established, the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation represents another important element in the cultural and education spheres linking Jerusalem and Amman. Abdul Hameed Shoman, the son of a peasant family from Bayt Hanina, founded the Arab Bank in Jerusalem in 1930. The Amman branch opened its doors in 1934 and after the 1948 war Amman became the site of the bank's headquarters.[49] The Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation shows the important role played by the private sector, and particularly business and finance, in structuring the contribution of Palestinian families to Jordanian society. Founded in 1978 in the memory of the Arab Bank founder, and financed by the Arab Bank, this foundation has evolved into an essential actor in the promotion of culture, literacy, education, and scientific research in Jordan.

Zalatimo's Demise and Prosperity

This reflection started in the streets of the old heart of Amman – Jabal al-Luwaybda and Jabal Amman – and has been nourished by impressions, individual and institutional trajectories, and anecdotal information. Can the cumulative effect of these elements help reconstruct the image of Jerusalem as a potential Arab metropolis, aborted in 1948? And is the story of the Zalatimo pastry shop relevant to this project of historiographic construction?

The first time I entered a Zalatimo pastry shop was in Amman in 2013. I was struck by the images chosen to decorate their fancy textile bags and their round box of *za'tar*: Petra's Treasury next to the Dome of the Rock. This mixture of symbolism speaks of the trajectory of this family-owned pastry shop, from Jerusalem's Old City to Amman. In 2016, I was lucky to have also had the opportunity to taste the famed *mutabbaq* pastry with walnuts in the small, rudimentary Zalatimo shop in Khan al-Zayt, right next to the stairway behind the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem. A true witness to history, this pastry shop was first opened in 1860 by Muhammad Zalatimo after he returned from serving in the Ottoman army. I was greeted by a huge old oven, a few plastic tables and chairs, and mildew eating the vaulted ceiling, before the smell of syrup poured on the hot pastry tray shut out all other senses. In 2019, Hani Zalatimo decided to close the shop: one possible reason was that he was forbidden to conduct any restoration works in his small shop (a factor glaringly absent from a *Haaretz* article on the subject, although this is an all too common problem for Palestinian residents and businesses in the Old City of Jerusalem).[50]

The Amman branch was established in 1986 by Muhammad Zalatimo's grandson 'Abdallah. 'Abdallah was unable to return to Jerusalem after studying marketing in the United States (possibly because his residency was revoked by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior), so, as the Zalatimo website explains, "Amman, Jordan, was the logical option."[51] Zalatimo and Zalatimo brothers have been hugely successful and

Figure 2. Zalatimo's maamoul, online at
zalatimo.com/en/products/maamoul-assrt-pistachios-walnuts-dates (accessed 24 January 2025).

have expanded rapidly into the Gulf. Middle-class sociability in Amman has made Zalatimo a favorite brand, and its fancy wood and metal boxes with varieties of pastries are a preferred gift to bring along for visits. Zalatimo could not thrive in the Israeli-occupied Old City of Jerusalem, although this was its original environment; it is in Amman that sweets craft and a good business sense pushed Zalatimo to the top.

Amman might also be the logical option for "the chronicler, who recounts events without distinguishing between the great and small, [and] thereby accounts for the truth, that nothing which has ever happened is to be given as lost to history."[52] Jerusalem's unfulfilled modernity does not have to be lost to history if historiography seizes its own potential to stand up to facts on the ground.[53]

Falestin Naïli is currently assistant professor at the University of Basel where she leads a Swiss National Science Foundation project on "Futures Interrupted: Social Pluralism and Political Projects beyond Coloniality and the Nation-state."

Endnotes

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Why is Ahmad Hilmi Pasha 'Abd al-Baqi Absent from the History of the Palestinian National Movement?

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Translated from the Arabic by
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Abstract

Ahmad Hilmi Pasha 'Abd al-Baqi was one of the most prominent Palestinian personalities of the first half of the twentieth century. He was not only an eyewitness but also an active participant in the events that absorbed the Arab world during this period. In 1948, the year of the Nakba, he played an important role defending Jerusalem against Zionist attacks, particularly on the Old City. Throughout the spring, Ahmad Hilmi was the only member of the Arab Higher Committee present in the city, which led many who sought guidance and leadership to rely on him. However, most people link his name only with the short-lived All-Palestine Government in Gaza. While the Palestinian collective memory preserves an esteemed position for Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni in leading the national movement, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha's role is mostly unknown to intellectuals, let alone the general Arab readership. What is behind the eclipsing of the economic, political, and military roles of one of the most prominent figures of the Palestinian elite, played over two decades of British rule and the Nakba? What is behind the neglect of the role of this man who chose Palestine as his homeland and spent most of his life defending its cause? This essay, which is based on the author's unpublished biography of Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, makes an attempt to answer these questions that are relevant not only to past Palestinian history but also to contemporary accounts of the national leadership.

Keywords:

Ahmad Hilmi Pasha; biographical accounts; Nakba; Hajj Amin; All-Palestine Government; Jerusalem; Palestinian elite; Arab Higher Committee; Arab Bank.

Ahmad Hilmi Pasha ʻAbd al-Baqi (1882–1963) was among Palestine's most prominent personalities in the first half of the twentieth century, his rich life and varied career encompassing political, economic, cultural, and military roles (the latter in Iraq during World War I and in Palestine in 1948). He was an eyewitness and, more importantly, an active participant in the events that absorbed the Arab world during this period. He played a leading role in the area of Arab development and finance, and a political role in the Palestinian national movement, including, in 1948, the defense of Jerusalem, particularly the Old City, against Zionist attacks. Throughout the spring of that year, Ahmad Hilmi was the only member of the Arab Higher Committee present in the city, which led many who sought guidance and leadership to rely on him.

Despite his distinguished achievements, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha has remained a little known figure, unjustly inconspicuous in the historical literature of Palestine. Even during his lifetime, he remained largely out of the political spotlight. He was not a polarizing Palestinian leader like Hajj Amin al-Husayni or his opponent, Raghib al-Nashashibi, nor was he the leader of a political party or faction seen as contributing to the fragmentation of the national movement, rendering it unable to confront its enemies who fought to turn Palestine into a "Jewish national home." To the extent that he is remembered, most people link his name with the All-Palestine Government in Gaza, established in autumn 1948 but short-lived in the face of tripartite British-Zionist-Hashemite hostility.[1]

While Palestinian collective memory holds in high esteem Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni as leader of the national movement during its struggles against colonialism and Zionism, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha ʻAbd al-Baqi's role is barely known to intellectuals, let alone the general Arab readership. What is behind the underplaying of the economic, political, and military roles of this prominent figure of the Palestine elite over two decades of British rule and during the Nakba? Why has this man, who consciously chose Palestine as his homeland and spent most of his life defending its cause and preserving its identity and independence, been so neglected? Before trying to answer these questions, let us examine Ahmad Hilmi's position among the top echelons of the national movement and the diversity of his activities before and after the Nakba.

Ahmad Hilmi ʻAbd al-Baqi's biography is the story of a man in the Palestinian elite who led the national movement and transformed along with it. He cast aside his supranational pre–World War I Ottoman identity into which he was born and adopted an Arab one, finally settling on a Palestinian national identity with which to defend the "Arabness" (*ʻuruba*) of the homeland and its independence. His biography sheds light on aspects of the history of the Palestinian national movement, from its beginnings in the early 1920s until the Nakba and its aftermath, while the network of social and economic relations woven by this self-made man, a newcomer to Jerusalem (with its already well-established political elite), enables us to reassess the performance of the leadership of the national movement.

This essay briefly traces the turns of Ahmad Hilmi's life, placing them in their historical context and reevaluating them in light of the social environment of the time, and thus chronicling the achievements of this unique personality and through him the

Palestinian elite to which he belonged.[2] Ahmad Hilmi's recognition and importance as a public figure is made clear in the Mandate-era press, which covered his activities (especially in the economic realm), as well as the memoirs and autobiographies of his contemporaries. This material compensates for the relative paucity of material that he himself wrote – not to mention material that was certainly lost with Palestine in 1948.

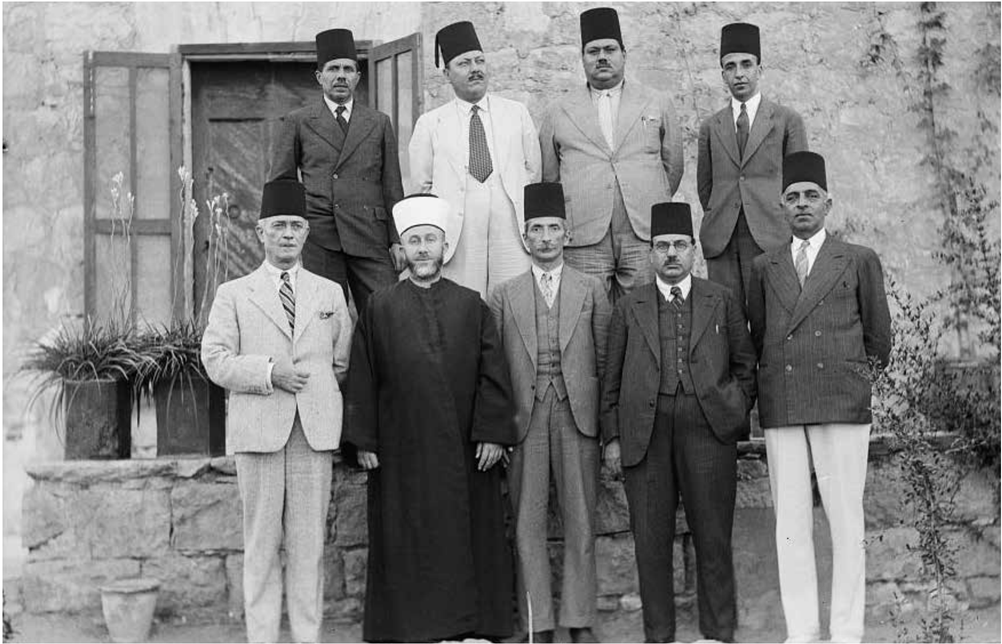

Figure 1. "Palestine disturbances 1936. Members of the Arab Higher Committee. Front row from left to right: Ragheb Bey Nashashibi, chairman of the Defence Party, Haj Amin eff. el-Husseini, Grand Mufti & president of the Committee, Ahmed Hilmi Pasha, Gen. Manager of the Jerusalem Arab Bank, Abdul Latif Bey Es-Salah, chairman of the Arab National Party, Mr. Alfred Roke, influential land-owner. Back row: Jamal eff. el-Husseini, chairman of the Arab Party and leader of the unofficial Arab Commission to London. Dr. Hsein Khaldhi, Mayor of Jerusalem. Ya'cub Bey el-Ghussein, President of the Arab Youths Committee. Mr. Fuad Saba, Secretary of the Arab Higher Committee." From Library of Congress. online at www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.18173/ (accessed 3 February 2025).

An Early Life and Career in the Ottoman Shadow

Ahmad Hilmi Pasha 'Abd al-Baqi is in a sense a classic tragic hero. His birth in 1882 coincided with Egypt coming under British rule and Zionism beginning its colonial settlement project in Palestine. His mixed patrilineal origins (no information is known about his mother or his wife) were a circumstance of the Ottoman Empire's control of a vast region: he was born in Sidon, in the Levant, where his father was an employee of the Ottoman Treasury; his father himself had been born in Tulkarm and his father's father was Albanian.[3] The Ottoman Empire underwent tumultuous times internally and externally throughout Ahmad Hilmi's childhood and early education

when instability in the area and work opportunities forced his father to move the family several times. But his experiences deepened his integration into this region and its Arab culture. Ahmad Hilmi's early career gave indications that he would follow in his father's path as an employee with the Ottoman government. He at first supported the Young Turk Revolution that brought to power the Committee for Union and Progress in 1908, but, like many of his Arab contemporaries, he soon became disappointed. Nevertheless, he continued to serve and defend the Ottoman Empire until its demise after World War I.

Throughout his life, Ahmad Hilmi's ideas and projects reflected a transition from an Islamic Ottoman identity to supporting Arab unity, and ultimately Palestinian nationalism. When the storms of World War I blew, sweeping away Ottoman rule, they brought new options and possibilities. The collapse of the state in which he grew up had immediate consequences on the geopolitics of the world to which he belonged. His horizons shrank from a transcontinental transnational empire to a few confining nation-states, whose borders were drawn by European colonialism and whose kings and rulers were crowned by European generals. Ahmad Hilmi would find himself at similar crossroads many times in his life. In such circumstances, he made bold decisions and was forced to accept their consequences.

In Arabia, Sharif Husayn, who had been promised Britain's support to establish an independent kingdom in the Arab East, found himself abandoned by his ally, and forced to abdicate the Hijaz to his son 'Ali. In 1918, Ahmad Hilmi felt that he was "destined" to work first with the government that Faysal, son of Husayn, Sharif of Mecca and figurehead of the Arab Revolt against the Ottomans during World War I, established in Damascus. In 1920, Ahmad Hilmi and others who had flocked to join Faysal's government in Damascus experienced its bitter fall after the Battle of Maysalun in July 1920, and the division of the Arab East into mandate territories under British or French colonialist rule. In 1922, he joined Husayn's son 'Abdallah in Amman, where he was appointed financial counselor to the nascent Hashemite Transjordanian government. He would go on to serve Sharif Husayn in 1924 and 1925, earning the title of pasha around this period. But Ahmad Hilmi became disheartened by the postwar fate of Husayn and, especially, with Faysal and 'Abdallah, who secured for themselves a kingdom in Iraq and an emirate in Transjordan, respectively, by compromising with the British.

After spending the immediate postwar years in Damascus, Amman, Cairo, and the Hijaz, Ahmad Hilmi decided on Jerusalem as a home for his family and on the Arabism of Palestine as the cause to defend against the danger of the Zionist colonial project, to which Britain had pledged its support by the Balfour Declaration in 1917. After the failure to establish a unified Arab kingdom over the whole Levant, Ahmad Hilmi directed his independent spirit toward economic and political roles that served and defended the Palestinian cause.

Perhaps his independent nature, and the fact that he had not headed a party nor was from an influential family, led to his marginalization in the works on Palestine's modern history and its national movement.[4]

Finding a Footing in Jerusalem

Most of the political class involved in the Palestinian national movement in the aftermath of World War I grew up during the late Ottoman era, and some (such as Ahmad Hilmi) had played a role in serving and defending the empire. This elite were largely from the families of Jerusalem notables (effendis) who inherited their roles and functions from their fathers and grandfathers. Mufti Hajj Amin al-Husayni and his family are good examples; accustomed to the role of notables, they were the traditional intermediaries between the ruling state and the people.[5]

When Ahmad Hilmi Pasha ʻAbd al-Baqi arrived in Jerusalem in 1926, he became the third political leader in the city to hold the Ottoman honorific title of pasha, alongside Musa Kazim Pasha al-Husayni (1853–1934) and ʻArif Pasha al-Dajani (1860–1930).[6] The Dajani family, who were associated with the shrine of the Prophet David, was one of the largest and wealthiest families of the Jerusalemite elite. Like many members of his family, ʻArif Dajani held high administrative positions during the Ottoman period. After World War I, he became patriarch of the Dajani family and headed the Muslim-Christian Association in Jerusalem.[7] In general, he remained one of the active political figures in the national movement in the 1920s, until his death in 1930.[8]

Musa Kazim al-Husayni was mayor of Jerusalem from 1918 to 1920 and, as head of the executive committee of the Palestine Arab Congress, served as official leader of the Palestinian national movement from 1922 to 1934. His son, ʻAbd al-Qadir al-Husayni (1908–48), became a well-known symbol of sacrifice in defending Palestine during the 1936–39 revolt and especially after his martyrdom in the battle at al-Qastal on 8 April 1948.[9] Musa Kazim's grandson, Faisal al-Husseini (1942–2001), inherited some of his father's and grandfather's qualities and did everything he could to preserve the Arab identity of Jerusalem after the Israeli occupation of the city in June 1967. The Husayni family's status was bolstered by their inheritance of leading religious and administrative positions in the Ottoman and British eras, as they were able to place relatives in important positions.

By contrast, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, was a self-made man: he could not fall back on the wealth or security provided by an aristocratic family, nor was he satisfied to accept the reality of colonialism and join in its service. Ahmad Hilmi Pasha became friends with Hajj Amin when he arrived in Jerusalem in 1926 and worked alongside him in the Supreme Muslim Council, where Ahmad Hilmi served as inspector-general of Islamic waqf properties until 1930. Ahmad Hilmi Pasha consolidated his leadership position among the Palestinian elite by drawing on his relations with Hajj Amin and his rich experience in Ottoman administration and service to the Arab cause. The fez he wore and his title of pasha were indicators of his social standing when he and his family settled in Palestine in 1926. He was distinguished also by his diverse interests as a civil servant, finance expert, businessman, investor, and banker, at a time when such skills were desperately needed to boost the Palestinian economy.

Ahmad Hilmi Pasha and ʻAbd al-Hamid Shuman

Ahmad Hilmi's position among the elite was strengthened by connections forged through marriage. In 1929, his daughter Saniyya married ʻAbd al-Hamid Shuman, the founder of the Arab Bank. That year ʻAbd al-Hamid Shuman had returned from New York after achieving financial success in the United States.[10] A widower since 1913, ʻAbd al-Hamid had been in Jerusalem only a few months when he began looking for a suitable bride. He asked his friend Riyadh al-Sulh (1894–1951), later to become Lebanon's first prime minister, to find him an "Arab Muslim girl from a conservative family who knows English" because he planned to travel with her to America.[11] Shuman adds in his memoir, *al-ʻIsami* (Self-made man), that after waiting a long time for al-Sulh's response, he approached his friend Fayyad al-Khadra, who proposed the idea of marrying a Jerusalemite girl.[12] Khadra suggested that one of Ahmad Hilmi Pasha's daughters might be a good wife for him. Shuman asked Khadra to broach the subject with Ahmad Hilmi, who agreed on Shuman's marriage to his daughter, Saniyya. Shuman adds that he sent a telegram to Riyadh al-Sulh that read: "You were very late in answering me, so it turned out that I was destined to be married to the daughter of a mutual friend, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha."[13]

In 1937, Ahmad Hilmi's only son, Muhammad ʻAbduh, married the daughter of Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, a Palestinian nationalist leader from Haifa.[14] In 1946, ʻAbd al-Majid Shuman, ʻAbd al-Hamid's son from his first marriage, married Ahmad Hilmi's youngest daughter, Naila, further solidifying the bonds between the two families. In his memoirs, ʻAbd al-Hamid says that he was performing *ʻumra* when ʻAbd al-Majid decided to get married, prompting a congratulatory telegram that read: "Our son, ʻAbd al-Majid. Many congratulations. Your brother-in-law, Hajj ʻAbd al-Hamid."[15] The connections between the two families were renewed in the next generation when Khalid, son of ʻAbd al-Hamid Shuman and Saniyya ʻAbd al-Baqi, married Suha ʻAbd al-Baqi, daughter of Muhammad ʻAbduh, in 1974.

Was the intermarriage between the families in 1929 purely coincidental? And had ʻAbd al-Hamid Shuman not thought himself about marrying a suitable Jerusalemite bride? Was it because of his rural origins (from Bayt Hanina village) and the snobbery of the families of Jerusalem's scholars and notables toward the people of the neighboring villages? (Even decades after the Nakba many Jerusalemite families and their counterparts in Nablus and other Palestinian cities continued to refuse to allow their girls to marry "sons of peasants.") Such questions related to the history of social relations in Jerusalem, and other cities of Palestine, require separate research. In any case, the meeting and cooperation of the two "outsiders" in 1929 resulted in more than just a marriage between the families – it produced the first Arab banking institution in Jerusalem, the Arab Bank.

After two decades in the United States, ʻAbd al-Hamid Shuman returned to Palestine with a considerable fortune accumulated from business endeavors in real estate, business, finance, and philanthropy, and ready to invest in economic development in his homeland. Ahmad Hilmi ʻAbd al-Baqi had arrived in Jerusalem three years before

Shuman, with considerable banking experience from the Ottoman Agricultural Bank and high administrative and financial positions he had held in Iraq, Damascus, Amman, and with the Hijaz Railway, for which he was recognized with the title of pasha. In Jerusalem, as manager of the Supreme Muslim Council's finances, he oversaw major projects in the Haram al-Sharif and construction of the Palace Hotel, which gave him local experience in finance and business management. However, neither Ahmad Hilmi nor 'Abd al-Hamid could draw on family lineage like the Jerusalemite families who had inherited and competed over eminent leadership positions for centuries. The cooperation between Shuman and 'Abd al-Baqi was in many ways a natural alliance that helped both to succeed through social and political mobility.

In 1930, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha became the first chairman of the board of directors of the Arab Bank, newly founded with 'Abd al-Hamid Shuman, which opened branches in Palestinian cities and abroad in the following years. We do not know whether 'Abd al-Hamid Shuman approved his father-in-law's chairmanship of the board because of his long experience in banking or for other reasons. A major factor may have been that Shuman intended to return to the United States to pursue his business interests in New York. In any case, Ahmad Hilmi's participation in the establishment of the Arab Bank and his work there marked an important turning point in his transition from a civil servant at the Supreme Muslim Council to the role of a well-known businessman and banker at the national level. He later was a founder of the Agricultural Bank which provided credit to landed farmers, the Arab National Bank in Cairo, an organizer of the Arab Fair, and head of the Arab National Fund (*Sanduq al-Umma*), created by the joint Muslim–Christian Arab Executive Committee in 1932 to raise funds to keep Palestinians on their land. The increase in his financial wealth and importance also paved the way for him to join the political elite in leading the national movement.

