JERUSALEM QUARTERLY

JQ 94 – UNRWA Archives (Part 2)

INSTITUTE OF JERUSALEM STUDIES

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* Peer reviewed article.

Relief, Work, and Agency: Palestinians and UNRWA in the Prolonged Nakba

As Palestinians observed the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Nakba on 15 May, they were not commemorating a distant historic episode that occurred in 1948. Rather, they were recalling, memorializing, and summoning the events and political developments that had first led to their mass expulsion and the large-scale destruction of the social, political, and economic life of historic Palestine, and that continued thereafter to deepen the dispossession of Palestinians. In the articles in this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* and in the previous issue, the Nakba – its antecedents, and its consequences and aftermath – are ever-present in the locations highlighted, particularly in Jerusalem: whether in Silwan, in the Shuʻfat refugee camp, in Kafr ʻAqab, in the first Protestant church erected inside Jaffa Gate, or in Rehavia in West Jerusalem. Meanwhile, Israel's far-right government celebrated the "reunification" of Jerusalem this year by staging its weekly cabinet meeting on 21 May in a tunnel under al-Aqsa Mosque compound, as a signal to Palestinians and the rest of the world that Israel has sole sovereignty over the city.

As Palestinians live the fact that the Nakba remains in the here and now, what more dramatic reminder is there than the continued existence, three quarters of a century later, of a United Nations agency assigned the task of dealing with the Nakba's protracted consequences? This second issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* devoted to UNRWA focuses on some of the issues related to the structures and power relations within which UNRWA is situated.

We observed in our previous editorial that UNRWA continued to generate

headlines due to the ongoing labor dispute that involved work stoppages and the closure of UNRWA headquarters in Jerusalem. The struggle, led by the Federation of Arab Employees of UNRWA, is still ongoing, but the more recent agitation by activists in popular committees in some refugee camps has once again brought to prominence the larger political issues about the organization and its political orientation, relations with the "international community," and ultimately, its commitment to refugee futures. These activists have been raising persistent questions about the leadership of UNRWA and their alleged intention of "liquidating" the refugee issue, that is, the inevitability of return. At the same time, they have been voicing criticism of the Palestinian Authority, the PLO, and the employees' union for their inability to resolve the dispute. Relevant to this point, the article in this issue by Ala Alazzeh provides a rich background to the history of power relations – and often struggles – between camp residents, camp activists, the PLO, the PA, and UNRWA, seen from the ground up.

The current strife involving UNRWA and the communities it serves also brings to life the acute observations by guest editors Francesca Biancani and Maria Chiara Rioli as they explain the value of studying UNRWA through its own documents but also through other, complementary means of capturing the lived experiences of the refugees themselves. These sources, they remind us, are important to "illuminate areas of subaltern agency or complex interactions between subalterns and power," debunking "the myth of apolitical humanitarianism, exposing UNRWA as a political field itself operating within an already politically saturated environment of multi-scalar power relations." The article by Atwa Jaber in this issue, combining archival and ethnographic investigation, is a good example of what the approach can reveal.

While Palestine is and has long been an object of international diplomacy, great power politics (as seen in Yousef Omar's essay on the establishment of the first Protestant church in Jerusalem), and a setting for individual dramas (as seen in Norbert Schwake's biographical explorations of two colorful figures from the early twentieth century), we should not lose sight of developments at scales somewhere between the international and the individual: various historical and ongoing collective efforts of Palestinians not only to forge better lives for themselves and their compatriots, but to mobilize against their marginalization, to make demands of the powerful, and to articulate alternative visions of the future – in short, to engage in politics.