Exile and Return

From the 1930s, there was growing frustration and criticism of the Husayni-Nashashibi schism in Jerusalem, and many young educated men joined the ranks of the Istiqlal (Independence) party to try to influence the agenda of the national movement and its attitude toward the British authorities. Meanwhile, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, who had expanded his banking business and economic projects, joined the Arab Higher Committee in the spring of 1936, remained close to the mufti and supported his leadership of the national movement. Although he showed a clear affinity for the Arab anti-colonialist ideology represented by the Istiqlal, he and the mufti remained close until their arrest and exile – along with a number of the members of the Arab Higher Committee – to the Seychelles in 1937.

Eventually, Ahmad Hilmi and some of his exiled comrades were released, and he returned to Cairo in 1938, and from there went on to Beirut. At the beginning of 1940, he was the first of the exiles to return to Palestine, having agreed to the British government's condition not to engage in any activity that "threatened security."[16]

Ahmad Hilmi Pasha's explanation for accepting this condition was "the breakdown of the financial and economic institutions he managed and supervised," which "may collapse or deteriorate" if his "absence from the country is prolonged."[17] He arrived in Haifa at the end of January 1940, and *al-Difa'* newspaper expressed its "hope that the Arab economic movement will benefit from his well-known efforts and endeavors," and noted that he "spent last night at the home of his in-laws, the al-Hajj Ibrahim family."[18] Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim himself was not there to receive the pasha in Haifa, since he was kept in exile for another few months, returning to Palestine later in 1940. Britain did not allow some other members of the Arab Higher Committee, especially supporters of the mufti such as Jamal al-Husayni and 'Izzat Darwaza, among others, to return to Palestine until years later.

Ahmad Hilmi returned to Jerusalem just a few months after the outbreak of World War II. Meanwhile, the opposition led by Raghib al-Nashashibi exploited the extended absence of Hajj Amin and many of his supporters from Jerusalem after 1937, and strengthened their position, showing greater readiness to cooperate with Britain politically and even militarily. After the outbreak of the war, some, including members of the Istiqlal party who had fought Britain and seen it as a major enemy of Palestinian interests, were now ready to cooperate with it. British authorities in Palestine, for their part, worked to win allegiance and prevent Arab public support for the Axis powers.

Ahmad Hilmi Pasha distanced himself from politics upon his return and turned his attention to economic matters. Had his trust in the mufti's wisdom faltered after he and his comrades were exiled far from home, with plenty of time to contemplate the situation in Palestine in the last year of the revolt? Was his confidence shaken after seeing Hajj Amin in action, imposing his views on the leaders of the national movement? Was the rejection of the White Paper in May 1939, despite the important British "concessions" it contained for the Arabs, considered a misjudged decision? In the absence of diaries or memoirs, we are left to speculate about Ahmad Hilmi's return to Jerusalem after exile and his initial reluctance to engage in politics.

Whatever the case, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha's absence from the country for more than two years had left an impact on the Agricultural Bank and on his partnership with his son-in-law 'Abd al-Hamid Shuman at the Arab Bank. In his memoirs, Shuman writes that after Ahmad Hilmi's return to Jerusalem, they faced the sensitive issue of recovering funds that had been borrowed by political leaders.[19] Ahmad Hilmi tried to postpone the issue, but Shuman was determined to recover the money, which represented a significant part of the Arab Bank's cash liquidity. Ahmad Hilmi Pasha became angry and severely reprimanded his son-in-law, but Shuman insisted on his position. In the end, the matter was only resolved when Shuman replaced Ahmad Hilmi as chairman of the Arab Bank.[20] Ahmad Hilmi, meanwhile, turned his attention to reviving the activity of the National Fund after 1943 and established a committee to aid victims of the drought in Palestine in 1947. The last stop in his career, however, was to be in Cairo as a representative of Palestine (after Palestine itself had been lost) in the Arab League.

After the Nakba

In July 1948, the Arab League proposed to set up a Palestine government in Gaza, ironically to recognize Palestinian agency over Palestine, in order to preempt Jordanian plans to take control of the West Bank. In late September 1948, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha, together with other former members of the Arab Higher Committee, launched a government-in-exile in Gaza, called the All-Palestine Government, as a nascent state structure envisioned in the UN partition resolution. Headed by a divisive Hajj Amin al-Husayni, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha was selected to be prime minister of the government, in what he may have seen as the apex of his political life and the start of the last chapter of his half century of activity on Arab issues. However, the short-lived All-Palestine Government was fraught from its largely symbolic inception and plagued by competing Arab interests and Palestinian divisions.

Like other Palestinian leaders, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha lost much of his political and economic influence after 1948. He spent his final years, 1949 to 1963, in Cairo, initially as the All-Palestine Government representative to the Arab League, and then in tireless work that failed to achieve political and economic independence for the homeland he was devoted to. Like the rest of the Jerusalemite elite, the loss of Palestine and the transformation of the Zionist-Palestinian conflict into an Arab-Israeli conflict for more than a decade undermined his political position. Disagreements between the Arab regimes after the Nakba (as before it) overshadowed any attempt at joint action in the 1950s and 1960s. After the rise of Gamal Abdel Nasser in Egypt, Ahmad Hilmi lost most of what remained of his role as the representative of Palestine and its cause in the Arab League. Even the Arab National Bank, which he established and continued to manage from Cairo, was nationalized in the late 1950s. Yet the decline and eventual disappearance of the Palestinian elite laid the foundations for revolutionary leaderships that focused on the importance of the Palestinians restoring their role in their own struggle. One of the major steps toward this development, the foundation of the Palestine Liberation Organization, took place a short time after Ahmad Hilmi's death in 1963.

In many ways, Ahmad Hilmi's life and work embodied the Palestinian tragedy. He was an active witness to this tragedy, from his position in the political and economic leadership and through his close ties to the ruling Arab elites. He bore witness to the success of the Zionist colonial project despite significant struggles and sacrifices made by the Palestinians during the 1920s, and even more so throughout the years of the Great Revolt (1936–39). He and his comrades in the national movement expended huge effort to avert the Nakba before it happened. But the causes of the disaster were stronger and greater than any conceivable individual effort, no matter how sincere.

From 1936, Ahmad Hilmi Pasha became one of the leading men of the Palestinian national struggle, playing a major political role in the Arab Higher Committee and later in the Arab League. However, reducing his life and work during the Mandate period to his political activities does not do him justice. Ahmad Hilmi's tireless work in the fields of banking, development, and economics – including his involvement in major

institutions such as the Arab Bank, the Agricultural Bank, the Arab National Bank, and the National Fund – are as important as his political activities, and made him a prominent figure. In Egypt, he was able to witness the fall of the Khedival dynasty, through which the descendants of Mehmed ʻAli Pasha (an Albanian originally sent to Egypt by the Ottoman government) ruled Egypt and Sudan until the Free Officers' revolution of 1952.

Conclusion

The fate of the Palestinian historian, whose people lost so much of their intellectual and spiritual wealth during and after the Nakba, is to produce scholarship to reinstate Palestine into the historical narrative. Ahmad Hilmi Pasha left us no memoir or autobiography. In some cases, oral testimonies make up for lost archives and manuscripts, but Ahmad Hilmi's contemporaries passed away some time ago, foreclosing this possibility. We do, however, have access to some of their memoirs and diaries, to which we can add papers and family correspondence, the Arab and foreign press, published Arab documents, and other archives in Palestine and abroad that can shed light on some aspects of Ahmad Hilmi's life.

In writing the (as yet unpublished) biography of Ahmad Hilmi Pasha that is the basis for this essay, it took some effort to understand the absence of Ahmad Hilmi's name from the Palestinian collective memory and historical literature. I can offer no definitive explanation for this absence, given the sources available. However, it has also led me to consider the scarcity of biographies among the Arabic-language historical literature of the modern Arab world. There are very few good biographical books written by Arab researchers about leading figures who left their mark on the history of the Middle East in the twentieth century. Those available suffer from two shortcomings that weaken their credibility and academic value. The first is the absolute inclination toward glorifying the subject of the biography, especially when they are a "legendary" or symbolic king or leader. In such cases, researchers have failed to submit their subjects to critical historical methodology. The other flaw found in Arab biographies of twentieth-century figures is a tendency to collect information about an individual's life and works but not place it in its historical context or employ rigorous analysis, explanatory reasoning, or comparison. Without such tools, a biography may entertain, but it lacks historical value. Is the answer to the question that motivates this essay related to the scarcity of good biographical works more broadly in Palestine and the Arab states?

Whatever the case, it is important to raise questions even if it is not possible to provide definitive answers to them: this is, after all, at the heart of academic inquiry in the social sciences and humanities. Did Ahmad Hilmi's non-indigenous roots and his late arrival in Jerusalem affect his leadership position under Hajj Amin al-Husayni? Or was Ahmad Hilmi Pasha's dour personality and lack of charisma the reason why his role in the national movement is not more conspicuous? Did the early death of his only son, Muhammad ʻAbduh, who passed away only six months after Ahmad

Hilmi Pasha did, play some part in obscuring Ahmad Hilmi's role in the national movement? Raising questions about the absence of material is by necessity a way to deal with the uncertainty resulting from the lack of texts and documents upon which a historian relies.

Adel Manna is a historian of Palestine, and especially Jerusalem, during Ottoman rule. Over the last two decades, he has focused on Palestinians in the twentieth century and particularly their experiences of the Nakba and its repercussions. His book Nakba and Survival: The Story of Palestinians Who Remained in Haifa and the Galilee (1948–1956) *is published in Arabic (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2016), Hebrew (Van Leer Institute, 2017), and English (University of California Press, 2022).*

Endnotes

1 On the All-Palestine Government, see Muhammad Khalid al-Az'ar, *Hukumat 'umum Filastin fi dhikraha al-khamsin* [The All-Palestine Government on its fiftieth anniversary] (Cairo: Dar al-Shuruq, 1998).

2 This essay is based on my draft manuscript of a biography of Ahmad Hilmi Pasha 'Abd al-Baqi, for forthcoming publication.

3 Ahmad Hilmi's friend, 'Ajaj Nuwayhid, wrote in his obituary: "Mahmud, father of Hilmi Pasha, was a noble and generous man. I learned that he came from Albania and was involved in the military affairs of the state." 'Ajaj Nuwayhid, "al-Rahilun: Ahmad Hilmi wa rifaquhu" [The departed: Ahmad Hilmi and his companions], *Nahdat al-'Arab*, 13 December 1963.

4 There is not enough space here to mention all of the relevant books in Arabic and English, so I will restrict myself to a few telling examples: Ahmad Hilmi's name is completely absent from Rashid Khalidi's rich and important study *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997) as well as his book *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006). The same is true of an important book *Tarikh al-Filastiniyyin wa harakatihim al-wataniyya* [History of the Palestinians and their national movement] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2018) by Maher Charif and Issam Nassar.

5 On the Husayni family and its role during the Ottoman era and later in leading the Palestinian national movement in the twentieth century, see Ilan Pappé, *The Rise and Fall of a Palestinian Dynasty: The Husaynis, 1700–1948* (London: Saqi Books, 2010).

6 There is a short biography of 'Arif Pasha al-Dajani in my book *A'lam Filastin fi awakhir al-'ahd al-'uthmani (1800–1918)* [Palestinian figures in the late Ottoman era, 1800–1918] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995), 174–76. Yoni Furas recently published a biography of Musa Kazim in Hebrew, based on his MA thesis at Tel Aviv University: *Tirshom! Anahnu umah: Musa Kazim al-Husayni, biografyah politit* [Write down! We are a nation: Musa Kazim al-Husayni, a political biography] (Tel Aviv: Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 2017). This leading figure is still waiting for someone to write a complete biography about him in Arabic.

7 For a short period, he was also the head of the association's administrative committee and later its vice-president.

8 In popular memory and imagination, Hajj Amin al-Husayni is seen as leader of the national movement throughout the British Mandate, but Musa Kazim was the head of its executive committee until his death in 1934. Bayan Nuwayhid al-Hout, *al-Qiyadat wa-l-mu'assasat al-siyasiyya fi Filastin, 1917–1948* [Leaderships and political institutions in Palestine, 1917–1948] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1986).

9 The Dayr Yasin massacre, the day after the death of 'Abd al-Qadir al-Husayni, had a major impact on Palestinians in Jerusalem in particular, and throughout the country.

10 Upon his return, Shuman met several Jerusalemite figures, including Hajj Amin al-Husayni, at the Supreme Muslim Council building. This may have been where he

first encountered Ahmad Hilmi Pasha. See ‘Abd al-Hamid Shuman, *al-‘Isami: siratuhu ‘Abd al-Hamid Shuman, 1890–1974* [Self-made man: ‘Abd al-Hamid Shuman’s autobiography, 1890–1974] (Beirut: al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya, 1982), 119.

11 Shuman, *al-‘Isami*, 140.

12 Fayyad al-Khadra worked in the Supreme Muslim Council in Jerusalem, where, it seems, he met Ahmed Hilmi Pasha and his family.

13 Shuman, *al-‘Isami*, 142. This information about the friendship with Riyadh al-Sulh, also born in Sidon and who became the first prime minister of Lebanon after independence, confirms the close relations that continued to connect Ahmad Hilmi Pasha with prominent figures in the Arab political elite.

14 The marriage took place on 14 May 1937 in Haifa, according to contemporary Palestinian newspapers.

15 Shuman, *al-‘Isami*, 318.

16 Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim mentions in his memoirs that Ahmed Hilmi Pasha met with Hajj Amin during his stay in Beirut (in the presence of Jamal al-Husayni) and “the telegram was discussed and the solutions agreed upon with Muhammad Mahmoud Pasha were denounced. The Mufti denied he had approved them, but Jamal argued the contrary, which proved that the Mufti had actually issued the approval.” Rashid al-Hajj Ibrahim, *al-Difa‘ ‘an Haifa wa qadiyat Filastin* [The defence of Haifa and the Palestine issue] (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2005), 194.

17 Muhammad ‘Izzat Darwaza, *Mudhakkirat Muhammad ‘Izzat Darwaza, 1305 h.–1404 h. (1887-1984.)* [Memoirs of Muhammad ‘Izzat Darwaza, 1305 AH–1404 AH (1887 CE–1984 CE)] (Tunis: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1993), vol. 4, 74–75; Husayn al-Khalidi, *Wa mada ‘ahd al-mujamalat* [The era of compliments has passed] (Amman: Dar al-Shuruq, 2014), vol. 1, 405–6.

18 Ahmed Hilmi Pasha was the first of those deported to the Seychelles to return to Palestine. “‘Awdat ‘atufat Hilmi Basha ila al-Quds” [His Grace Hilmi Pasha’s Return to Jerusalem], *al-Difa‘*, 31 January 1940, 1.

19 See Sreemati Mitter, “Bankrupt: Financial Life in Late Mandate Palestine,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 2 (May 2020): 289–310.

20 Shuman, *al-‘Isami*, 237.

Before Painting: Nicola Saig, Painting, and Photographic Seeing

Stephen Sheehi

Abstract

This article hopes to excavate a history of modern painting in the Ottoman Arab world and its relationship with the practice of photography by examining the work of the Palestinian artist, Nicola Saig (Niqula Sayigh). The rise of painting in the Ottoman Arab world in the nineteenth and early twentieth century among its native bourgeoisie should not be understood as a crass derivation or mimicry of the European tradition. Nor was it only as an outgrowth of indigenous traditions such as handcrafts, iconography, miniature painting, illuminated manuscripts, Muslim visual practices, and Eastern Church aesthetic traditions. The rise of painting, especially at beginning of the twentieth century, was a manifest, visual expression of the radical social, political, and economic transformations of the era and generated through the intellectual and cultural circuits in provincial cultural capitals such as Jerusalem. The rise of modern oil painting, therefore, is historically contingent on the naturalization of a modern Arab scopic regime that is particular to photography and one that fascinated and facilitated the project of capitalist modernity of the new Arab bourgeoisie and nationalist classes. In other words, both visual practices were only made possible by the reordering of Ottoman Arab society and the creation of new local elites due to shifts in the political economy of self, society, polity, and material life, where the aesthetic was less European criteria than the effort to create a modern project appropriate to the new Arab individual of capitalist modernity (and national identity).

Keywords

Nicola Saig; Palestine; Jerusalem; painting; photography; Kamal Boullata; Arab subjectivity; Nahda; British Mandate; Late Ottoman Empire.

"Photography was not the bastard child left by science at the doorstep of art, but a legitimate child of the Western pictorial tradition," or so Peter Galassi famously stated in *Before Photography*.[1] Indeed, the dominant historiography of photography is enmeshed in the art history of the West. The rise of the obsession with verisimilitude was, as the putative theory goes, rooted in the history of the perfect perspective and the Albertian geometric balance of a framed scene. The quattrocento sensibilities reconceptualized spatial representations on new criteria of depth, proportion, scale, and texture, as seen through the eye of the spectator positioned at the top of a visual prism.[2] Galassi removes the history of photographic vision from Albertian perspectives to a new "pictorial syntax" of nineteenth-century landscape oil painting. Oil painting expresses the same "synoptic perceptions" that, he says, the "embryonic spirit of realism" does and share the same contingent "syntax of photography."[3]

While Galassi attempts to locate photography within a more flexible history of linear perspective, Jonathan Crary challenges the very dialectal relationship between photography and painting, relocating photographic vision in the development of optics and technologies that preceded the invention of the camera.[4] Likewise, Geoffrey Batchen takes to task the apparent binary between formalistic and "post-modern" approaches to photography. He asserts the historical specificity within "Western culture" that made the discourse and practice of, and indeed the desire for, photography possible.[5]

Until recently, the scholarship on the photography of the Middle East has been, in many ways, to approach photography (and modern art production, namely, oil painting) either as a derivative of European photography or within a context of "difference" to it. In the case of the Arab world, any assertion connecting the rise of photography with the development of modern, indigenous art practices has been complicated, not assisted, by the established prevailing art history paradigms regarding the Middle Eastern artistic traditions, ranging anywhere from folk art to the iconographic traditions within the Christian churches to the Ottoman tradition of secular portraiture.[6]

Contrary to the assertion that Islam prohibits image making, painting enjoyed prominence in the Ottoman court and among the empire's aristocracy. This ran concurrent to the centuries-old tradition of illuminated manuscripts and miniature painting.[7] In addition to Bellini's famous portrait of Sultan Mehmed II, oil painting grew within Ottoman circles. The success and popularity of the polyglot reformer Osman Hamdi Bey, himself trained at the hands of the French Orientalist painter Jean-Léon Gerome, demonstrates not only the social status of oil painting but also the relationship between it and the new class of bureaucrats, technocrats, and bourgeoisie in the Ottoman Empire.[8] These very classes were responsible for, simultaneously, the prevalence of city and landscape frescoes on walls in the new types of homes found throughout Istanbul and the provinces.[9] Indeed, the history of modern Arab painting, so deeply rooted in Ottoman and Persian art, often occludes the rich and differing traditions of religious painting and iconography among various Arab Christian communities as well.[10]

With these factors in mind, one is not surprised to learn that Oleg Grabar interrogated the very meaning and coherency of the term "Arab painting," recognizing not only the cultural, historical, and aesthetic complexity of divining such a definition but also its ideological pitfalls.[11] The history of modern Arab painting, if not photography (which may or may not be related to that aesthetic history), must be approached less through formalism than through a consideration, as Martin Jay might say, of a history of modernity's scopic regime in the Arab world.[12] Ironically, in closing his discussion on three competing scopic regimes of modernity, Jay carelessly concludes that, "there may well have been some link between the absence of such [rationalist] scopic regimes in Eastern churches … and their lack of indigenous scientific revolution."[13]

The shockingly Orientalist presumption of Jay is, in fact, quite contrary to the historical record. If nothing else, the life of Osman Hamdi, painter, archaeologist, and founder of the Academy of the Fine Arts, verifies that the rising scopic regime of the Ottoman elite, organic intellectuals, and new middle classes coalesced around rationalist paradigms of progress, "civilization," and positivist knowledge. Likewise, the establishment of the School of Fine Arts in 1908 by Youssef Kamal, the grandson of Ibrahim Pasha, was related to the Egyptian ruling elite and its emergent bourgeoisie's belief in the social value of the fine arts in the project of national progress and education. While this chapter does not intend to reinscribe some inexorable relationship between painting and photography (particularly, the latter's inevitable pedigree as a form of art, as Galassi suggests), it certainly asserts that "modern painting" in the Arab world emerged from the same scopic regime of photography. To amend Geoffrey Batchen's assertion that desire for photography was made possible only by the particularities of Western culture at a given historical moment, I argue that the rise of modern oil painting is historically contingent on the naturalization of a modern scopic regime that is particular to photography. In other words, both visual practices were only made possible by the reordering of Ottoman Arab society and the creation of new local elites due to shifts in the political economy of self, society, polity, and material life.[14]

The shifts in society, economy, and selfhood were also expressed in visual culture, producing new types of viewers who were "participants in the contingent experience of everyday life."[15] However, the rise of oil painting was not coterminous with the introduction of photography and its vision certainly did not precede photography. Rather, photography's explicitly rationalist vision "enframed" the oil canvas, the "eye" of the modern artist and the viewing subject. In this regard, looking at the rise of painting in the Arab world, one necessarily must look less at *a priori* form than to the discursive and social formations that structure form.

The World as Picture

The very creation of a viewer seems particularly important in the Ottoman Middle East. This is not because of some fantastic prohibition of imaging making in Islam or because the Arab world did not have an established tradition of visual culture. Rather, the genesis of a new viewer was the product of a series of modern discourses that

naturalized the subject-citizen as the center of society and vision. This is the Cartesian perspectivalism of which Jay speaks, which itself resonates with Timothy Mitchell's observations in *Colonizing Egypt*, where:

> The experience of the *world as picture* set up before the subject is linked … to the unusual conception of the world as a limited totality, something that forms a bounded structure or system… The world arranges itself into a picture and achieves a visual order, in accordance with the laws of perspective.[16]

Mitchell's discussion of experiencing "the world as picture before the subject" draws our attention to the nexus between the social transformations of the day, shifting notions of selfhood and how they both were expressed in various new forms of visual culture. He locates the Heideggerian world as picture, or *Weltbild*, as the central visual paradigm of colonialism. Elsewhere, I have argued that Giambattista Vico's elastic *verum factum* allows us to conceptualize the formation of a photographic sensibility, or "photographic perspective" as a mode of knowledge production. Using verum factum acknowledges that the process of "knowing" (*scrire*) involves piecing "together the element of knowing things," combining "discursive thought" (*cognitatio*) and Divine knowledge (*intelligentia*).[17] The facticity and legibility of the photograph is a combination of knowledge but also the power to compose it. Early Arab Ottoman photography, that is, visualized the epistemology of Arab Ottoman modernity and naturalized the knowledge of a particular sort of Nahda subject, the modern Arab subject who emerges in the nineteenth century through a series of intellectual, cultural, and social formations.[18] At the same time, the facticity of photography evokes an affectation beyond the knowledge produced by the image, what could be considered by Vico as that of Divine knowledge and which elicits the internal worlds created within communal, national, gender, class, and individualist subjective formation.

In the case of tracing the archaeology of a modern Arab painting, Heidegger's *Weltbild* provides us specifically with an understanding of representation with the context of modernity, an understanding that we may want to trouble or problematize in the Global South. It describes the "world picture of modernity" or the "modern world picture," in Heidegger's words, where "the being of beings is sought and found in the representedness of beings."[19] The world as picture is the scopic regime of modernity par excellence.

Visualizing the self in a universalized world with a framework of universalized history informs the discursive contours of Arab thinkers, activists, scholars, literati, artists, and politicians of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. All are calibrating Arab social and economic (and therefore subjective) changes and new formations within the rise of European political, economic, and intellectual hegemony, a hegemony that is read as the "natural" end point of "progress" (*taqaddum*). Yet, Heidegger's framing of the world as picture is complicated by Palestinians' confrontation not only with the emergence of capitalism and new social classes but also British colonialism and Zionist settler colonialism, which must always be displaced as secondary to a universal history

and vision in which the radical (modern) individual finds themselves. The world as picture points us away from "picturing" itself and toward the epistemology of a vision that can only imagine ourselves through visualization. The practice of oil painting emerged in the Arab world in the late nineteenth century from this epistemology, an epistemology that contends not only with the place of Arab self in "the world" and in history but in a history and world in which they fight not to be expelled, as Amilcar Cabral writes.[20]

Unfortunately, this article is unable to offer even a general overview of this history, which would involve not only a formalistic review of the development of genres, media, and artists in Istanbul, Beirut, Cairo, Alexandria, and Jerusalem, not to mention North Africa, but would also require the examination of the array of commentaries on art, aesthetics, education, social progress, and cultural reform.[21] However, grounding the approach of the birth of modern Arab painting within the understanding of *Weltbild*, we can note, first, that this concept is one that is created in the "worlding" of the Arab world during the Nahda, during the formation of Arab modernity itself, and therefore must not be seen as derivative of European modernity or aesthetics. That is to say, the origins of oil painting cannot be separated from the zeitgeist of the Tanzimat, the nineteenth-century reform and modernization movement within the Ottoman Empire, in particular the formation of new types of individual, class, national, communal, and gendered subjects. This aesthetic facilitated local (Jerusalemite), confessional (Christian), and national (Arab Palestinian) identities that drove the re-organization of social hierarchies and economic organizations, as shown by Sherene Seikaly.[22] Like so many other forms of modern cultural production from fiction to political thought, the genesis of modern Arab painting has been explained as yet one more example of how Easterners integrated or mimicked Western cultural forms.[23] The fact that the aforementioned Osman Hamdi and Yousef Kamal both studied in Paris is used as evidence. However, as Jessica Winegar, Özge Calafato, and Hisham Khatib have shown with a more contemporary context, the artistic identities and pedigrees along with artistic and vernacular genres did not exclusively match European definitions per se even if they may be uncannily reproductive of them on the surface.[24] In fact, albeit in passing, she notes that "during the Ottoman period" among others, the "system" and discourse of art and artistic education was "geared toward the scientific, industrial and technological development of the country."[25] In this regard, painting in Egypt, Ottoman Turkey, and Syria as well as Palestine, should not be seen only as an outgrowth of indigenous traditions, such as handcrafts, iconography, miniature painting, and illuminated manuscripts, as Bashar Shamout shows us.[26] Equally important, painting was a manifest, visual expression of the radical social, political, and economic transformations of the era, a visual language generated by a new class of Arab artists.[27] This article hopes to excavate a history of modern painting in the Arab world and its relationship with the practice of photography by examining the work of the pioneer Palestinian artist, Nicola Saig (Niqula Sayigh).

Jerusalem's First Painter

Little is known about Nicola Saig (1863–1942) other than Kamal Boullata's invaluable work on the painter, based largely on oral interviews and personal experience.[28] This lacunae reminds one of the fragility of the lives and works of Palestinians that is the consequence of the ongoing colossal cultural violence of the Nakba and genocide. Despite the absence of any written documents in his own voice, Saig's persona as a leading and seasoned iconographer and painter in Jerusalem emerges forcefully. His life and atelier were the center of Jerusalem's icon production. Jerusalem itself was a center for religious, particularly Orthodox, iconography, developing in the previous century its own distinct *maqdisi*, or Jerusalemite, style.[29] Saig's atelier was the epicenter for iconography in the early decades of the century, also responsible for training other pioneer artists such as Zulfa al-Sa'di.

Boullata asserts that Saig's work was a linchpin in secularizing figurative and landscape painting in Palestine. No doubt, Saig developed a vernacular that was infused by religious and iconographic painting and European "secular" oil painting. As such, his hybrid language is symptomatic of his generation's "overlapping senses of identity" and as preserving a "'multifocal identity.'"[30] Furthermore, he states that Saig "seems to have provided the prototype compositions for many of the different historical scenes," which were "laboriously copied by the younger generation of painters who have studied under him as well as by other colleagues who fell under his spell."[31] Saig's real contribution to the development of Palestinian, and indeed Arab, art, however, lays in the fact that the artist developed a "synthetic language that addressed the realities of his world," synthesizing a mixture of iconographic techniques and painting.[32] Therefore, Boullata concludes, "Saig's hybrid language fusing iconic referrals and illusionist styles embodied his unceasing shuttle between religious and secular painting."[33]

Saig's oeuvre squarely falls in the historical trajectory of the transformations of modernity in Palestine. While Boullata does not delve deeply into the political economy and social changes at the time, he correctly states that Saig's historical paintings were "attempts at a *metaphoric* interpretation of the political moment Palestinians were living during their struggle for national independence."[34] Indeed, Boullata's analysis correctly suggests that Saig's development came as "a result of understanding the new knowledge disseminated by the changing world around him."[35]

Symbolism to Allegory

Boullata's work introduces to us the potential synthetic nature of Saig's work, whose religious compositions were initially rooted in the Jerusalem ateliers of religious iconography but morphed into secularized oil painting and iconography. The syncretism of Saig's art fused the idealism of two radically different artistic traditions, iconography and figurative oil painting. Boullata notes the different formalist traditions within Eastern Orthodox iconography itself, and between Greek, Russian, and post-

Byzantine styles as well as the iconography of Eastern Uniate churches within the development of Palestinian art. But to locate Saig within a larger, regional context, one certainly might look at the figurative similarities between the icons and frescos of the Maronite, Greek Catholic, and Orthodox churches to ferret out a potential embryo of a syncretic regional, if not only, religious vernacular. Considering this, Saig's work might parallel with earlier artists such as Kanaan Dib and even Daoud Corm, who should be seen not as part of a neighboring national (Lebanese) tradition but precisely as a part of the Arab Ottoman and Eastern (*sharqi*) tradition. However, perhaps more important than stylistic vagaries within the burgeoning of a regional or national aesthetic, is that religious iconography has more in common with medieval European Christian frescos or the miniatures in illuminated Arabic manuscripts than visual codes and the form of oil painting. That is, in looking beyond formalism, the impact of Saig's oeuvre can be relocated to the plane of signification, meaning, vision, and indeed epistemology. The force of his work, then, can be seen as larger than an artistic transformation or development but as a common historical moment of modernity in Palestine itself.

Certainly, innovations on the manifest surface of the canvas clue us in to the radical social, economic, and political changes underway. Yet, the true rupture lay in the visual and representational language of the image itself. For an icon, its representational composition is not based on proportion, perspective for viewer or the viewer him or herself, but rather on the non-narrative content of the image and on the symbolic and social hierarchies that were represented. The Orthodox iconography of Jerusalem certainly followed the Antiochian tradition that hermeneutically understood texts as unmediated, direct, and literal communications with the flock.[36]

However, instead of the presence of the divine in the company of the faithful or the representation of the sacred reaching into the profane world, the icon for Saig ceased to function on the symbolic level. Similar to artists in Beirut and Cairo previously, Saig and his apprentices secularized the Palestinian icon, in a more profound shift. This gradual secularization of oil painting and even religious iconography indicates a larger epistemological shift. Indeed, Saig's work has much in common with the portrait painting of his Beiruti contemporary Daoud Corm. Their oil painting marks more than a development in artistic practices but a shift in ways of seeing itself.[37]

By the early twentieth century, the visual paradigm of modernity structured Saig's artistic language, when he began to paint on an allegorical level. The "Arab Renaissance" (*al-nahda al-ʻarabiyya*), the Ottoman Tanzimat, and the cultural trends of Cairo and the provincial capitals undoubtedly informed Saig's relation to the world as much as the ever-increasing presence of Zionist colonial settlers or the arrival of the British Mandate.[38] Just as the classical prose narrative, *al-maqama*, with its overly ornate sensibilities became obsolete, arcane, and empty of its utility in offering a socially relevant narrative, so, too, did the icon on the larger level of reflecting social relations. Therefore, new narratives, in particular the historical, didactic, and romance novel, coincided with Saig's reworking of visual narratives in an attempt to paint allegorically.

The shift from iconography's symbolism to painting's allegory is not only a formalistic development. The two operate on different epistemological levels, on mutually exclusive echelons of signification, recognition, and narrative. The symbolic nature of the icon offered the believer an unmediated image of divinity. Owen Barkfield's famous metaphor of painting before the Scientific Revolution fits in the context of the Orthodox icon where the world of its depthless, sacred surface "was more like a garment" than a "stage."[39]

The "*metaphoric* interpretation" of Saig's historical painting was not a coincidental new way of rendering contemporaneous events. Rather, his allegorical painting sees the "world as a picture" that entails a new social and economic reality that called to be visually imagined. In this regard, allegory does the hard work of casting the narratives of the present into its historical analogue, and into a visual language and coherent visual nomenclature in which Palestinian Arabs could recognize themselves. Or, as Craig Owen explains, allegory in the visual arts had been enlisted in the service of historicism to produce image upon image of the present in terms of the classical past. This relationship was expressed not only superficially, in details of costume and physiognomy, but also structurally, through a radical condensation of narrative into a single, emblematic instant – significantly, Barthes calls it a hieroglyph – in which the past, present, and future, that is, the historical meaning, of the depicted action might be read.[40]

Saig's choice of historical painting certainly condenses the narrative of burgeoning Palestinian identity into "emblematic" glyphs as Owen and Benjamin might suggest. But the shift from symbolism to allegory was possible because a new visual language had been established during the preceding *al-nahda al-'arabiyya* and Ottoman Tanzimat. The representational content of the image was hollowed out and recoded along a new structure of language, identity, and selfhood.

The icon's figures of saints, Church Fathers, Jesus, and the Virgin Mary may be religiously sacred but the icon's materiality and representational content no longer signify God's omniscience in a mystified world. Rather, the icon is metaphorical of the presence of the holy in the profane lives of the faithful. Yet, even by the time of Saig's childhood, let alone World War I, Palestine had undergone massive transformations in political economy, including changes in the land tenure system, the creation of new petty middle classes, and the emergence of urban bourgeoisies to compete with traditional elites.[41] The political impact of these developments, found in other parts of the Ottoman Empire, was amplified by increased Jewish immigration from Europe. While Palestine would remain the "Holy Land," this Orientalized paradigm did not inform the self-view of Palestinians, who were fully entrenched in rationalization of every aspect of society from agriculture to art. The icon could only be recoded as an element of Palestinian Christian culture and religiosity. The relationship to the icon could not encompass the new social relations between the peasantry, church, elites, and Ottoman and British administrators, let alone express their relation to the land, which would become so tantamount to their national struggle.

In this regard, the allegorical depth of painting would be the expression of an

epistemological shift, a shift essential to Arab modernity. When we speak of "decolonizing" art, painting, or thought, this is the juncture to which we must look. That is to say, allegory becomes a particular form of translating and recoding social positions, expectations, and hierarchies into universal fixture of "national" history and the bourgeois individual's place in it. Allegory, as Owen and Roman Jakobson explain, is a "projection of a structure." That structure at turn-of-the-century Palestine was the positivist developmental paradigms of the Nahda, the Arab renaissance. In shifting to allegory, "syntagmatic or narrative associations were compressed in order to compel a vertical reading of (allegorical) correspondences."[42] Moreover, it "is revealed to be the projection of the metaphoric axis of language onto its metonymic dimension." Owen notes that Jakobson "defined this projection of metaphor onto metonymy as the "poetic function." Jakobson coupled "metaphor with poetry and romanticism, and metonymy with prose and realism. Allegory, however, implicates both," bisecting style and form.[43]

In the context of Saig, the move to allegory does not commit the author to one referential index over another. Saig's use of allegory does not derail his art from the metaphoric function of the icon. Theoretically speaking, iconography's axis of selection or simultaneities, as Jakobson and Sassure respectively would say, is not transferred onto painting's axis of combination or succession. Rather, the use of allegory reflects that the social relations of the image had been transformed and that the language of painting projected the new narrative structure of modernity in the Middle East, the syncretism between wrenching social and economic transformations, material culture, and communal identities, and the creation of a new visual language of modernity.

Historical Painting

Saig's *Caliph 'Umar at Jerusalem's Gates* (c. 1920) may very well be an example of the "birth of the secular icon" although certainly not the birth of Arab secular painting.[44] The image refers to a famous moment when the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem Sophronius surrendered the city in 637 to the Caliph 'Umar, who in turn granted Christians religious and civil freedoms, along with allowing Jews to worship in the city for the first time after their expulsion some five centuries earlier.

Boullata stresses the awkward use of perspective, scale, and light, which, along with its sense of gesture, seem to be influenced by Saig's craft as iconographer. The image's color palette, figures, and softness reek of an academic composition. Therefore, the painting's idiosyncrasies may not relay Saig's inabilities to paint as an academic painter but, rather, insinuate a synthetic use of Jerusalemite iconography, itself noted for its use of softer figurative features, in contemporary oil painting. Boullata himself recognizes the syncretic nature of the canvas, artistically and socially. Saig's painting for him invokes "Jerusalem's interfaith harmony," endowing "the image of the Muslim Conqueror with the Christian traits of the Prince of Peace."[45]

Perhaps Boullata intentionally avoids the heavily laden term of allegory but clearly Saig's painting is allegorical. The reading of allegory, however, goes beyond Boullata's initial observations. Certainly, secularism and intersectarian harmony were essential for Palestinian national resistance to the double threat of Zionist settler colonialism and British imperialism. However, also, this stress on "unity" (*ittihad*) and "concord" (*ulfa*) arose out of Palestine's Ottoman tradition – in particular the reformist tradition in which Palestinian intellectuals and elites were ensconced. This tradition, it must be said, was an essential idiom during the rise of new property owners, compradors, and bourgeois classes. These economic and social transformations radically shook Arab societies in Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria. Saig's syncretism, then, is a critical class articulation. In creating a visual language for the new Palestinian Arab subject – and a new way of "seeing" as a modern Arab – Saig's syncretism reaches beyond the binary of iconography and oil painting, communal and national identities, tradition and modernity. It pushes us beyond the asymmetrical "projecting" of iconographic metaphor onto the axis of metonymy.

Saig's use of allegory presupposes a shift in seeing and narration. His oeuvre in general took place *within* well-established artistic, literary, and intellectual practices of synthesizing elements of native modernity, one that conscripts Muslim as well as Christian Arab subjects into its vision. But these practices participated in a stripping away of registers that made "traditional" iconography and narrative practices socially relevant and intelligible. Panofsky's concept of "synthetic intuition," albeit naïve and not without problems, is helpful to understand the shift that is required to approach Saig's painting. That is, Panofsky defines the third level in understanding art as based on the viewer's ability to comprehend and conceptualize the symbolic content of the image. Built on the overt "factual" content and culturally informed "conventional" meaning of the image, the viewer's "synthetic intuition" conceives its more profound "history of cultural symptoms."[46]

If in allegory one text is read through another, then the story of 'Umar is read through a political lens of secularism and co-existence.[47] However, more importantly, the historical painting of the Arab caliphate entering Jerusalem can be read through the medium of oil painting itself, the genre's perfect perspective, scale, and rationalism. The medium itself is the allegorical material of modernity as opposed to the beautifully, ornate metallurgy and tempera on wood or plaster. The shift itself parallels the movement of Palestinian society, and indeed all West Asian societies, from communities built on the surface tangibility of social arrangements (tribal affiliations, patron-client relations, confessional affiliations, etc.) toward the "rational" and transparent organization of social *qua* national relations not primarily mediated by the surface, tradition, or confession.

In other words, the allegory that *Caliph 'Umar at Jerusalem's Gates* invokes can only be meaningful if its narrative and compositional codes are recognizable by its Palestinian and Arab viewers and who are able to pull religious, historical, and national allegory into a galvanizing narrative. The iconographic elements deployed

by Saig are "projected" onto the metonymic axis of oil painting. However, the multiplicity of the allegory of 'Umar, its "poetic function" and prosaic force, is only intelligible because of the epistemological shifts that make allegorical narrative (and painting and novel, for that matter) possible. That is, the compositional syncretism expresses that the social relations of the viewer have been radically transformed. Indeed, the image itself speaks to a new viewing subject; a subject where the lessons of interconfessional unity in the face of Zionism, British imperialism, and capitalist transformations and modernity itself are not only coherent and intelligible but call for the necessities of paintings' production. The Caliph 'Umar is transformed into a national secular leader, one that very much reflects the cross-sectarian, cross-class social relations of Jerusalemite (and Palestine's) *a'yan* (notable) families, who were transforming themselves into national leaders. On the other hand, this viewing subject – very likely, the same subject who might be the sitter in the photographic studio – participates, on the one hand, in producing meaning that makes the allegory of 'Umar politically poignant. In this regard, we may consider that the portraits and photographic images of notables and notable families, both staged and during ceremonies, that cut through the photographic albums of the Mandate figure, Wasif al-Jawhariyya, are aesthetically, epistemologically, and socially primed by an image such as Saig's.[48]

The Stripping of Saul

The allegorical content of *Caliph 'Umar at Jerusalem's Gates* was predicated on a new "synthetic intuition" of the Palestinian Arab viewer, one conditioned by the social and political transformations over the previous fifty years. This intuition is the culturally and historically informed ability to recognize the visual syntax of the image or at least its most basic representational content that present the analogues of the allegory. Saig's "Caliph 'Umar" certainly screams out for an allegorical unpacking while its uncanny artistic syncretism communicates that the image expresses several poignant social relations (for example, modernity's arrival at the gates, interconfessional unity, the nationalist covenant between elites and the masses, the necessity to speak of history in a modern artistic milieu). Yet as unbalanced and idiosyncratic as his Caliph entering Jerusalem, Saig's body of work itself is highly erratic and variegated.

More challenging than the allegory and syncretism of *Caliph 'Umar at Jerusalem's Gates* is Saig's complex *Conversion of Saul* (figure 1). The image is a dense and unbalanced rendition of St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus. The painting is strikingly different from the painter's lighting and discrete use of space in *Caliph 'Umar at Jerusalem's Gate*. This painting is patently Baroque and more reminiscent of Rubens's *Fall of Phaeton* than the nineteenth-century academic palette and figuring in "Caliph 'Umar." The painting's use of chiaroscuro illuminates the diagonally cascading, muscular figures, which contrast with a gaping, empty space off-center in the frame.

Figure 1. Nicola Saig, *The Conversion of Saul* (c. 1920), Khalid Shoman Private Collection.

Perhaps, too, this image could be read allegorically. The conversion could very well be the conversion of the artist from one artistic tradition to another cast in the language of the late Mannerist masters. The figure of the Roman soldier isolated at the edge of the frame and separated by black space and bursting celestial light could stand for any one of the empires with which Palestine found itself politically involved. Yet, the true value of this piece is not the potential allegorical content or even the gesture toward Counter-Reformation painting at a period that coincides with the fragmentation of the Ottoman Empire, the British Empire's mandate over Palestine, and the invasion of Zionist settlers. Rather, Saig's diverse use of styles seems to reflect the very disintegration of the epistemology of sacred iconography, replaced by a visual language that speaks to narrative not form, allegory not symbol, metonymy not metaphor.

Boullata states that Saig confronted a paradox between "a centuries old Eastern form of visual expression he inherited and a Western language that invaded his world."[49] Yet, Saig's oeuvre does not seem to be conflicted but precisely syncretic, expressing the social relations between artistic indigenous and non-indigenous practices. In his discussion of the relationship between turn of the century Muslim reformers and conservative Orthodoxy, Talal Asad tells us that "secular" reformers did not import exotic concepts into Islam and Arabic culture but relied on the creation

of "new vocabularies," or, what I have called elsewhere, new nomenclature, which "are linked and connected to older ones."[50] Saig's secularization of painting was involved, in other words, in a process of recoding. It recoded iconographic art as an expression of national identity but also recoded Orthodox iconography into new visual and narrative forms, vacated of its exclusive sacred meanings and origins.

In some ways, the idiosyncratic *The Conversion of Saul* is the artist's least visually conflicted painting, but it is one that is bereft of the syncretism of his other works. That said, the comprehensively Baroque composition expresses that the sacred had already been stripped away from even religious narratives. The sacred use of images was obsolete and Saig's canvasses, and perhaps even panels, then, must be seen as structured by a new, modern vision that rested on a new "synthetic intuition" cobbled together through the cultural, literary, and intellectual activities of Saig's Levantine and Egyptian peers. Likewise, this "synthetic intuition" was predicated on the naturalization of a "positivist vision," a vision of photography.[51]

The Conversion of Saul might seem almost slavish in its homage to late Mannerism yet the spatial composition is eerily modern. That is, the Vitruvian perspective of Mannerism is offset by the "rule of thirds" that defines classic photographic landscape. Saig's work indeed exhibited, if not participated in, a stripping of the mystic aura of the icon, recoding it with a narrative structure of the secular and profane. Yet, he is not responsible for the re-engineering of the painted image. His work, like the two-third's compositional imbalance of Saul's conversion, is only an expression of it.

Before Painting

Hans Belting's magisterial work, *Likeness and Presence*, has shown, perhaps inadvertently, that medieval Western panel painting derived much of its inspiration, formalism, and style from the "living painting" of Eastern iconography.[52] European painting turned from the Eastern tradition sometime in the last medieval period. Peter Galassi states that photography, in turn, is "a legitimate child" of the later developments in the Renaissance and in modern Western painting.[53] Saig's oeuvre, like that of Daoud Corm or the former's prolific student Daoud Zalatimo, make us reconsider the relationship between Arab and Ottoman painting (whether on canvas, plaster, parchment, or panel) and photography.[54] Rather than observing the birth of photography in contrast or response to the pictorial tradition of iconography, illuminated manuscripts, or miniature portraiture, early modern Arab painters give witness to the reification of a photographic vision that precedes their painting.

This assertion is plainly supported by one of Saig's perhaps most historically significant paintings *Husseini's Surrender* (figure 2). This oil painting is based on an even more famous photograph taken by Eric Matson or Lewis Larson of the American Colony in Jerusalem. The photograph, Boullata and Barbara Blair remind us, commemorates mayor Salim al-Husayni's surrender of the city to the British on 9 December 1917 in Lifta, a village to the northwest of the capital that would be completely depopulated

in 1948.[55] Boullata lauds the painting of the surrender of Jerusalem as marking "a turning point in Saig's career, establishing his reputation as the pioneering master whose craftsmanship not only transgressed the bounds of religious iconography but competed with the most modern means of laying claim to reproducing images of reality."[56]

Figure 2. Nicola Saig, *Husseini's Surrender* (c. 1918), Khalid Shoman Private Collection.

A painting by an iconographer from a photograph to canvas seems poignant. Walter Benjamin's notion of aura certainly is amplified in Eastern iconography, which held sacred value for centuries, but also became a mark of cultural and religious "self-assertion."[57] Photographic vision is void of such aura. Indeed, it strips the image and world of such aura, seeing it through a rationalist, positive perspective. Yet, in painting the surrender of Jerusalem, Saig codifies more than an event. His move to painting and the secularization of his pictorial syntax freed him from the symbolic and sacred, from being a "craftsman" to becoming an "artist" in the modern sense of the word. Painting from a photograph clearly embodies that Saig's work was no longer metaphorical but allegorical. It was narrative. Photography arises out of the impulse to prioritize what "really happened." It works in concert with a number of mechanisms, cultural forms, and genres, including the novel.

Similar to the phenomenon of the shift from the rhyming prose of *saj'* to the novel, the aura was reconfigured into a language of painting that would speak to the viewer, who is now not exclusively a subject of God but an individual, a citizen, an Arab, and a Palestinian. In this regard, Saig's painting relates not only the event of the British conquest of Ottoman Palestine but also relates the story of Palestine's passing from imperial possession to a mandate, and the passing of Palestinians from a society where icons represent social relations to a nation that communicates rationally in painting.

Positivism and Pathos

A series of vectors transverse Saig's oeuvre: the secularization of iconography, allegorical narratives, positivist vision, and the new positionality of the viewing subject. Photography as a way of seeing predates portraits and landscapes in oil but also it enframes the allegorical painting of Saig. Photographic vision as hinted at by *The Conversion of Saul* and literally evinced by *Husseini's Surrender* is apparent in *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* (figure 3), another unsuspecting canvas held by the Khalid Shoman Private Collection. Its biblical scene, Boullata suggests, is copied from a staged photograph, commonly sold to European Christian pilgrims to Palestine.[58] Indeed, many photographs of "daily life" in the Holy Land were repurposed to accommodate the demand for biblical images in catalogues and postcards.[59] Furthermore, the staging of the image is reminiscent of the photographic subgenre of documenting religious holidays and rituals that was popular among local Palestinian Orthodox and Jerusalemite Armenian communities, as well as Western pilgrims.

Figure 3. Nicola Saig, *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* (c.1920), Khalid Shoman Private Collection.

The figures in *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* are not modelled on idealized biblical iconography but on contemporaneous Palestinian peasantry. For Boullata, "The Jerusalem painter dissolves the religious and the secular traces encountered in his environment and thus he elevates an everyday sight of his provincial countrymen to the mythical status of representing the Holy Family."[60] The practice of using contemporaneous Palestinian

character-types (peasants, water bearers, shepherds, merchants, etc.) was popular in expatriate photography, dating back to the nineteenth century. Boullata's observation sidesteps the clear Orientalist implications of having Palestinians stand in for timeless biblical characters in order to make a powerful claim regarding Palestinian cultural identity.

Acknowledging the origins of the condensation of how biblical tropes arose from older Orientalist narratives does not discredit the formation of Palestinian national identity or culture at this time. To the contrary, typographical origins of these tropes that collapse modern Palestinian peasants into biblical figures emerge from the tradition of photography in the Holy Land. This is not limited, however, to postcards for foreign markets. The act of self-Orientalizing, whether through biblical or Orientalist representation, was equally popular especially among the nascent middle classes and bourgeoisie in the photographic studios of Jerusalem and Haifa.[61]

Along with Saig's "Nativity Scene," Boullata stresses the bi-temporality of painting, or how the modern Palestinian peasant condensed into biblical imagery. This temporality marks what I have noted as the "heterchronies" of Palestinian photography: that is, the ways in which Palestinian photography, even appropriated Orientalist photography, is knotted within different temporalities to create political and subjective meaning.[62] On the one hand, this bi-temporality indicates that Saig frees himself to "venture into new territories in which secular subjects may be explored."[63] Equally important for the author, the Palestinian peasant family as a metonym for the Holy Family clearly makes the painting an expression of national identity at a time when the relationship of the Palestinians to their land was beginning to be called into question by Zionist ideology and colonization.

Therefore, the photographic structure of the *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* tells us much. Indigenous photographic portraiture, as much as expatriate tourist photography, enframes the compositional structure of Saig's historical painting (for example, figure, costume, and movement/direction). Also, the biblical tropes and Orientalist narratives, even the most objectifying, were deployed to signify Palestinian national identity. While this process sounds simple, it involved shifts in visual narratives, representation, and selfhood. The self-Orientalizing imagery moves Saig's image beyond the religious into the secular. Religious representation was deterritorialized of the exclusivity of the sacred, thereby allowing it to be recoded with the social value of cross-confessional Palestinian cultural and social identity.

The stripping of the sacred in the construction of the secular national self synchronically accompanied the collapsing of the ancient biblical Palestine with the contemporary countryside. Folding biblical narratives into the rural realities of Palestine was a class act committed by Indigenous elites as much as it was an act of Orientalism by the imperialist metropoles. In imagining a modern, native subjectivity, the new bourgeoisie, the traditional notable families, and the emerging middle classes along with their organic intellectuals, often objectified peasants, workers, craftsmen, and women as laying outside of modernity.[64]

If we are to return, then, to Panofsky's "synthetic intuition," Saig's *Escape of the Holy Family to Egypt* can be seen as a rationalizing text. The direction of the image

moves from right to left as an Arabic text. As such, the heterogeneous painting asks the viewer to read it. This said, the tableau is predicated on a new reading subject and a modern subjective vision that places the individual as the origin of seeing, experience, and social identity. Photography enframes this vision, which itself expresses a new syntax of selfhood that finds its expression in the depth of allegory and narrative.

Conclusion

Saig's allegorical painting is powerful because it is juxtaposed against his iconography, which recodes it with a very particular cultural cachet. The flatness of the icon, indeed the certainty of its meaning, contrasts the many layers of the allegory. This contrast reminds us to think of "perspective as symbolic form."[65] As Panofsky suggests, the "depth axis" in painting solves the problem in how to "depict the unfolding of an act over time, in a single static scene."[66] Within the colonial context, we would want to complicate such a depth axis, not only of a new perspective emerging with new social formations (that is, classes and individuals) but these always enframed within a colonial modernity against which the nomenclature of Arab modernity is contending. The *Escape of the Holy Family* relates a religious story in a peasant vernacular, a sort of indigenizing of the biblical narrative as Yazan Kopty might say.[67] Its representation of the sacred is in the profane medium and visual language of oil painting. The composition's spatial relations construct the "stadium" of a photograph. The image could not be farther from the icon, then, relating the visual narrative not only of the Holy Family but the Palestinian national self and, even, national heritage.[68] But like Arabic's turn to the novel even when it itself deploys the *maqama* as in the case of al-Shidyaq's *al-Saq 'ala al-Saq* (Leg over leg) or al-Muwaylihi's *Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham* (The narrative of 'Isa ibn Hisham, often translated as "A Period in Time"), the visual structure of a painting – mediated through the photographic prism – alerts us that the icon's viewing subject has been fully transformed into a new Cartesian subject of Arab modernity but one that reclaims the "perspective" as a part of Arab visual heritage.[69] In other words, for Saig, it is Arab eyes that are looking at this painting, a painting in which the Arab viewer may locate themselves through a parallax vision of present, past, and the viewer.

Indeed, this photographic vision is the consequence of the positive paradigms that circumscribed the cultural, social, and political thinking of late Ottoman Empire and early Mandate period. These paradigms are not imports but generated over decades by Arab intellectuals, who are naturalizing capitalist modernity and the formations of new forms of class hierarchy, property ownership, commodity production, and consumption. In other words, photographic vision is linked into an epistemology of modernity that locates subjectivity in the individual upon whom community, society, and nation are enacted. Saig's painting as an articulation of Palestinian identity especially during the British Mandate period and a formative step in the development of modern Palestinian art cannot be understated. However, more powerfully, it exhibits the scopic regime of a new perspective, a perspective where Palestinians were locating themselves in a "world as a picture" in which their own presence could

be articulated especially against British colonial control and the encroachment of Zionist colonization. This statement is not meant to be anachronistic, just as the idea that the scopic regime that enframes Saig's painting in the late Ottoman and Mandate periods is a photographic vision should not be seen as tautological.

Rather, before photographs become reproductive tools of dominant discourses, before they become historical documents, before they become contested spaces, before they represent new national identities or express their anxieties and ambivalences, photographs must first be understood as a secondary by-product of an a priori constructed subject. The photograph and photographic vision can, therefore, only exist after an epistemology of its visual language has been reified and its subject naturalized. Upon this language and this episteme, Saig began to translate his iconographic craft into a narrative of Palestinian identity but this translation itself was only of the vision syntax enframed by photography, positivism, and the cultural production of his peers and predecessors, not only in Palestine but throughout the Arab Mediterranean.

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Endnotes

1 Peter Galassi, *Before Photography: Painting and the Invention of Photography* (New York: MOMA, 1981), 12.
2 For the canonical account, see Beaumont Newhall, *A History of Photography* (New York: MOMA, 1964); or for an important formalist and reactive approach to photography, see John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: MOMA, 2007).
3 Galassi, *Before Photography*, 19 and 25.
4 Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On the Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).
5 Geoffrey Batchen, *Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 52.
6 The modern art history of the Arab world has been changing over the past decade with studies by scholars such as Nada Shabout, Anneka Lennsen, Sarah Rogers, Kirstin Scheid, Jessica Winegar, Patrick Kane, Hala Auji, and Cynthia Becker, among others. For a critical commentary on the absence of nineteenth-century art from the canon of "Islamic art" history, see Margaret S. Graves, "Feeling Uncomfortable in the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of Art Historiography* 6 (June 2012): 1–27.
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miniature painting, see Esin Atil, "Ottoman Miniature Painting under Sultan Mehmed II," *Ars Orientalis* 9 (1973): 103–20. Also, for an article on the images of women, see "'Musicians and Dancing Girls': Images of Women in Ottoman Miniature Painting," in *Women in the Ottoman Empire: Middle Eastern Women in the Early Modern Era*, ed. Madeline Zilfi (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 153–68.

8 See Wendy Shaw, *Possessors and Possessed: Museums, Archeology, and the Visualization of History in the Late Ottoman Empire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 98–105.

9 See Stefan Weber, "Images of Imagined Worlds: Self-Image and Worldview on Late Nineteenth Century Damascus" in *The Empire in the City: Arab Provincial Capitals in the Late Ottoman Empire*, eds. Jens Hanssen, Thomas Philipp, and Stefan Weber (Beirut: Ergon, 2002), 145–71.

10 For an example, see Karène Sanchez Summerer and Sari Zananiri, eds., *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens, 1918–1948* (Amsterdam: Brill, 2021).

11 Oleg Grabar, "What Does 'Arab Painting' Mean?" in *Arab Painting: Text and Image in Illustrated Arabic Manuscripts*, ed. Anna Contradini (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 17–22. In this contribution, Grabar engages the canonical description of the Arab painting as set forth by Richard Erringhausen's seminal *Arab Painting* (Geneva: Skira, 1962).

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13 Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," 20.

14 For a series of discussions on the socioeconomic and political shifts in nineteenth-century Palestine, see David Kushner, ed., *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformations* (Leiden: Brill, 1986).

15 Galassi, *Before Photography*, 14.

16 Timothy Mitchell, *Colonizing Egypt* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991), 22. My italics.

17 Giambattista Vico, *On the Most Ancient Wisdom of the Italians Unearthed from the Origins of the Latin Language*, trans. L. M. Palmer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 46.

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21 For a rare examination of the formation of "taste" in the late Ottoman Empire, see Toufoul Abou Hodeib, *A Taste for Home: The Modern Middle Class in Ottoman Beirut* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

22 Sherene Seikaly, *Men of Capital: Scarcity and Economy in Mandate Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

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24 See Hisham Khatib, *Palestine and Egypt under the Ottomans: Paintings, Books, Photographs, Maps, and Manuscripts* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2003).

25 Jessica Winegar, *Creative Reckoning: Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006), 55. Also, see Özge Baykan Calafato, *Making the Modern Turkish Citizen: Vernacular Photography in the Early Republican Era* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2022).

26 Bashar Shammout, *Al-'irth al-Filastini al-mar'i wa-l-masmu': Nash'atuhu wa tashttutuhu wa-l-hifath al-raqmiu 'alayh* (The audiovisual Palestinian heritage, origin, dispersion, and digital preservation: Preliminary studies and future prospects) (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2020)

27 For an overview, see Nada Shabout, *Modern Arab Art: Formation of Arab Aesthetics* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2007).

28 I am grateful to the late Kamal Boullata for

his generosity in suggesting and discussing his work with me. See Kamal Boullata's groundbreaking book, *Palestinian Art: 1850 to the Present* (London: Saqi, 2009). For a helpful review article, see Joseph Massad, "Permission to Paint: Palestinian Art and the Colonial Encounter," *Art Journal* 66, no. 3 (2007): 126. Discussing books on Palestinian art by Gannit Ankori, Samia Halaby, and Boullata, the article was the center of some controversy, as Massad suggests that Ankori's thesis borrowed from Boullata without proper citation.

29 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 45.
30 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 120.
31 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 61.
32 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 108.
33 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 119.
34 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 61, my italics.
35 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 107.
36 While the icon might have been a vessel by which the faithful could be in the presence of divinity, this certainly does not preclude it from its own social history. Boullata stresses the Russian influence of iconography on image making in Palestine. It seems that despite their efforts, Russian influence was declining by the end of the century due to bickering within the Palestinian Orthodox community and more concern for Russian interests and pilgrims in the Holy Land than for the native Orthodox faithful. In some ways, such a statement refocuses on the importance of why Saig might be opting to represent a national narrative of Palestinian secular identity, a narrative that Christian Palestinians were key in propagating. While the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society eventually began to focus on Palestinian Orthodox, the influence of French and Catholics (as well as various Protestant churches and Britain) increased. See Hanna Kildani, *Modern Christianity of the Holy Land* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2010), 124–25. On the other hand, the few religious schools established in Palestine were themselves quite adversarial to the modernist tendencies of art in Europe. Also, both the Russian Orthodox Holy Synod and the Czar's Foreign Ministry ran Russian activities. The tendency, then, to paint, say, more or less Russian than Jerusalemite, certainly holds its own political and social relevance. See Kildani, *Modern Christianity*, 137 and for the initial goals of the Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, Kildani, *Modern Christianity*, 130.
37 For a rare and critical discussion of Daoud Corm, see Sarah Rogers, "Daoud Corm, Cosmopolitan Nationalism, and the Origins of Lebanese Modern Art," *Arab Studies Journal* 18, no. 1 (Spring 2010): 46–77.
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39 Owen Barfield's famous *Saving the Appearance: A Study in Idolatry* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1988 [first edition, 1965]), 94.
40 Craig Owen, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October* 12 (1980): 76.
41 See Alexander Scholch, "Was There a Feudal System in Ottoman Lebanon and Palestine?" in Kushner, *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period,* 130–45; Ruth Roded, "Social Patterns Among the Urban Elite of Syria in the Late Ottoman Period, 1876–1914," in Kushner, *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period*, 146–71. Also, Fred Gottheil, "Money and Capital Flows in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Palestine: A Physiocratic Model Applied," in Kushner, *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period*, 211–29.
42 Owen, "Allegorical Impulse," 76.
43 Owen, "Allegorical Impulse," 73–74.
44 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 114. For a reproduction of the image itself, see Issam Nassar, Stephen Sheehi, and Salim Tamari, *Camera Palaestina: Photography and Displaced Histories of Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2022), 15.
45 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 115–16.
46 Ernest Panofsky, *Studies in Iconology* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1962), 15–16.
47 Owen, "Allegorical Impulse," 69.
48 See Nassar, Sheehi, and Tamari, *Camera Palaestina.*
49 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 120.
50 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam and Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003), 222. For the nomenclature of reform of *al-nahdah al-'arabiyya*, see Stephen Sheehi, *Foundations of Modern Arab Identity* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004), 24–25.

51 For a discussion of "positive vision" within the context of modernism's reception in the Arab world, see Stephen Sheehi, "Modernism, Anxiety, and the Ideology of Arab Vision," *Discourse*: *Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 28, 1 (2006 [2008]): 72–97.

52 Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence: The History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 261–64. See on the "Eastern origins" of the icon and how the mysticism and aura of the icon was "more important as an idea than as a fact," Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 332.

53 Galassi, *Before Photography*, 12.

54 See Kamal Boullata's article, "Daoud Zalatimo and Jerusalem Painting during the Early Mandate," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 44 (Winter 2010): 70–74.

55 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 117.

56 For a discussion of the photographic studio and the American Colony, along with the original image of *Salim Husseini's Surrender*, see Barbara Bair, "The American Colony Photography Department: Western Consumption and 'Insider' Commercial Photography," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 44 (Winter) 2010: 28–38. Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 118.

57 Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 17.

58 Boulatta, *Palestinian Art*, 108. See also Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken, 1969): 217–52.

59 See Annelies Moors, "Presenting People: The Cultural Politics of Picture Postcards of Palestine/Israel," in *Postcards: Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*, ed. Jordana Mendelson and David Prochaska (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), 93–105; and Annelies Moors and Steven Wachlin, "Dealing with the Past, Creating a Presence: Picture Postcards of Palestine," in *Discourse and Palestine: Power, Text and Context*, ed. Annelies Moors, Toine van Teffelen, Sharif Kannana, and Ilham Abu Ghazaleh (Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1994), 11–26.

60 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 110.

61 For a discussion of self-Orientalizing bourgeoisie and Romanticism, see Sheehi, "Modernism, Anxiety, and the Ideology of Arab Vision." For a brief discussion of self-Orientalizing in the photographic studio, see Issam Nassar, *Laqatat mughayira: al-taswir al-futughraphi al-mubakkir fi Filastin* [Different snapshots: early local photography in Palestine] (Ramallah: Kutub and Qattan Foundation, 2005), as well as his "Familial Snapshots: Representing Palestine in the Work of the First Local Photographers," *History and Memory* 18, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2006):139–55; and Badr el-Hage, "Khalil Raad, Photographer of Jerusalem," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 11–12 (Winter 2000): 34–39. Also, for a discussion of the practice of self-Orientalizing and photography within the Iranian context at the turn of the century, see Ali Behdad, "The Power-ful Art of Qajar Photography: Orientalism and (Self)-Orientalizing in the Nineteenth Century Iran," *Iranian Studies* 34, no. 1–4 (2001): 141–51.

62 Stephen Sheehi, "Our Photography: Refusing the 1948 Partition of the Sensible," in Nassar, Sheehi, and Tamari, *Camera Palaestina*, 116.

63 Boullata, *Palestinian Art*, 112.

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65 Erwin Panofsky, *Perspective of Symbolic Form* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1993).

66 Martin Lister, John Dovey, Seth Gidding, Iain Grant, and Kieran Kelly, *New Media: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2003), 130.

67 Yazin Kopty, "Edward Keith-Roach's Favourite Things: Indigenising the National Geographic's Images of Mandatory Palestine," in Sanchez Summerer and Zananiri, *Imaging and Imagining Palestine*, 309–39.

68 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1982), 27–28.

69 Ahmad Faris al-Shidyaq, *al-Saq 'ala al-saq fi ma huwa al-Faryaq* [One leg over another, concerning al-Faryaq] (Paris: Duprat, 1855) and Muhammad al-Muwaylihi, *Hadith 'Isa ibn Hisham aw fatra min al-zaman* [The narrative of 'Isa ibn Hisham, or a period of time] (Cairo: Matba'at al-ma'arif, 1907).

Reflections on Certain Theories to do with the History of Early Islam

Tarif Khalidi

Abstract

The vast corpus of premodern Arabic historical writing, encompassing both Islamic and Christian narratives, remains largely unexplored, with many manuscripts still awaiting classification and editing. This historiographical heritage has faced critical scrutiny since the late nineteenth century, particularly regarding early Arabic Islamic sources from the first few centuries of Islam. Revisionist scholars have applied techniques from biblical criticism and modern literary analysis to challenge the authenticity of these early histories, often labeling them as "salvation history," which they argue imposes a supernatural framework on events. Critics contend that the temporal distance between events and their recording diminishes reliability; however, recent scholarship suggests that oral traditions coexisted with written records from the outset of Islamic history. Furthermore, the concept of "topoi" in historical narratives raises questions about the credibility of certain accounts while acknowledging their potential to convey underlying truths. This essay evaluates these revisionist critiques, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of historical sources that transcends simplistic categorizations of reliability and fictionality.

Keywords:

Arabic historiography; early Islam; revisionist history; salvation history; oral tradition; manuscript studies; biblical criticism; literary analysis; historical authenticity; historiographical methods.

The existence of a vast corpus of pre-modern Arabic historical writing, Islamic and Christian, is a fact well-known to both experts and the general educated public. There is no parallel to this corpus in the pre-modern period except perhaps the Chinese chronicles. And when one adds the biographical material, which Arabic civilization often equated with history, the total must be in the tens of thousands, even hundreds of thousands of volumes.[1] Many years will pass before we uncover its full dimensions since much of it is still in manuscript form and in need of identification, classification, and editing.

This extremely rich pre-modern historiographical heritage has been undergoing a critical revision by some Western Arabists and Islamists. This began in earnest in the late nineteenth century with the assault on hadith; and hadith, as we know, is a first cousin of history. This skeptical revisionist program has recently come to focus with greater intensity on the earliest Arabic Islamic historical sources, produced, roughly speaking, during the first two to three centuries of Islam, while later historical sources escape such skepticism and revisionism relatively unscathed. More specifically, these revisionists have come to target the early historians from the generation of Ibn Ishaq (d. 767 CE) down to al-Tabari (d. 923 CE), but later historians such as, say, Ibn al-Athir (d. 1233 CE) have not yet come under what Salim Tamari calls the "critic's surgical knife."

This revisionist program comes in several varieties, so it is not easy to summarize and analyze their views. This is because their revisionism has several sources, the most prominent of which are critical techniques derived from higher criticism of the Bible and critical techniques derived from modern Western literary criticism. In what follows I try to address some of the major points raised by the revisionists, and then attempt an evaluation.

One common critique of the early Arabic Islamic sources is that these can best be described as "salvation history" which reads history to understand God's redemptive actions and intentions and are therefore teleological and tendentious.[2] A supernatural grid is thus imposed on human history so that every historical event becomes both a fact and a symbol of the divine plan. These revisionists thus read early Arabic Islamic history as having one dominant mover, the Almighty, who runs the show in one direction towards a definite end. In other words, we are not dealing with history in the positivist or empirical sense – "what actually happened" – but rather with theophany masking itself as history.

Yet it should be noted that all three major monotheistic faiths suffer from excessive attachment to the immediate and present historicity of their respective revelations. All three exhibit a high degree of adherence to what might be described as "salvation history." If we choose to describe Arabic Islamic history as "salvation history" we are not saying anything about it that cannot also be equally applied to early Christian or Jewish history. The concept of divine salvation is integral to all three faiths, and all three faiths have used history to show how salvation has manifested itself through time. The salvation history school ends by telling us that we should, in effect, throw the baby out with the bathwater, since there is very little "real history" in these early works. It is like a virus that infects historical texts, rendering them unusable. So what's to be done?

Some revisionists such as John Wansbrough and his disciples, including Patricia Crone and Michael Cook,[3] would argue that we look for an alternative history derived

from contemporary but non-Islamic sources: for example, Syriac, Byzantine, Armenian and other similar chronicles.[4] But then one might ask: Do these other chronicles also not suffer from the virus called salvation history? I am happy to report that this strand of revisionism has not won too many adherents and has not produced any significant or fertile leads that one can follow.

A second critique has to do with oral versus written sources. Simply put, it states that early Arabic Islamic scholarship began its life in orality and only a hundred or a hundred and fifty years later did it resort to writing. Thus, when the earliest historians sat down to record Islamic history in written books they were already separated by a century or more from the events they recorded. Quite apart from the issue that oral transmission is by its very nature defective, we are told that no one can or ought to trust a record so far separated from its historical antecedent. Among both the skeptical revisionists and others who are prepared to grant the early sources some value, the argument goes something like this: early Islam did not have a contemporary historian, like a Thucydides or a Tacitus, who lived in Mecca or Medina at the time of Muhammad.[5] What we have instead are reports allegedly going back to that period but they are embedded in histories written down a century or more *after* the events they describe. Similarly, and analogously, no twentieth-century work should be considered an original or primary source for the history of the eighteenth century.

But let us concentrate first and in brief on orality and writing. The view that Islamic scholarship began in orality and then a hundred or more years later switched to writing is no longer tenable. The research of scholars like Gregor Schoeler, Harald Motzki, and others demonstrate clearly that this was not so: that the confusion is mainly the result of a misunderstanding of technical terms of transmission, and that it is becoming increasingly obvious that orality and writing coexisted from the earliest Islamic times.[6]

Let us now turn to the third critique, namely, the question of the distance between the sources and the period they describe. On the surface, this looks like a perfectly respectable historiographical principle; that is, trustworthy sources need to be contemporaneous or eyewitness sources. But let us examine for a moment what precisely we mean by a contemporaneous source.

The span of a typical individual human memory can easily extend backward and forward across a range of even hundreds of years. If we imagine a person who transmits historical reports from, say, a grandparent who in turn is relating from a grandparent, and further imagine that that person transmits them to a grandson, a span of two centuries can easily be attained.

This sounds a little abstract, so a concrete and personal example might be appropriate. I was born in 1938 and my mother was born in 1897. Any information I now transmit to any other person which I heard directly from her regarding Beirut's social life in 1907, for example, is, today in 2024, already 117 years old.That is not all. As a young girl, my mother often stayed with *her* grandmother who was born around 1820, and her grandmother used to tell her stories of Beirut life around 1830 or so. Therefore, if I relate to someone today a story directly from my mother who transmitted it directly from *her* grandmother, the span of memory has already extended for nearly two centuries. And

what happens if an interlocutor of mine today transmits this information to his or her grandchildren? We now have a span of memory that far exceeds two hundred years. To maintain that one cannot trust a report *because* it is separated by a century or more from its origins goes against a common human exercise, especially in societies that greatly prized the transmission of memories.

Naturally, this does not mean that all such reports are trustworthy, but it does mean that reports at a temporal distance from their origins are not *ipso facto* to be dismissed as untrustworthy. If you have no reason to disbelieve what I am telling you, and I have no reason to disbelieve my mother, and she in turn has no reason to disbelieve her grandmother, a historian cannot dismiss such reports simply because they are distant in time from their occurrence. Arguments that dismiss and discount any report that is not contemporaneous with an event are still very common in studies of early Islam because not much attention has been paid to the meaning of the word "contemporary." Thus, reports may be highly reliable even when separated by centuries from the events they relate because they can be the result of a relatively short line of transmission of just a few informants, each of whom is relying on his or her own personal memory.

A fourth, and important, critique comes from source criticism, especially as seen in the influential study of the late Albrecht Noth.[7] We might summarize the central argument of this work as follows. Noth presents us with a list of obstacles facing a reconstruction of early Islamic history. He does not say it is impossible to reconstruct that history. He merely says: here are the hurdles one must be aware of before one begins the work of historical reconstruction. These obstacles or hurdles come in two basic forms, topoi and schemata. Noth describes topoi as basically concerned with the content of reports while schemata are basically concerned with their form. He then provides us with several examples of each.

Let us look at only one example of a topos, which may be taken as typical. Arabic sources describe some battles against the Byzantines in which the Byzantine soldiers were chained together. Is this credible? Of course not, says Professor Noth. No sane general would ever tie his soldiers up in chains. In 1967, I heard exactly the same story about Israeli soldiers being chained inside their tanks. When you see such a topos, beware! What you have is fiction and not history. We are told that examples can be multiplied of such topoi far beyond what Noth himself has dealt with in his work.

So, an ever-expanding and open-ended armory of critical weapons is now available for historians' use. When Noth has finished enumerating all of these topoi and schemata, they no longer appear like obstacles on the road. Instead, the whole history of early Islam becomes a veritable minefield. This impression is fortified by the fact that Noth's early and guarded optimism regarding the historicity of the sources is soon abandoned. There is hardly a subsequent page of his work on which we don't meet words like "fiction," "absurd," "legendary," "inauthentic and unreliable," "complete confusion," "clumsy forgery," "no relation to reality," "of dubious value" and so forth.[8] According to Noth, some of these reports may once have had a basis in fact, a "kernel of truth," but later transmitters detached them from their historical anchors, set them adrift, and clothed them with topoi to suit "the mood of their times" or simply to entertain their audience.[9]

But what exactly is a topos? A topos may be defined as a sort of cliché or a metaphor or rhetorical formula. A friend of yours tells you that he fell in love with a woman at first sight: he took one look at her and he tumbled into love. Instead of telling you all this simply and directly, he quotes to you the verse of Ahmad Shawqi: *nazratun fabtisamatun fa salamun fa kalamun* ("a glance, a smile, a greeting, and then talking") and so on. Now his falling in love may not have happened exactly or literally like this but he chooses a topos, a cliché, to convey his meaning. As a historian writing about this love affair – provided it is an earth-shaking love affair – it is one's duty to search inside the topos to find the kernel of truth in it, namely, that it was love at first sight. One might argue that our ordinary speech is peppered with topoi and that a topos is appropriately used *precisely because* it carries within it a "kernel of truth."

But let us go back to the chained soldiers. What exactly is the function of that story? Yes, as a historian, I might say that the story as it stands and if understood literally, sounds nonsensical or fictional. But does my job stop here? Does this story of soldiers in chains have a "kernel of truth"? Surely it does. We could suggest, for instance, that it has to do with perception: the enemy were seen to be cowardly. This is a perception that a historian cannot simply ignore or dismiss.

Again, we might ask: How exactly did this wholesale process of topos construction by later historians occur? Did these later historians sit down, look back on their history and decide: Let us now sprinkle this history that has come down to us with topoi? Did they do so consciously or unconsciously? And is there any parallel to this process in the historiography of other cultures, the Greco-Roman, the Byzantine, or the medieval European for example? Or is this process peculiar to Arabic Islamic historiography and, if so, why? And is there a distinction or hierarchy among topoi? Are some topoi more likely to have a "kernel of truth" than others? Putting all topoi on the same level must surely reduce their value as explanatory tools. The absence of any categorization and enumeration of topoi, which Noth merely describes as appearing "frequently" or "often," leaves us with no clear indication as to their relative density in the sources.

A fifth revisionist critique comes directly from literary criticism, and more specifically from the important works of the American scholar Hayden White. Here we move from topos to trope, that is to say, to figures of speech similar to what ancient Arab literary critics used to call *al-badi'*.[10] White's approach may perhaps be encapsulated in the following quote: "Although historians and writers of fiction may be interested in different kinds of events" – he means of course factual and fictional – "both the forms of their respective discourses and their aims in writing are often the same."[11] Nice of him to say "often"!

Having established not only that there is a family resemblance between history and fiction (something we have known for a very long time – after all, a story or a narrative is common to both history and fiction), White now pronounces history and fiction indistinguishable in form and aim. In other words, history is now turned into historiography: not *what* historians report but *how* they report it.

As the Wansbrough contingent had done before them, the Hayden White contingent have now turned their guns on early Arabic Islamic history. They are asking us to take a text by, say, Tabari (d. 923 CE) or Mas'udi (d. 956 CE) and, instead of asking: Is this

text credible? Is it plausible? Do we take it as representing a historical event accurately, dispassionately, and so forth? We ask: How is it constructed formally? What is its tone? What are its tropes or figures of speech? Is it epic or tragic or tragi-comic or whatever? How is it "plotted," to use Hayden White's favorite phrase? In other words, let us put history aside and let us concentrate on representation, on how these historians build their accounts of the past. And when we do that, we are told that early Islamic history is really a series of parables or else that it is a matter of "poetics," that is to say, it is basically unknowable.[12]

I have lived with Tabari and Mas'udi and other early historians for a very long time and this emboldens me to say a few things in conclusion. To begin with, putting Tabari, Mas'udi, Baladhuri (d. 892 CE) and so forth in one basket is a grave mistake. They are very different historians in style, outlook, intention, and form. Further, did they really have no conception of the difference between fact and fiction? Of course, they wrote to entertain, of course they wrote to moralize and preach, but was this *all* that they were doing? Anyone who reads these historians will also see that they are striving to the best of their ability to give us an accurate account of the past *in addition to* entertainment and moralizing.

When all is said and done, are these historians so different from modern historians, Eastern or Western? A modern historian's impact and reputation is based not just on his or her accuracy and synthetic ability, originality and all the other things we admire in a historian. We also admire his or her elegance of style, skillful use of language, simplicity of diction – in a word, readability and entertainment. This does not absolve the historian of the primary function of attempting to represent the facts, nor can we toss facts to the wind and say we can never hope to have a factual or semifactual account of the past. Tabari and company are first and foremost historians, not *hakawatis*, or popular entertainers, or preachers, and all of them, without exception, take a very serious view of their profession even if they also entertain and moralize, just like any modern historian. Mas'udi, for example, describes history as the font and source of all knowledge since "all branches of knowledge are derived from history." These branches include philosophy, jurisprudence, eloquence, theology, ethics, and politics. Entertainment value is mentioned at the very end of that list. [13]

And now to my conclusion. We must never give up the attempt to try to understand and reconstruct early Arabic Islamic history. Despite any disagreements we may have with Wansborough, Noth, or Hayden White, we must welcome them into the historians' community, deal fairly with their views and see if, at any point in our reconstruction of the past, we may be able to benefit from their insights. We must also not allow them to turn our attention completely from the pursuit, which admittedly often seems endless, of the facts of history. Nor need we demolish the "house" of early Arabic Islamic history simply because it might be full of cracks.

Like Sisyphus, historians are condemned forever to push that rock of facts up the mountain, only to see it tumbling down before it reaches the mountain peak, though we might hope that it deposits some fragments along the way.

A quote from George Orwell might serve as a summary of the main contentions of

this article: "I am willing to believe that history is for the most part inaccurate and biased, but what is peculiar to our own age is the abandonment of the idea that history *could be* truthfully written."[14]

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Endnotes

1 In paying tribute to my dear friend Salim Tamari, it should be pointed out that he has done more than any other contemporary historian to advance the use of biographical and autobiographical material to illuminate the social history of Palestine.

2 The term "salvation history" was popularized by John Wansbrough in his work *The Sectarian Milieu: Content and Composition of Islamic Salvation History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978).

3 See Patricia Crone and Michael Cook, *Hagarism: The Making of the Islamic World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977). In their later writings, both authors quietly abandoned the views expressed in this work.

4 In a work of great erudition, *Seeing Islam as Others Saw It: A Survey of Christian, Jewish, and Zoroastrian Writings on Early Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998), Robert Hoyland demonstrated that non-Islamic sources frequently "coincide with" the Islamic sources. See Hoyland, *Seeing Islam*, chap. 14.

5 For example, in an important work, which is otherwise critical of the skeptics, Fred M. Donner nevertheless holds that the early sources "are not contemporary sources." Fred M. Donner, *Narratives of Islamic Origins: The Beginnings of Islamic Historical Writing* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1998), 4.

6 See Gregor Schoeler, *The Oral and Written in Early Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006) and *The Genesis of Literature in Islam: From the Aural to the Read* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009). See also Harald Motzki, "The *Musannaf* of ʻAbd al-Razzaq al-Sanʻani as a Source of Authentic *Ahadith* of the First Century A.H.," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 50 (1991): 1–21.

7 See Albrecht Noth, *The Early Arabic Historical Tradition: A Source-Critical Study* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1994).

8 For these adjectives, see Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 101, 113, 79, 101, 147, 100, 136, 101, 124, 103.

9 For "kernel of truth," see Noth, *Early Arabic Historical Tradition*, 22 ("kernel of truth"), 110 ("mood of their times"), and 145 (for later historians introducing topoi).

10 See, for example, ʻAbdullah ibn al-Muʻtazz, *Kitab al-badiʻ*, ed. Ignatius Krachkovskii (Damascus: Dar al-Hikma, n.d. [c. 1969–75]) and Hazim al-Qartajani, *Minhaj al-bulagha' wa siraj al-udaba'* [Curriculum of the eloquent and lamp of the literary], ed. Muhammad al-Habib ibn al-Khujah (Beirut: Dar al-Gharb al-Islami, 1986). These are, of course, only two examples of a widespread tradition of literary criticism in Arabic culture. See, for example, Wen-chin Ouyang, *Literary Criticism in Medieval Arabic-Islamic Culture* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997).

11 Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 121.

12 Typical of this "tropological" approach is Tayeb el-Hibri, *Reinterpreting Islamic Historiography: Harun al-Rashid and the Narratives of the ʻAbbasid Caliphate* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). Some Israeli Orientalists also appear to have adopted a tropological approach with even less rigor than el-Hibri. See, for example, Uri Rubin, *The Eye of the Beholder: The Life of Muhammad as Viewed by the Early Muslims, a Textual Analysis* (Princeton, NJ: Darwin Press, 1995); and Boaz Shoshan, *Poetics of Islamic Historiography: Deconstructing Tabari's History* (Leiden: Brill, 2004).

13 Masʻudi, *Muruj al-dhahab wa maʻadin al-jawhar* [Meadows of gold and mines of gems], ed. Charles Pellat (Beirut: Université Libanaise, 1965–79), sec. 989.

14 Quoted by Ian Jack in "Time for Several Whiskies," *London Review of Books*, 30 August 2018, online at www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v40/n16/ian-jack/time-for-several-whiskies (accessed 21 November 2024).

INTERVIEW

Maintaining the Social Fabric: Mutual Aid in Gaza

An Interview with Hadeel Assali

Interview by Lucy Garbett

Abstract

Since November 2023, Hadeel Assali and a small group of family and friends (and a huge community of supporters) have been running the Gaza Mutual Aid Solidarity project to provide support to those enduring the effects of ongoing genocide. The collective has raised over $750,000 for projects to provide clean water, food, tents, clothing, and cash to families. It has also purchased clay pots and ovens, and a vehicle for members of the project team in Gaza, repaired a sewer system, installed a new water line, and funded medical workers and civil defense crews. In this interview by Lucy Garbett at the *Jerusalem Quarterly,* Assali highlights the importance of initiatives by the Palestinian community in response to the ongoing genocide in Gaza.

Keywords:

Gaza; mutual aid; Palestinian community; humanitarianism; fundraising; solidarity.

Countless fundraising appeals have been launched by international organizations and international non-governmental organizations for the "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza and millions have been successfully raised. These initiatives come at the same time as Israel's criminalization of UNRWA and curtailment of its operations in the West Bank and Gaza, and UNRWA's loss of donor funding as a consequence – symbolizing the replacement of Palestinian refugee status by an even more depoliticized status. Framing Palestinians as humanitarian recipients

in a humanitarian crisis instead of refugees of the 1948 Nakba and survivors of genocide, are just some of the ways humanitarian governance works. This idea is not new of course, as the literature has long pointed to how aid dependency is often structured by security logics and counterinsurgency aims.[1] Implementing anti-terrorism clauses as part of funder contracts, first used by the U.S. and then also adopted by the EU, upholds and maintains a security regime that criminalizes Palestinians. Civil society organizations then participate in surveillance through these counter-terrorism clauses, which authors such as Lisa Bhungalia have framed as the "aid-war dynamic."

While pictures of destruction and death in Gaza, the "live streamed genocide," continue to dominate minds and social media feeds, part of this story too is how Palestinians remain, reassemble, and resist. The Gaza Mutual Aid Solidarity project is one example from a long list of similar community projects that have emerged. In this interview with the *Jerusalem Quarterly,* Hadeel Assali highlights the importance of initiatives by the Palestinian community in response to the ongoing genocide in Gaza. We discuss how this initiative developed, some of the obstacles in getting funds into Gaza, and the benefits of this style of mutual aid at this particular time.

Hadeel Assali is a Palestinian who grew up in the United States, yet for her first twenty-two years she held the status of a stateless refugee before finally being granted U.S. citizenship. She is currently an anthropologist researcher and lecturer at Columbia University, and her work focuses on colonialism. Since November 2023, she and a small group of family and friends (and a huge community of supporters) have been running the Gaza Mutual Aid Solidarity project to provide support to those enduring the effects of genocide. They have provided clean water, food, tents, clothing, and cash to families. They have also provided clay pots and ovens, purchased a vehicle for members of their team in Gaza, repaired a sewer system, installed a new water

Figure 1. Abu Shukri poses with the new logo of the project, printed in Gaza. He is in the new pottery "studio" of the displaced Atallah family, in a tent in al-Jura displacement camp, al-Zawayda (middle area), 28 October 2024. Photo by Shukri Alayan.

line and funded medical workers and civil defense crews. The collective has raised over $750,000 to support the various projects.

The work of this mutual aid project is a direct form of emergency response and a testament to the strength of Palestinian community ties and international solidarity. It also demonstrates a different set of priorities and rationales: for example, from using indigenous clay from the ground of Gaza – known for its purifying qualities – to make water holders, to creating an economic ecosystem based on subsistence and dignity that strengthens social relations amid all the destruction. The capacity for love and generosity as seen in the stories Hadeel Assali shared with us here illustrate that, despite all attempts against it, hope remains alive and is actively nourished by the labor of people committed to affirming life.

Considering the difficulty Palestinians have expressed around writing and finding the words during this time of genocide, and Hadeel's responsibilities of supporting family members in Gaza every day, we decided to conduct the conversation using a series of WhatsApp voice notes, which were then transcribed and edited by Hadeel and the editors of *JQ*.

Figure 2. Amina Awad with the body of her son Muhammad Ahmad Awad, killed by a sniper on 21 January 2024. Amina found Muhammad's body in a mass grave at Nasser hospital in Khan Yunis, 25 April 2024. Photo by Abdullah Awad – Muhammad's son and Amina's grandson.

Interview with Hadeel Assali

Lucy Garbett: Hadeel, thank you for making the time to speak to us about this important initiative, despite such difficult circumstances. Over the past year Palestinians have been saying over and over that there are no words to describe the genocidal circumstances being faced by the Palestinian people and everyone in Gaza. At the same time, I think it is important we find the ways and the words to document not just the atrocities but also community initiatives that support life, reconstruction, and dignity, and the ability to remain. Could you talk us through how your Gaza Mutual Aid Solidarity project first started?

Hadeel Assali: The project started through my mother's family – the matrilineal line. They live mostly in Maghazi refugee camp [middle area] and other areas of the southern Gaza Strip. One of my dearest great aunts, her name is Amina, lives in Khan Yunis. She is a corpse washer and someone long committed to community service. At the beginning of the current genocide, I was checking in with her every so often and asking if there was anything I could do or if I could send her some funds. At the time, she told me they were fine, but that there were families from the north displaced

around them whose conditions were very difficult. So I sent her some money, and she started distributing small amounts of cash to them and carefully documenting it. Soon after, she herself was displaced to Mawasi in Khan Yunis, but she and her family continued mutual aid work in their camp until today.

Another very close relative, Muhammad Alyan, who goes by Abu Shukri, is a kind of jack-of-all-trades and a well-connected project and construction manager. When we started in November 2023, he was still in his home in Rafah and decided that they should run a *tikkiya* (soup kitchen) to cook for all the displaced people around them. He also immediately started distributing water and found people to make clay ovens for purchase and distributed them. He used to live in the Brazil neighborhood of Rafah, but was eventually displaced to Maghazi camp.

I initially launched an online fundraising page on GoFundMe with a modest goal of $10,000, which was very rapidly met. I increased it to $25,000, and eventually expanded to other platforms and grew our team. That is how it all began, sending funds between my aunt in Khan Yunis, and Abu Shukri in Rafah. We ended up sending a lot more to Abu Shukri because he had more capacity as a former construction manager. He has four sons and several relatives working with him whom he has put to work. We also have two teams in the north in Gaza City. One is also a relative, Husam, and one is a very knowledgeable journalist named Abd al-Ghani al-Shami who we met by chance through family friends. All of them have been doing incredible work under the most unimaginable conditions.

On the U.S. side, the team quickly grew to include my mother Nahida Saker – who became the backbone of the effort – my sister Amanda Assali, our close family friend Nora Ashour, and recently Layla Feghali joined our small team. We also grew a very committed and consistent network of supporters who became friends. Of course, this is all unpaid labor on our part. As exhausted as I have been, I am awed by the rest of our crew – both here and in Gaza. This is not pretty or prestigious work, and it comes with so many challenges. So why do it? We reflected on it as a group and realized how quickly it has made us go back and connect with the local community to organize and get things done. These spaces of solidarity and all the new relations that have been forged helped all of us feel less isolated and gave us the push to carry on.

LG: Millions have been raised for humanitarian projects in Gaza, but Gazans have also critiqued this funding due to inflated overhead costs of large organizations that leaves much less funds reaching the people on the ground and with the speed that is needed. Mutual aid disbursed through these kinship and community networks, while of course with their critiques and issues, circumvent this and mean much more reaches people on the ground and in ways these large organizations simply cannot cover. Could you give us a sense of what sorts of initiatives Gaza Mutual Aid Solidarity has managed to do?

HA: We have had to stay very flexible and not insist on what funds are used for due to the rapidly changing conditions – and the simple fact that we are not there on the ground to dictate to them. They know their immediate needs best, and sometimes there are more longer-term needs. The more immediate needs include food and water

distribution, a soup kitchen, clothes, tents, medicine, and occasional cash assistance to underpaid or unpaid civil defense crews and to families in need.

We funded local tailors to make over three hundred pairs of trousers, since what is available in the markets have exorbitant prices. Other times we tried to do more long-term infrastructure work, such as installing and repairing water wells and solar powered pumps in the north of Gaza city and in other middle areas. We funded the repair of a raw sewage system in the Saftawi area of Gaza City. We contributed to the conversion of a diesel plant to use plastic waste as fuel, we funded the repairs and fuel for a desalination plant in Rafah, and later we funded solar power panels to power refrigerators in the summer months. We distributed ovens for cooking, and we are supporting displaced potters from the north to help expand their operations so that they can make more of the wares and containers people need for daily life.

LG: This is all very inspiring and important, especially the creative ways people have been forced to develop to sustain themselves through such devastation. In Palestine the term *faz'a* is used sometimes to describe a community response to a particular need – be it collecting clothing, mattresses, cash distribution, or other needs. Countless families and other Palestinians are trying to find ways to send funds – cash to print books or other needs. We have seen so many of these types of initiatives set up through social media and online fundraising platforms.

I spoke to an elderly Greek-Palestinian woman in her nineties in Jerusalem just last week. Her fanily were made refugees in 1948 when they were forced out of their home in the Greek Colony in the western part of Jerusalem. They were living in cramped conditions in Church properties in the Old City and her mother decided to set up a soup kitchen. She got the supplies from the Red Cross and ran it twice a day for the refugee families as a refugee herself. It made me think of all the soup kitchens and food distributions being run all over Gaza and how throughout the long history of catastrophes Palestinians have faced there has always been a community response from both inside and outside of Palestine of Palestinians insisting to live, support one another, re-build and resist. Just in our last issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* 99 on Food and Foodways we had a piece by Hani al-Madhoun on the Gaza Soup Kitchen run by his brother Mahmud al-Madhoun and in the period of publication his brother was targeted and assassinated by the Israeli army. The targeting of doctors, professors, community workers, and the entire fabric of society is a brutal demonstration of the unprecedented nature of this genocide.

Could you tell us more about the food distribution and soup kitchen activities that you have all been doing?

HA: As for food distribution, that can happen in a few ways. The first is a *tikkiya* – the distribution of cooked food. In Rafah, Abu Shukri organized a tikkiya for several months and hired people to cook. At one point he had it going in multiple locations in Rafah and sometimes he would take the big pots to displacement camps around them to distribute there. He had one just beneath his house for a long time. Giant pots are typically used for weddings and other big gatherings, so they were available and put to use. He has since been displaced to Maghazi camp, and now he hired a young baker to help bake

and distribute bread, and he is starting a new *tikkiya.* In the north, we also sponsored food distribution several times, but there we have smaller capacity. Similarly, my aunt in the Mawasi area in Khan Yunis does smaller food distributions with her kids in the displacement camp they are in called al-Hurriya camp – often canned goods, *zayt* and *za'tar*, and occasional cooked foods like *sumaqiyya* (a spiced stew of greens and sumac).

This table might give an idea of the matching funds required for certain projects:

Project	Matching funds
Solar powered pumps and water well repair in the Saftawi neighborhood north of Gaza City to serve one thousand people	$15,000
Sponsor food distribution in the north	$100,000
Cash distribution to over two hundred families	$200,000
Daily bread and ten thousand liters of water distribution	$120,000
Diesel plant conversion	$3,000
Repair and fuel for desalination plant in Rafah	$3,500
Three hundred clay ovens made and distributed	$18,000
Soup kitchen daily in Rafah for nearly three months	$30,000
Solar energy panels for refrigeration of water and chicken	$6,000
More than one hundred tents	$70,000
Fuel costs for approximately 150 family evacuations from Rafah	$30,000
Five wheelchairs for amputees	$1,500
Medical treatment and prosthesis for about thirty bombing victims	$4,500
Medicine for several patients	$1,000
Support for orphaned children	$1,000
Clothes: three hundred pairs of jeans and sweatpants made by local tailors	$3,000
Food distribution: ten kilograms of vegetables and two kilograms of chicken for approximately one hundred displaced families	$20,000
Eid celebrations	$2,000
Eid money distribution for children	$5,000
School support (meals and supplies) in Mawasi Khan Yunis	$10,000
Small cash stipends for unpaid and poorly paid civil defense crews, clinic workers, and mortuary workers in north and central Gaza	$10,000
Installation of water well and pump in northern Gaza	$8,000
Repair of raw sewage system in northern Gaza	$5,000
Equipment for displaced potters (and pottery distributions)	$25,000

LG: You have also launched a specific campaign around pottery and clay. Could you say more about this?

HA: At the beginning of the genocide, fuel supplies were cut by Israel. In order to cook, many turned to clay ovens. In Gaza, clay is plentiful and naturally occurring in the soils, and there is a very long history of pottery – at least since the time of the Canaanites. It is an ancient custom and potters are famous for it in the Gaza Strip. In fact my own father's extended family were potters in Gaza City in *Harit al-Fawakhir* but their place of work was bombed. However, we discovered that the Atallah family – one of the largest potter families who have been making traditional ceramics for many generations – was displaced to the middle area and started making pottery there, especially traditional vessels that people needed after being displaced and leaving so much behind.

We launched a campaign to distribute traditional vessels that are everyday necessities for displaced families and to keep a cultural craft alive in defiance of Israel's relentless effort to destroy everything Palestine represents. Distributions include the *zibdaya* (a mortar and cooking vessel that is vital to the local cuisine), *qalan mai* (a jug to keep water cool), and *qidra* (a cooking vessel for spiced rice).

Potters in Gaza City used to be equipped with extruders for processing the clay, powered wheels for throwing vessels, and gas kilns for firing them. After their displacement, they set up a makeshift studio in a tent and built a wood-fire kiln out of mud. They were able to find local deposits of mineral-rich clay, which fires into russet earthenware. Potters globally joined together in a collective called "Potters for Palestine," and helped us raise over $20,000 to support the potters and the distribution of wares. With those funds, we were able to also buy for them an extruder and solar panels for power. We have done several distributions of *zibdiyas,* and now we are hoping to try and have them make clay water filters since clay has the ability to clean some toxins from water (and soil). I am also hoping that when it comes time to rebuild, we will encourage the use of local clay rather than concrete,

Figure 3. Makeshift kiln created by the Atallah family in their displacement camp in al-Zawayda area, 3 October 2024. Photo by Abu Shukri.

which is environmentally very destructive.

LG: There are so many inspiring posts on your Instagram account that highlight the real innovation and resilience of Gazans to find ways to continue. One that stood out was Abu Shukri's water tank being hit by a tank missile which also injured his son Rami and patching it up the next day using fiberglass. Do you have any other anecdotes you want to share since starting this initiative?

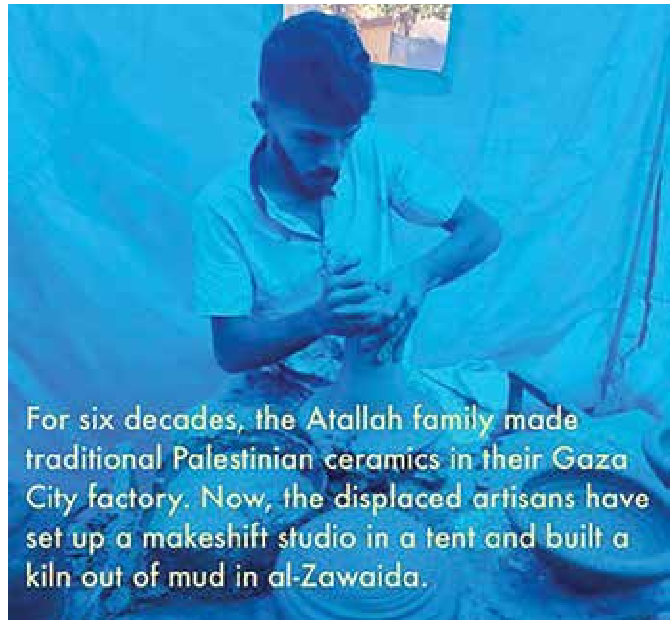

Figure 4. Image and text created by Potters for Palestine for their fundraising push, featuring Ja'far Atallah; online at givebutter.com/pots4pal (accessed 15 January 2025).

HA: One is a story of love in the time of genocide. Before they were displaced from Rafah, Abu Shukri and his wife Nisreen were housing one hundred and twenty displaced people. During those difficult days, [their son] Shukri fell in love with one of the young women staying in their home. Now they are proud to announce that they are engaged to be married.

Abu Shukri has adopted two boys whose parents were martyred and is helping care for three other children who are orphaned. One of the boys will soon be coming to the United States for a prosthetic leg. Also the potter, Ja'far Atallah was recently married and asked Abu Shukri to stand with him.

We are seeing new relations forged all over the place through this mutual aid work. I think this is important to highlight as Israel's hope is to sever all of these relations. Of course, this is working through their genocidal acts, but it turns out we are more rhizomatic – connecting with roots and shoots and without hierarchy – than they ever imagined.

LG: So many people in Gaza have become a target for what they do, most recently we saw this with Mahmoud al-Madhoun, the chef at the heart of the Gaza Soup Kitchen who was assassinated by Israeli forces. We have seen doctors, nurses, lecturers, anyone who is forming the basic fabric of society assassinated since the start of the genocide – how does everyone you work with manage this risk?

HA: We try to tell people on the ground to be careful, that maybe they have done enough and they are putting themselves at risk. They respond that they cannot just sit at home doing nothing. They are witnessing so many people who are in much worse situations than

they are experiencing, and so this work gives them a very strong sense of purpose. It also enables them to meet so many people they might normally not have known and to forge new relations. Initially, because we were so afraid they would be targeted, we would cover their faces before posting to Instagram. However, now they have taken over the Instagram account and are posting openly about their work. I think they know the areas to avoid, but also they know that no place and no one is entirely safe. I naively thought that Mahmoud al-Madhoun and the Gaza Soup Kitchen crew would be safe because of all the media coverage of their work, but sadly even that did not protect him.

LG: Could you talk us through that process of raising funds among the Palestinian community in the United States and especially some of the obstacles with raising and sending funds?

HA: There were many obstacles and challenges in getting the money in. There has been a lot of fear regarding sending international money transfers because of the history of criminalization of this in the past. One such example is the Holy Land five.[2] The United States State Department's list of foreign terrorist organizations includes every single Palestinian faction with the exception of the non-military wing of Fatah. There was fear that as Arabs or as Muslims we would be seen as or we could be accused of sending material aid or material support to those groups. I think that's why a lot of people prefer to go the non-profit route because they seem to think that it offers some level of protection rather than sending families the funds directly.

At the beginning Western Union would work sometimes and we would have to search to find the best rates. Eventually it became evident that lots of people were sending money to their families in Palestine. Countless families here in the U.S. were sending thousands and thousands to their relatives to pay the evacuation fees [to Egypt] or just to survive the exorbitant prices in Gaza right now. I noticed that it was mainly older Palestinian women like my mother and her cousins who were transferring the money through to their kinship networks. While the risk was there, this generation of women said, "Let the FBI come to my house. I'm sending money to my family." So while not everyone is willing to do it, my mother, my sister, a couple of friends are doing money transfers directly to accounts with Bank of Palestine and everyone has decided this is a risk we are willing to take.

The issue has always been liquidity, not just the transfers. In the north of Gaza for example liquidity takes at least a 20 percent cut (lately we have been hearing even higher percentages). In the middle area it is less than the north but still a significant amount, which is something we can't quite get around. Except, for example, Abu Shukri can do bulk orders directly from traders and pay them electronically to avoid dealing with the liquidity issue. We are also facing obstacles of extreme inflation. Many in Gaza are blaming the traders, the *tujar,* and accusing them of raising prices to take advantage of the situation. There are many awful stories that we are hearing. But we are not there on the ground and we can't control these things, so we just try to keep going as we are and do what we can.

LG: As you have said, the Palestinian community in exile and outside of Palestine play

such an important role in raising and sending these funds. This is nothing new, certainly in the first intifada there was a similar initiative from the Palestinian community in the United States to "sponsor" families inside Palestine with their running costs. But I also don't want to lose sight of the internationalist part and you have raised many funds outside the Palestinian community. Can you tell me a little more about the fundraisers that have been taking place beyond kinship networks?

HA: The very first fundraiser that someone did for us was a dumpling artist in Mexico City. The breadth and creativity of the fundraisers has been surprising and very uplifting – it really helped keep us going both financially and emotionally. There was a supper club in London, a music party in Korea, book auctions, tattoo raffles, ultra-marathon runners, all to raise funds.

Shakira's niece is an artist and made prints to raise funds for us. She is just one of the many artists and artisans who have made prints, paintings, quilts, pottery, jewelry, naturally dyed clothing, candles, beaded charms, and furniture. There has been real creativity with food: a Salvadoran friend had a "Pupusas for Palestine" fundraiser; she, her mother and her aunt cooked their tails off in San Antonio. There were many fundraising dinners that I wish I could have attended; there is an Indian chef in Marseille who sold a special Chai blend, bartenders in Brooklyn who donated their tips, a confectioner in Oakland who made special chocolates. There were also film screenings and other cultural gatherings that donated proceeds to us (and other mutual aid efforts). Another moving example was a group of Asian artists who held a water ceremony to honor the murdered children in Gaza.[3]

The creativity and care is beyond what we imagined and way too much to list here. I personally have learned so much from them. They have affirmed for us that we must be doing something right if the work is being buoyed by all these people who find the most creative ways they can to sustain life in the face of genocidal annihilation.

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Endnotes

1 See Lisa Bhungalia, *Elastic Empire: Refashioning War through Aid in Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2023).

2 Several months after 9/11, the U.S. government froze the assets of the Texas-based Holy Land Foundation for Relief and Development, the largest Islamic charity in the U.S., and charged leaders with providing material support that benefited Hamas, a proscribed organization, based on humanitarian aid funds that HLF sent to zakat charitable committees in the West Bank and Gaza. Five men were sentenced to 15 to 65 years in prison. For information on the legal case and concerns, see online at charityandsecurity.org/litigation/holy-land-foundation/ (accessed 23 January 2025).

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The Destruction of Sports Infrastructure in Gaza

Issam Khalidi

Abstract

Gaza has long been a center of sports activity in Palestine. This essay gives a brief history of sports in Gaza, including major sporting clubs, and Palestinian sporting connections with international bodies. Since October 2023, athletes and sports infrastructure have been impacted by the genocidal assault that Israel has inflicted on Gaza's people and its built environment. In addition to the athletes and coaches who have been killed, sports clubs and arenas have been destroyed, and stadiums used for mass arrests and mass graves. The essay also addresses the silence by international sporting bodies, including the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), with regard to the destruction of sports infrastructure and genocide in Gaza more generally.

Keywords:

Sports; genocide; youth; football; stadiums; FIFA; Gaza.

It is not only killings, massacres, torture, and starvation that constitute genocide, but also erasure of history and identity, and the destruction of cultural heritage. This includes Palestinian sports, which have been an integral part of Palestinian culture for over a century. In addition to enriching Palestinian culture, sports have been linked to the national identity of the Palestinian people and the moral development of Palestinian youth. Participation in sports has been seen as instilling a spirit of sharing, a willingness to give time and effort, a sense of self-sacrifice, a commitment to moral values of fairness and discipline,

and a love for their homeland, Palestine. Further, sport has served an important role, to strengthen bonds among Palestinian youth. Palestinian sports culture is diverse and intertwined with other cultural dimensions, as well as economics, politics, and the social world of Palestinians. Palestinian conditions have been unfavorable to the development of sports for a long time. However, at the same time, sports, acting as soft power, have played an important role in the Palestinian political landscape during the last few decades. For decades, Palestinian sports have been a nightmare for Israel because of their affirmation of Palestinian presence, as sports clubs use the name of Palestine, the Palestinian flag, and the Palestinian people, and athletes compete on their behalf.

Sports in Gaza's Modern History

Sports flourished in Gaza since the 1920s. In March 1927, the Jaffa-based newspaper *Filastin* reported about a soccer game between the Orthodox Youth Club in Jaffa and the Gazan Youth Club, among the first athletic clubs established in Palestine: "What happened in Gaza recently was one of the most striking manifestations of this [sports] renaissance. Their patriotic spirit and affinity were evident during and after the game."[1] In 1934, the Gaza Sports Club was founded and other clubs were later formed in Gaza and Khan Yunis during the 1940s.

The center of gravity of Palestinian sports moved from Jaffa to Gaza after the Nakba. During the period of Egyptian administration in the Gaza Strip, there was a remarkable growth in a number of fields, including sports (which retained its Palestinian identity during this time).[2] From the early 1950s, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) also established service centers in Jabaliya, Rafah, Khan Yunis, al-Shati', al-Nusayrat, al-Burayj, and al-Maghazi camps, which became clubs with their own teams, participating in local and Arab championships and playing a leading role in the development of sports in Gaza. In 1962, the Gaza Sports Club was reestablished as the Palestinian Sports Federation for Football. Sports activists such as Elias Manna, Zaki Khayal, and Subhi Farah (who had been actively involved in the sports movement from the 1930s and 1940s) formed several sports federations to organize the majority of the games played at that time.

Palestine took part in the first Arab Games in 1953 and the third in Morocco in 1961. In 1966, Palestine participated in the Games of Emerging New Forces (GANEFO) in Phnom Penh. As part of the delegation, there was prominent Palestinian sports leader Zaki Khayal, as well as administrators Zuhayr al-Dabbagh and Elias Manna from Gaza. A Palestinian team was assembled, bringing together members from inside Palestine (including Gaza) and refugees in Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon.[3] Unfortunately, however, Palestinian sports federations were not accepted by most international federations (with the exception of table tennis and basketball, recognized in 1964 and 1965 respectively), based on the pretext that there is no state named Palestine (after consulting with the United Nations) and that the Gaza Strip is governed by

Egyptian administration and does not possess an independent status under the law.[4] Only in the 1990s did the Palestine Olympic Committee gain recognition from the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the Palestine Football Association joined the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) in 1995 and 1998, respectively.[5]

In the late 1970s, the Gaza Strip Association of Clubs (Rabitat al-Andiya) was formed. Gaza Strip and West Bank club associations cooperated with each other, and several football matches were played between the two associations.[6] Even after the Oslo accords, the Palestinian sports movement's center of gravity remained rooted in Gaza. Sports in Gaza was organized under the supervision of the Supreme Council for Youth and Sport. Despite the obstacles to Palestinian sports put in place by Israel's occupation, the sector grew until the Israeli siege on Gaza began in 2007. During this siege, the sports sector witnessed a decline due to Israeli restrictions as well as the political division between Fatah and Hamas. Since 2007, Israel also repeatedly targeted sports facilities, claiming they were being used to launch missiles. Despite this, around fifty-eight sports clubs were active in the Gaza Strip before 7 October 2023, with football teams competing in the first, second, and third divisions of the Gaza Strip Premier League.[7]

Israel's genocidal war has also caused significant destruction of sports infrastructure, following a pattern established since the 1948 Nakba. Hundreds of athletes and also coaches, sports leaders, and sports journalists have been killed and dozens of sports facilities have been destroyed – some accounts are that over 70 percent of the sports facilities located in the Gaza Strip have been destroyed – bringing about complete paralysis of all sports activities.[8] The full extent of destruction of and disruption to the sports sector is difficult to ascertain in conditions of ongoing genocide. However, the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, the Palestinian Football Association, and colleagues working in the sports sector in the Gaza Strip have managed to gather some data and make informed estimates regarding the current situation.

Loss of Life

Over 410 martyrs from the sports and scouting movements have been killed since the war began last October. The Palestinian Football Federation indicated in August 2024 that 297 child and youth footballers have been martyred since 7 October 2023.[9] Israel has targeted athletes in stadiums: a video clip broadcast by al-Jazeera on 10 July showed occupation forces bombing a group of displaced people while they played football in the yard of al-ʻAwda School in ʻAbasan al-Kabira.[10] There are hundreds of examples of the brutality of the occupation directed toward athletes, including torture and martyrdom. Frayj al-Hallaq, a veteran athlete and an Alzheimer's patient, was executed by Israeli occupation forces, and left to bleed to death in front of al-Shifa Hospital. Nagham Abu Samra, a Palestinian karate champion and member of the Palestinian national team, was critically injured in the bombing of her home in al-

Nusayrat camp and died after one month in a coma. Long-distance runner and athletic coach Majed Abu Maraheel, who in 1996 became the first Palestinian to compete in the Olympic Games, died of kidney failure in Gaza, unable to receive treatment as a result of the siege and destruction of the Gazan health system.

In Gaza, clubs mourned the loss of cadres, players, athletes, and coaches. The Friendship (Sadaqa) Sports Club in Gaza City lost twenty members to Israel's bombs, and fifteen martyrs were killed when Israeli forces bombed the Ittihad al-Shuja'iyya Club.[11]

Arab sports communities also expressed their support and condolences for martyred Palestinian athletes. The Jordanian al-Wehdat Club grieved for the martyr Mohammed Barakat, formerly of the Palestinian national soccer team, and honored Hani al-Musaddar, a former player and assistant coach of the Palestinian Olympic soccer team, with a special tribute last June. Before he was martyred, during the time of intense raids and clashes in Khan Yunis, Barakat broadcast his last will and testament by posting a video to social media platforms: "I ask for forgiveness and prayers. My mother and father, beloved and dear to me, I entrust you to God … These might be my last words and the last time you see me." He then recited verses from the holy Qur'an.[12]

Destruction of Infrastructure

According to the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports in Gaza, material losses relating to sports have reached twenty million dollars or more as a result of the destruction of stadiums and various sports facilities.[13]Airstrikes, artillery shelling, and the ground invasion of the Gaza Strip have completely destroyed an estimated fifty clubs. Twelve club headquarters have been razed to the ground in Gaza province, leaving no trace behind. Seven clubs were bulldozed in the northern Gaza Strip and headquarters of five clubs were directly shelled in the central region. Six club headquarters were destroyed during the ground invasion of Khan Yunis.[14] The headquarters of the Gaza Sports Club and most of its facilities, including a football field, tennis courts, and a multipurpose indoor hall, were completely demolished. Shelling has leveled the headquarters of the Friends Equestrian Club as well as the Jabaliya Services Club. The Sadaqa Sports Club also paid a heavy price, as occupation forces destroyed the club's headquarters, the main stadium, and the indoor hall.[15]

In addition to clubs, the headquarters of the Palestinian Olympic Committee, the Palestinian Football Association, and the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports have been demolished, as have many stadiums. According to the Supreme Council for Youth and Sports, the most notable stadiums destroyed in northern Gaza and Gaza City are: Palestine Stadium, Yarmuk Stadium (built in 1951), Bayt Hanun Municipal Stadium, Bayt Lahiya Stadium, and the Gaza Sports Club.[16] Israel also bombed and destroyed the United Nations Development Program Stadium in Rafah, Khan Yunis Municipal Stadium and Sports City, al-Nusayrat Municipal Stadium and the baseball and softball stadium in al-Shati' Camp.

Those stadiums that remain standing have been transformed by the assault on Gaza. The Rafah Municipal Stadium was converted into a field hospital, and the headquarters of the Rafah Services Club became a distribution center for humanitarian aid to the displaced people in Rafah.[17] The Martyr Muhammad al-Durra Stadium has become a shelter for displaced Palestinians. In a report for al-Jazeera, Nelly al-Masry described the stadiums as places where sports have come to an end and fans' cheers have gone silent, replaced by the pain and groans of the displaced, forced to leave their homes and seek refuge in a stadium to survive.[18] Israel has also turned stadiums in the Gaza Strip into prisons, torture centers, and execution grounds. At the Yarmuk Stadium, dozens of civilians were forced to undress in the open. Dirt stadiums, including one adjacent to the Indonesian Hospital, to the north of Gaza, have been turned into mass graves.

Other Destructive Effects

Like millions of others of Palestinians in Gaza, athletes have also been subject to the loss of livelihoods and homes. This war of extermination brought about a complete cessation and paralysis of sports activities. More than six thousand players, coaches, and sports cadres have lost their only source of income. They rely on humanitarian aid and cannot afford food and medicine for their families. Players, coaches, and club cadres have also been denied the opportunity to represent Palestine in recent Arab and international championships due to the war.[19] Many athletes, like others, were forced to leave their homes and neighborhoods, some of which were completely destroyed. In an interview with Nelly al-Masry, footballer Muhammad Silmi, who played for Egyptian al-Ahly Club, Ittihad Shuja'iyya, and Ittihad Bayt Hanun, summarized the conditions that so many athletes in Gaza endure:

> I was forced to flee my home in the Shuja'iya neighborhood in Gaza City due to the escalating conflict. I never dreamed that I would be displaced from the place where I have experienced the most beautiful moments of my life. This is the place where I have scored goals and celebrated with fans. However, whenever I enter that place, I feel distressed and suffering.
>
> When the war started on October 7, the [Gaza] Premier League was still in its beginning. I played against my former team, Ittihad Shuja'iya. I felt heartbroken because of my old teammates, with whom I had the greatest memories of my life. I felt a lot of sadness for them. As a consequence, all my dreams and ambitions were destroyed, and I was affected psychologically, physically, and spiritually.[20]

When al-Silmi was asked about his sixth displacement with his family between Gaza City and areas of the central governorate, he said, "I ultimately settled in al-Durra

Stadium, which is located in the middle of the Strip. My only concern at the beginning was to provide a tent for my family. I wanted to protect my children from the cold."[21]

FIFA and Genocide

The Palestinian Football Association is calling on FIFA and the International Olympic Committee to take a strong stand and hold the Israeli occupation accountable for the genocidal war going on in Gaza.[22] The Palestinian Football Association sent a draft resolution to the FIFA Congress in Bangkok on 17 May 2024 to hold Israel responsible for violations of Palestinian sports rights and to expel it from FIFA.[23] FIFA President Gianni Infantino, however, has rejected calls for a vote on the issue of expelling Israel from FIFA. He claimed that a legal assessment would be conducted as soon as the FIFA Council meets to discuss the allegations. Initially, the meeting was supposed to take place at the end of July, but it was then pushed to after the Paris Olympics, then to the end of August, and later rescheduled for the end of October. By postponing the request four times, FIFA has attempted to avoid making a fair decision in favor of the Palestinian Football Association. FIFA has long claimed a neutral position on the Israel-Palestine "conflict," though it is obvious that any party that is neutral on this issue is complicit in Israel's extermination war on the Gaza Strip and must be held accountable for its actions.

Both FIFA and Israel claim that the Palestinian Football Association is exploiting sports for political purposes. Sports and politics cannot be separated. No other activity seems able to evoke nationalistic and patriotic feelings as sports can. Furthermore, both FIFA and Israel use sport in politics when it serves their interests, even as they criticize the Palestinian Football Association when it challenges their interests.[24]

Conclusion

Will it be possible to rebuild the destroyed and damaged sports infrastructure? And will sports in the Gaza Strip ever be the same as it was before the deaths of more than four hundred athletes and sports leaders, in addition to the destruction of the infrastructure? The answers to these questions are challenging, and speculating about the Gaza Strip's political future is particularly difficult at this stage. Any recovery will be tough, but not impossible. Sports may not return to their former glory. However, as demonstrated throughout history, every time Israel attempts to destroy the Palestinian people, their history and culture come back stronger and more resilient than before. Among the many characteristics that distinguish our people is their ability to weather and recover from the harsh blows dealt to them. This is what we saw in the Gaza Strip after the Nakba. More recently, in 2023, the Palestinian national football team reached the second round of the Asian Cup for the first time in its history, despite the war of extermination to which Palestinians have been subjected. It also reached the final round of the World Cup qualifiers for the first time. Palestine participated in the

2024 Paris Olympics with the largest sports delegation since it began competing in the Olympics, and ʻUmar Yasir Hantuli qualified in taekwondo becoming the second Palestinian ever to qualify for the Olympics through qualification and points.

Sports in the Gaza Strip has a long history and roots that stretch back decades, demonstrating steadfastness against the ravages of war. Despite occupation and its obstacles, Palestinian sports has continued to grow and progress. Israel's destruction of Palestinian sports may inspire Palestinian athletes to compete in the future and fight in the sports arena as a means of proving themselves. Certainly they will work hard to achieve their desired success. At the end of the day, the international community's solidarity and support – as well as the Arab community's support – in response to the suffering of our people in Palestine will have a significant impact on the rebuilding of the Palestinian sports movement and its infrastructure in Palestine.

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LETTER FROM JERUSALEM

The Battle for Armenian Jerusalem

Kegham Balian

Abstract

In this letter from Jerusalem, Kegham Balian shares a first-hand testimony from the Save the Armenian Quarter Movement (Save the ArQ) in Jerusalem. In July 2021, a secretive deal was made to lease a large tract of the Armenian Quarter to an allegedly settler-backed organization and private company called Xana Gardens Ltd. The deal leased the historic Cows' Garden and other parts of the quarter (a total of 11,500 square meters equalling 25 percent of the Armenian Quarter) for a duration of ninety-eight years to build a luxury hotel. The Save the ArQ Movement began in May 2023 to defend and preserve the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. It galvanized support within the community from people of all ages and generated unprecedented unity.

Keywords:

Armenian Quarter; Jerusalem; Christian community; dispossession; Cows' Garden; church; Armenian Diaspora.

In the 2005 epic film, *Kingdom of Heaven*, the crusader Balian of Ibelin comes face to face with Salah al-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub at the entrance of Jerusalem and asks, "What is Jerusalem worth?" to which the charismatic leader answers "Nothing!" as he walks back toward his army before turning briefly and stating, "Everything!"

Jerusalem is worth nothing and everything. Impossible to quantify, impossible to put a price on – an intricate and ever-changing tableau marked by the many civilizations that have inhabited it. It is "nothing" in the

sense that it is just a city – that is, its physical worth is negligible compared to its immense symbolic and spiritual significance, representing the pinnacle of religious and cultural importance for multiple faiths, making it, inevitably, a focal point of intense conflict and reverence. This duality captures the essence of the struggle over Jerusalem, illustrating that the city's value lies not just in its tangible assets but also in what it represents to those who seek to possess it.

Figure 1. The Flag of Artsakh in the Cows' Garden, Armenian Quarter, Old City of Jerusalem, 28 December 2023. Photo by Vince Kahkejian.

The Armenian presence in Jerusalem embodies that truth. When Armenia adopted Christianity as an official state religion in the fourth century it led to the flocking of the faithful to the Holy Land, making it the oldest Armenian Diaspora in the world. Salah al-Din himself – some seven hundred years later – drafted a writ instructing Muslims not to harm Armenians when he recaptured Jerusalem from the Crusaders in 1187, a document still preserved to this very day within the archives of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

More than five centuries later, at a time of great financial uncertainty and rising debts, the Armenian Patriarch Gregory the Chainbearer (1715–1749) wore chains around his neck and travelled the globe in order to raise enough funds to repay the debts. He not only achieved his objective but was able to expand the perimeter of the Armenian Quarter – buying land and properties all around the Old City.

The Armenian Quarter has been a target in recent years of settler attacks on Armenian restaurants, assaults on clergy through spitting and beatings, graffiti on the walls of the quarter calling for death to Arabs, Christians, and Armenians, and verbal abuse of Armenians in the streets as they try to walk home. Indeed, this is but a microcosm of wider assaults on Christian presence in Jerusalem.

In the midst of these rising attacks, on 8 July 2021, a secretive deal was made to lease away 25 percent of the Armenian Quarter to an allegedly settler-backed organization and private company called Xana Gardens Ltd. It was signed by Archbishop Nourhan Manougian, the current Armenian Patriarch of Jerusalem, Archbishop Sevan Gharibian, the Grand Sacristan, and Father Baret Yeretsian, the former director of the real estate department. The deal leased the historic Cows' Garden and other parts of the quarter (a total of 11,500 square meters, which equals 25 percent of the quarter) for a duration of ninety-eight years to build a luxury hotel.

The hotel development company Xana Gardens is headed by majority shareholder Daniel Rothman (also known as Rubinstein), an Australian-Jewish investor, and George Warwar, an Arab with Israeli citizenship and the second largest shareholder in the company. While the deal remained the subject of rumor and speculation within the community, a few months later on 15 November 2021 seventeen members of the St. James Brotherhood (the governing order of the Armenian Patriarchate) signed an internal letter to the Patriarchate condemning the deal and claiming it violated internal procedures.

In a further shocking revelation, the value of the transaction was a mere $2 million-lump-sum payment with an annual rent of $300,000 in the event a luxury hotel is built. Furthermore, should the hotel register a negative revenue, the difference is deducted from the annual rent. The orchestrator of the deal, the disgraced Fr. Baret, claimed it was a beneficial deal for the Patriarchate. However, when a 50-square-meter apartment in Jerusalem costs approximately between $270,000 and $400,000, that statement alone further corroborates this treasonous transaction. One local Armenian remarked, "A falafel stand on that same property would have raked in more revenue!"

After much work, the community managed to obtain a copy of the agreement through international and Armenian lawyers in mid-2022. Facing increasing pressure, the Holy Synod of the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem convened on 6 May 2023 and unanimously declared Fr. Baret Yeretzian (now Khatchig Yeretzian) defrocked. The former real estate director was disgraced for illegally leasing the Cows' Garden. A few weeks later, he was ordered to vacate his residence within the Armenian Convent. A large crowd of the Armenian community rushed to oust him with chants of "traitor, traitor, traitor!" The Israeli police escorted Khatchig out of his home and put him in a taxi to Ben Gurion airport. He now resides in exile in the United States, shunned by the Armenian Diaspora at large. After the synod's meeting, on 11 May 2023, Jordan and the Palestinian Authority withdrew their recognition of Patriarch Nourhan Manougian on the grounds that he "mishandled culturally and historically significant Christian properties in Jerusalem's Armenian Quarter."[1]

The Save the ArQ Movement began on 10 May 2023 to defend and preserve the Armenian Quarter of Jerusalem. It galvanized support from all ages within the community and generated unprecedented unity. We didn't need orders, we didn't require directions, and without a word, a synergetic understanding gripped our beleaguered community. We knew, we understood: no corrupt land deals without the permission of the community. These lands belong to the Armenian people and only to the Armenian people. We organized weekly protests in the Grand Courtyard of the Armenian Quarter to demand the cancellation of the deal. We mounted a resonant media and PR campaign, creating our own narrative. The community finally had a united voice, and it was only getting louder. Journalists rushed to cover the demands of our struggle. Dignitaries, officials and heads of churches received us and stood by us in our righteous fight to reclaim what is ours.

On 26 October 2023, after months of weekly protests, the Armenian Patriarchate sent a cancellation letter to Xana Gardens. A few days later, on 5 November in an

open declaration of encroachment, a bulldozer drilled into the wall separating the Cows' Garden from the private parking of the Patriarchate. The community – men and women, young and old – gathered at the scene and witnessed an armed group with rifles and attack dogs attempting to forcefully seize our land. The group was comprised of Israeli settlers, led by the notorious Saadia Hershkop, a self-described hilltop settlement activist, Daniel Rubinstein, the Israeli-Australian businessman who is the majority share-holder of Xana Gardens, and George Warwar. The sight of guns would instinctively jolt most into compliance, into submission. Not us. We had no intention of abandoning our 1,700-year Armenian presence in Jerusalem. Motivated by this calling, a sacred duty to our spiritual homeland, we suppressed our fears and rallied to the Cows' Garden: "Bring our flags! Bring our tents!"

From that day on, we started barricading our land. The attacks increased, but so too did our resolve. We used the rubble from their destruction to fortify our encampment: rocks, barbed wire, metal fences, corroded satellite dishes, old furniture all became the raw material for our determination. Atop a pile of tarmac and wreckage amassed by the bulldozers of our oppressors, we raised the flag of Artsakh – not Nagorno-Karabakh, not Qarabağ, but Artsakh, the Armenian enclave ethnically cleansed by Azerbaijan in the fall of 2023. There, our brothers and sisters were subjected to the combined military might of Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Israel – our own were bombed into oblivion by drones, our churches desecrated, our soil ravaged by white phosphorus – all enabled by the empty placard of the "international community." In forty-four days, 150,000 Artsakhian Armenians were forcibly displaced. The destruction of Artsakh taught our generation something about the torment we saw in our parents' eyes: a palpable reminder of the potential for erasure from a land that had anchored us for more than one thousand years. With every facet of our identity under siege, Armenian Jerusalem could be idle no more. Not today, not tomorrow. We will honor our memory. Thus, the flag of one of our greatest failures as a people became the symbol of our resistance. We took a stand and planted it in the middle of the Cows' Garden.

Night after night, we took shifts guarding and monitoring the Cows' Garden. It took a crisis of this magnitude to sow the seeds of unity, but united we were. Families brought us food in support of our struggle. Young and old and across the Armenian political spectrum, left and right, put aside their ideological differences to create a united struggle for the fate of Jerusalemite Armenians. A letter was written by all Armenian clubs in the city against the deal, and the cost for waging our legal battle was raised in its entirety by the community both near and far. "What do you boys want? *Mjadarra* [rice and lentils]?" Hopig Marshalian would ask, a larger than life character whose family can be traced back seven hundred years, who Armenians call *Kaghkatsis* (locals in Armenian). "Khalas, salamtik, no need, thank you!" we would reply, to which she would retort with persistence, "Khalas, khalas. I'll bring it tomorrow!" We would gather around the table in the makeshift tent, as our youth eagerly listened to tales of a generation that witnessed the Armenian Genocide and arrived to Palestine as refugees in 1915; their sons and daughters integrated into society without comprising their Armenian identity – mastering craftsmanship,

photography, medicine, history, with notable figures such as *Doctora* Karkashian, a gentle yet stoic family doctor cherished over generations; Albert Aghazarian, world-renowned historian and interpreter; Stepan Der Vartanian, a goldsmith whose talents were commissioned by H. Stern; Puzant Markarian, a watchmaker whose unparalleled expertise was sought after by Swiss manufacturers; George Hintilian, a man with an encyclopedic knowledge of Jerusalem's history, an erudite presence in our community to this very day. Many in the community arrived in the aftermath of the Armenian genocide in 1915, and our own generation then witnessed Artsakh. As we listened to these stories, we saw the inherited pain and trauma in our elders' eyes, we saw the potential for our erasure and we weren't going to let it happen.

Figure 2. Armenian community and clergy standing in the face of an encroaching bulldozer from the Xana Gardens development company, November 2023. Photo by Zorab Krikorian.

“Your unity is your main asset!” said lawyers Eitan Peleg and Sami Ersheid, an Israeli and a Palestinian, respectively, working hand-in-hand with our movement, having mounted a class action lawsuit with over 380 signatories in order to annul this illegal land lease. This was a huge achievement and showed the unity of the Armenian community despite all divisions against this deal.

After nearly five hundred days of standing firm, there was no meaningful action from our Patriarch Nourhan Manougian. This is in stark contrast to the support of Israeli and Palestinian civil society organizations and the solidarity of the Latin and Greek Patriarchs who received us in their official capacities and made important statements.

“With the power at his disposal, he could have come down to the Armenian Patriarchate Road, put his chair in the middle of the one-way street, bolting himself to the ground, creating an impossible barrier to traffic, and demand the arrival of either the mayor of Jerusalem, Moshe Leon, or the president himself, Isaac Herzog, in order to swiftly resolve this catastrophe. But … that requires courage,” said Setrag Balian, my brother and co-founder of the Save the ArQ Movement.

Two court cases are currently in motion against the deal with Xana Gardens, one launched by the Armenian Patriarchate to cancel the deal, and the other, our class action by the Armenian community. Every time we asked the Patriarchate for information and every time we asked to combine our efforts in fighting the legal battle, we were met with empty promises and even emptier “reassurances.”

Instead, our community lawsuit argues that the bylaws and constitution of the Patriarchate do not give it the right to lease away properties for ninety-eight years. Our international and local legal teams: Kerkonian Dajani LLP comprised of Karnig Kerkonian, Garo Ghazarian, Elizabeth Al Dajani, and former Human Rights Defender of the Republic of Armenia (ombudsman) Arman Tatoyan, in tandem with our local legal team, including Daniel Seidemann, made this groundbreaking discovery. They found the *waqf* (trust endowment) that was registered in the Islamic Sharia Court of Jerusalem in the sixteenth century by the Armenian Patriarch Andreas and his nephew Patriarch Tavit. The following quote is from a document of the waqf deed translated from Ottoman Turkish that states the following:

> For the benefit of the children of his brothers who are present today and they are Bishop Tavit and Frankoz and Zachary, the children of his brother Oanis and Daniel and Thomas, the children of his brother Toma and Ishak son of his brother Boles and Reverend Estefian, our brother, all together, and after their deaths for the benefit of their children, and then their children’s children, and then their children’s children’s children, and every person born to them while they are alive and to the extent that they do not have an heir, the endowment will be transferred to the Armenian Christian community of Jerusalem.

There you have it. The beneficiary owners of the waqf are the Christian Armenian community of Jerusalem, whereas the Patriarch (and Patriarchate) is the custodian of

the waqf. The Patriarchate's role as custodian is to work as a protector of the properties for the interests of the community. This is one of the first organized movements in the country to hold the church accountable with regards to the management of its properties and the rights of its community. The existential battle for Armenian Jerusalem is far from over. It has only begun. The choice we have before us is very clear: Fight or slowly die.

Kegham Balian is a Jerusalemite Armenian writer, ceramist, and the communications director for Save The ArQ.

Endnotes

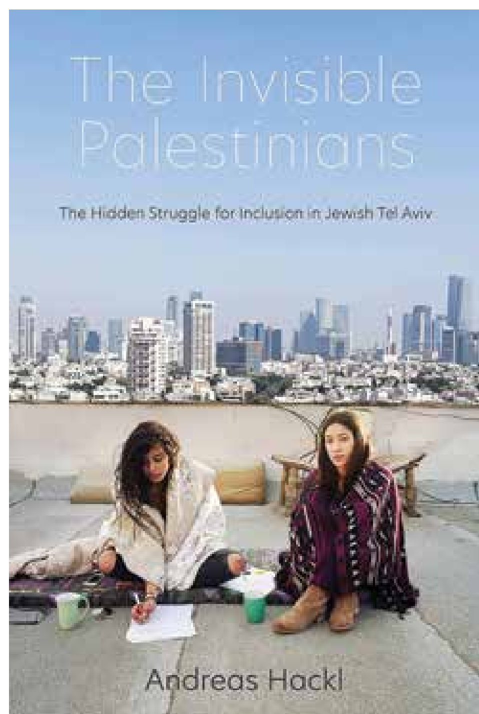
1 "Palestinian Authority, Jordan Withdraw Recognition of Jerusalem's Armenian Patriarch," The New Arab (6 December 2024), online at www.newarab.com/news/pa-jordan-withdraw-recognition-armenian-patriarch (accessed 21 December 2024).

REVIEW

Beyond Memory Activism: Palestinian Life in the Colonial City

Review by Yara Sa‘di-Ibraheem

Andreas Hackl, *The Invisible Palestinians: The Hidden Struggle for Inclusion in Jewish Tel Aviv* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022). 230 pages. $70.00 cloth; $28.00 paperback; $27.99 ebook.



Abstract

Andreas Hackl explores in his book, *The Invisible Palestinians: The Hidden Struggle for Inclusion in Jewish Tel Aviv*, the reality of Palestinians who, for a variety of reasons, live in Tel Aviv. Hackl argues that the apparent access granted to Palestinians to partake in the universal dimensions of urban life is contingent upon their continuous political and collective invisibility, which he labels "immersive invisibility." The author explores the manifestations of this bargain in seven chapters, displaying different groups of Palestinians and aspects of their lives. These include students, workers, and other groups of residents who often live in the city temporarily, some to benefit from the educational and occupational opportunities it offers, while others in search of personal freedom and anonymity. However, as some interviewees' narratives reveal, access to these benefits is conditioned on their invisibility, an issue that has not been previously explored.

Keywords:

Tel Aviv; Jaffa; Palestinians; conditional inclusion; immersive invisibility; Indigenous space; settler-colonial cities.

Pre-1948 Tel Aviv is frequently portrayed in scholarly literature as the emblematic city of Jewish settlers that embodies the aspirations of a new, urbanized Jewish society and serves as a symbol of the Zionist project's success and a model of capitalist modernity. It is often labeled the "White City" in contrast to Jaffa, the "Black City",

reflecting a spatial polarity between settler and native. This duality has only increased since the Nakba in 1948, when Tel Aviv expanded considerably through confiscating the lands of depopulated Palestinian villages surrounding the city. These villages were erased and replaced with Jewish residential neighborhoods, including Tel Aviv University campus and several parks.

In contrast to this prevalent binary representation, Andreas Hackl explores in his book, *The Invisible Palestinians: The Hidden Struggle for Inclusion in Jewish Tel Aviv*, the reality of Palestinians who, for a variety of reasons, live in Tel Aviv. By focusing on this group, he challenges colonial attempts of *urbs nullius*, a term used by Glen Coulthard to refer to urban spaces devoid of Indigenous people's presence. Instead, he views the city as a contested space within which Palestinians struggle to achieve urban citizenship, arguing "that the Palestinians' invisible struggles for inclusion and access in Tel Aviv provide an important complementary perspective on how indigenous peoples use and navigate settler-colonial spaces" (15). Epistemologically, he explores the city through the lived experiences and personal narratives of Palestinian residents – the marginalized "indigenous" others. Rightfully, this approach addresses Palestinians in Tel Aviv as a collective that is systematically denied political expression and is often disregarded in scholarly literature.

Drawing on over two years of ethnographic research conducted between 2012 and 2014, and a follow-up visit in 2017, Hackl critically examines the paradoxical nature of Palestinians' "conditional inclusion" in Tel Aviv, a city that, outwardly, projects a liberal ethos while simultaneously disregards Palestinians' presence. Hackl argues that Palestinian citizenship in Israel represents a form of settler-colonial control, where inclusion functions as a governance tool, and citizenship is used to manage and contain Indigenous people's claims to sovereignty and self-determination. In Tel Aviv, this dynamic is mirrored at the urban level; the apparent access granted to Palestinians to partake in the universal dimensions of urban life is contingent upon their "immersive invisibility," namely, continuous political and collective invisibility in work, education, and leisure among other aspects of life, the same components that Hackl underscores as key factors for urban minority citizenship. Hence, central to his analysis is the notion of the "invisibility bargain," according to which Palestinians' presence in Tel Aviv is premised on their contribution to the city's economy. Thus, they are granted "economic citizenship" as long as they remain "Good Arabs" by maintaining their political and social invisibility as Palestinians.

The author explores the manifestations of this bargain throughout seven chapters, presenting different groups of Palestinians and aspects of their lives. These include students, workers, and other groups of residents who often live in the city temporarily, some to benefit from the educational and occupational opportunities it offers, while others in search of personal freedom and anonymity. However, as some of Hackl's interviewees' narratives reveal, access to these benefits is conditioned on their invisibility.

Many of the Palestinians who come to Tel Aviv do so for work. Palestinian workers in various fields are simultaneously hypervisible and invisible, encountering the city as temporary residents who experience a profound sense of dislocation. For instance,

Palestinian citizens who work as drivers for Israeli bus companies are pulled into Tel Aviv for work while their mobility is confined to their towns. As Omar, a Palestinian bus driver states: "I can't take part in anything in Tel Aviv. The time is dead, I don't have any time. And getting a room is too expensive" (26). Likewise, Raed, a Palestinian software engineer, commutes daily from Nablus in the occupied West Bank to Tel Aviv through checkpoints and settlements, as his permit does not allow him to stay overnight. This dual perspective of citizens and non-citizens underscores how Israel's political economy differentially distributes mobility, by creating a complex web of limited pathways into the city. These pathways, in turn, reinforce the invisibility, disconnection, and dispersion of Palestinians within the urban space.

The other major draw of Palestinians into the city is education. This is addressed through the experiences of Palestinian students at Tel Aviv University, an institution built on the land of the destroyed Palestinian village of al-Shaykh Muwannis. Despite the university's material and discursive erasure of Palestinian history, many Palestinian students conceive the university as a site of political awakening and collective activism. However, they also encounter, often for the first time, the realities of this conditional inclusion. Hackl explores how, after being politically active on campus, these students employ strategies of invisibility and mimicry to navigate through their exclusions upon their graduation to find employment. This balancing act intertwines with additional tensions that they experience between the city and the anonymity and freedom it offers in contrast to their hometowns' sociability.

While Tel Aviv University might tolerate some degree of Palestinian political or cultural expression, the broader city imposes a stark contradiction between accepting individual professional success and disallowing public expression of Palestinian social life. This dissonance leads to a collective sense of anonymity, described by one middle-class Palestinian professional as: "We are anonymous together" (73). This collective anonymity also facilitates the journey of Palestinians through the city's nightlife and social scene, particularly the hidden spaces where Palestinian identity is both expressed and concealed, from underground bars hosting Arabic DJ nights to private apartment gatherings. Hackl explores the additional layers of invisibility faced by single Palestinian women and members of the LGBTQ community. For example, he depicts the experience of a Palestinian woman who initially tries to integrate into the LGBTQ scene but soon discovers the painful process of co-optation and erasure of Palestinian identity that often accompanies such attempts; eventually she had to choose to be either a Palestinian or a member of the Israeli LGBTQ community. Her rejection of these pressures reflects the broader struggle of the Palestinians to maintain their cultural and political identity in a city that demands their invisibility. Other experiences reveal that participating in Tel Aviv's social life often requires Palestinians to quietly accept the heavily politicized hegemonic Israeli entertainment culture.

Hackl also provides access to the experiences of Palestinian workers in the cultural sector by focusing on three Palestinian artists living and working in Tel Aviv: contemporary artist Anisa Ashkar, writer Raji Bathish, and actor and musician Mira

‘Awad. Although Indigeneity is not a central theme in all their work, their status as Palestinians shapes their artistic and personal lives in countless ways. While art has the potential to foster Indigenous resistance in some colonial contexts, the interviewees indicate that the liberal Israeli art scene often suppresses radical alternatives. In this context, art becomes a form of expression that, although not overtly political, navigates and reveals invisible aspects of identity, as it is used by Palestinian artists as a personal and alternative means of resistance. Hackl unveils how these artists navigate the tension between creative expression and the realities of living in Tel Aviv. In the case of Bathish, the situation of experiencing “exile at home,” facing both linguistic and political alienation, and continuously rejecting the role of a “token Arab” led him to leave the city. As he asserts: “It’s very hard to live in a place that is afraid of the language you think in” (129).

Hackl also gives attention to more explicit political dimensions, addressing various phenomena, such as protests, public events, and guided tours on the hidden Palestinian history of Jaffa and Tel Aviv. These activities disrupt the invisibility of Palestinians, but they are often met with strong public reactions. Yet, despite their focus on national issues and historical narratives, these efforts do not fully address the current realities of Palestinians in Tel Aviv. In addition, he explores the complexities in the relationships between local Palestinian Jaffawis and Palestinian residents in Tel Aviv from other regions. Jaffawi political activists expressed concern that middle-class Palestinian residents of Tel Aviv often view Jaffa romantically and are detached from its deep-rooted problems, such as violence and a housing crisis. They use the city merely as a gentrified leisure space, ignoring the systemic neglect by the authorities and the conditions the residents of Jaffa endure. Hackl builds on these themes and offers a critical ethnography of the idea that Palestinians’ pragmatic immersion in Tel Aviv can lead to civil coexistence. He shows how the city’s liberal façade often crumbles during Israel’s wars with the Palestinians such as the 2014 war on Gaza, as well as on Israeli national commemoration days. On such occasions, latent tensions and hostilities are exposed, shattering the illusion of depoliticized urban relations. Hackl concludes that the forced invisibility of Palestinians in Tel Aviv is unsustainable and represents a flawed approach to coexistence.

Narrating Tel Aviv through Palestinians’ personal stories can be a powerful method for decolonizing research on settler-colonial urban spaces. By centering Indigenous experiences of living within the colonial city, this book decolonizes the binary approach of “white” versus “black” cities. Moreover, while memory activism challenges dominant narratives intent on Palestinian erasure, it is often limited to the commemoration of Palestinian depopulated villages and does not address contemporary realities of Palestinians or offer a future vision beyond the demand for the return of the Palestinian refugees. Hackl’s approach goes beyond memory activism in studying contemporary Palestinian life in the colonial city. With much of the existing literature focused on historical processes of elimination, *The Invisible Palestinians*’s focus on contemporary structural power relations in settler-colonial cities fills an important gap.

The book's focus on current realities could have been enhanced by further situating them in their social, economic, and historical context. This could have provided a deeper understanding of particular issues raised in the book, such as Palestinian students in Israeli universities, middle-class living in Tel Aviv, and the transformations in Jaffa society over the past few decades. Such a social-historical contextualization could have facilitated an understanding of the scale and root of some events and phenomena mentioned. Nevertheless, the book offers worthwhile theoretical advances in the geography of settler-colonial cities and a profound critique of the intersection between urban life and settler colonialism. By providing valuable insights into the lived experiences of Palestinians in Tel Aviv, Hackl points to the broader implications of these experiences for examining urban citizenship in settler-colonial settings.

Yara Sa'di-Ibraheem holds a PhD in human geography and is currently a Polonsky postdoctoral fellow at the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. She is interested in Indigenous geographies and time, settler colonialism, neoliberal urbanism, and the social-political aspects of infrastructure in colonial settings.

Submissions General Guidelines
The *Jerusalem Quarterly* (JQ)

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* accepts author submissions of original contributions about Jerusalem, its social and political history, and its current realities. Occasionally personal memoirs or works of fiction are accepted. Submissions are received throughout the year; specific deadlines for special thematic issues may also be announced.

JQ sends all manuscripts to designated readers for evaluation. Authors may also specifically request that their article be peer-reviewed. Authors should allow four to eight weeks from the date of submission for a final evaluation and publication decision.

Please direct submissions or queries to the *JQ* team: jq@palestine-studies.org

General Guidelines

Material submitted to *JQ* for consideration should adhere to the following:

- **Length**: Articles for peer-reviewing should not exceed 8,000 words; essays should be between 3,500 and 5,000 words; "Letters from Jerusalem," reviews, and submissions for other sections should not exceed 3,000 words. All submissions should include an abstract of a maximum of 200 words; a list of up to 10 keywords; and a brief author's biography of a maximum of 25 words. NOTE: the above word-count limits exclude footnotes, endnotes, abstracts, keywords, and biographies.
- **Spelling**: American English according to Merriam-Webster.
- **Text style**: Refer to *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMOS) for all questions regarding punctuation, capitalization, and font style.
- **Transliteration** of names and words in Arabic, Hebrew, and Turkish should follow the style recommended by the *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, but modified for Arabic transliteration by omitting all diacritical marks except for the ‘ayn (open single quotation mark) and hamza (closed single quotation mark). No right-to-left letters are allowed, except for very limited instances of crucial need.
- **Citations** should be in the form of endnotes and written in full (CMOS), as in the original source, with transliteration as needed.

- **Book reviews**: A high-resolution photo of the book cover should be included, as well as a scan of the copyrights page.
- **Visual material**: Any photos, charts, graphs, and other artwork should be of high resolution. For details, please see the section below.

Guidelines for Visual Material

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* encourages the inclusion of visual material, wherever possible, for articles, essays, and for other sections submitted for publication. Visual material can be photographs, scans, charts, diagrams, graphs, maps, artwork, and the like (hereafter called "figures").

When including any figures, please keep in mind the following guidelines:

- **Rights**: It is imperative that authors obtain appropriate rights to publish the figure(s). *JQ* is willing to assist in this in any way possible – for instance, by providing a letter from *JQ* supporting the application for rights, and providing more details about the journal – but it is the authors' responsibility to actually obtain the rights. An email giving *JQ* the rights to publish the figures suffices as proof of rights. Please let us know what copyright acknowledgment needs to accompany the figures.
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- **Captions**: Authors should provide full captions (including, when applicable: source, credits, dates, places, people, explanation of content, etc.).
- **Color Figures**: Thus far, *JQ* has been more inclined to publish photos in black and white mainly because of the subject matter of the articles and essays, but for some time now we have been accepting both options. Since printing in full color is more costly, we sometimes opt to publish in black and white figures submitted in color. If this is not acceptable in the case of a specific figure, we kindly ask authors to notify us in writing.

The Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem

The Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem is an annual award launched by the *Jerusalem Quarterly* in 2017 to honor the memory and work of Ibrahim Dakkak (1929–2016), Jerusalem engineer, activist, political leader, writer, and former chairman of the Advisory Board of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*.

It is awarded to an outstanding submission (in English or Arabic) that addresses either contemporary or historical issues relating to Jerusalem. A committee selected by the *Jerusalem Quarterly* determines the winning essay. The author will be awarded a prize of U.S. $1,000, and the essay will be published in the *Jerusalem Quarterly*.

Essays submitted or nominated for consideration should be based on original research and must not have been previously published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Essays should be 4,000 to 5,000 words in length (including endnotes), preceded by an abstract of no more than 200 words, and up to 10 keywords.

If the submitted or nominated essay is in Arabic, the abstract and keywords should be in English.

Preference will be given to emerging/early career researchers and students.

Please submit or nominate essays and a short bio (including current or previous affiliation with a recognized university, research institution, or non-governmental organization that conducts research) via email to **jq@palestine-studies.org**, mentioning the Award. In the case of nomination, please provide a contact email address for the nominated author.

Any images should be submitted as separate files with a resolution of 600 dpi minimum, if possible. Submitted images must have copyright clearance from owners, and have captions that are clear and accurate.

The deadline for submissions and nominations is **15 January** of each year.

Gaza raconte son génocide
Récits et Témoignages

Sous la direction de
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Rédaction
Akram Mussallam
Abdul Rahman Abu Shamala

Introduction
Ghassan Zaqtan

Institut des études palestiniennes

تحت وطأة الحائط

حارة المغاربة في القدس: حياتها وموتها

1187 - 1967

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داود تلحمي

مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية
Institute for Palestine Studies

Cover photo: Card designed by a young Kamal Boullata, early 1960s.

Back cover: Mohamed Harb, *I am Jerusalem … Jerusalem is me*. 120 x 120 cm, 2020.