Scales and Geographies of Contention, Containment, and Mobilization

Francesca Biancani and Maria Chiara Rioli

Guest Editors

This issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* is the second of two special issues dedicated to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), its archives, and its history/ies. The first special issue, *JQ* 93, published in spring 2023, applied critical archival theory to the documentation generated by UNRWA since its establishment in 1949, and to a number of institutional and private archives. In their articles and essays, Anne Irfan, Jo Kelcey, Halima Abu Haneya, and Jalal Al Husseini reflected on the mechanisms and processes of epistemic silencing, subjectification, erasure, and reappearance of Palestinian refugee archives. These contributions revealed and unpacked UNRWA's complex and troubled history, reflecting on the institutional strategies of documentary preservation as well as loss within UNRWA's archives.[1] Additionally, the pieces in *JQ* 93 explored historical forms of belonging and identity making in refugee camps,[2] the critical relationship between UNRWA and development agencies,[3] and recent UNRWA initiatives aimed at improving access to documents for refugees and scholars.[4]

This second special issue complements the first one by showing how UNRWA sources can be used to retrieve, first of all, aspects of Palestinian refugee political history and, secondly, the role played by UNRWA in the making of regional and international politics on a more systemic level. In fact, it situates UNRWA at the crossroads of multiple political scales, ranging from the bottom-up perspective of the camps to the regional and international levels. Taken together, the pieces in this

special issue bring together historical, anthropological, and sociological methods to explore in diverse geographies the different patterns of contention, mobilization, and resignification of humanitarian norms and humanitarian technopolitics. In doing so, the contributions reveal UNRWA's humanitarianism as a critical site of political competition within Palestinian political constituencies, regional powers, and international donors, whose impact in shaping the region, especially at some pivotal historical moments, certainly needs more sustained investigation.

In his article "No Bridge Will Take You Home," Atwa Jaber combines ethnographic and archival research to focus on Palestinian narratives of displacement, dispossession, and ethnic cleansing rooted in the Jordan Valley exodus in the aftermath of June 1967. As he shows, these materials expose important knowledge about the Jordan Valley and the lives of the Palestinian refugees between their original expulsion in 1948 and the further impact of the 1967 war and Israel's occupation of the Jordan Valley. They provide insights into material conditions and infrastructures of survival in the immediate aftermath of the Nakba; relations between the refugees, UNRWA, and the local inhabitants of the Jordan Valley that allowed for thriving communities to emerge; and the fraught Israeli-Jordanian negotiations over the return of those displaced again in 1967.

Ala Alazzeh's article, "Popular Services Committees in West Bank Refugee Camps: Political Legacies, Formations, and Tensions," contributes to the discussion over the forms of negotiation and contention between UNRWA, the Palestinian Authority, and the Palestine Liberation Organization before and after the Oslo accords. Based on extensive ethnographic research, it digs into the agency of West Bank popular committees and their efforts to reconcile "humanitarian concerns," that is, the everyday needs of camp dwellers, with the long-term goal of return and the radical political mobilization of the PLO, without being overridden or subsumed into the PA's hegemonic territorial project.

Similar to Jalal Al Husseini's article in the previous issue, Valentina Napolitano's article, "Managing Palestinian Refugees in Syria," is informed by a critical development studies approach, through which she examines the strategies implemented by UNRWA and the Syrian government agency PARI (Palestine Arab Refugee Institution) in managing Palestinian refugees in Syria. Through a sociological analysis of UNRWA's documents, this study demonstrates how the Syrian government's management and containment of Palestinian refugees sought to integrate humanitarian assistance into a broader political project. As the author states, "by accusing UNRWA of pursuing the permanent resettlement (*tawtin*) of Palestinian refugees in neighboring countries, and of reducing its aid to them, Syria has attempted to present itself as the main defender of the Palestinian cause and of the refugees' right of return." At the same time, the Syrian government hoped that UNRWA development projects might be used to improve the living conditions of Syrians as well as Palestinians living in "unofficial" camps.

In "What UNRWA Teaches Us about Humanitarian Histories," the closing remarks for this issue, Ilana Feldman draws attention again to the entanglement of local and global scales in UNRWA humanitarian practices. By stressing the salience of UNRWA

to the making of modern humanitarianism, she makes a most important point about how the situated and peculiar Palestinian humanitarian experience, far from reflecting any form of exceptionalism, actually magnifies some defining features of modern global humanitarianism. As she argues, "Analysis that begins from the intersection of Palestinian life and UNRWA practices offers significant insight into enduring, transforming, and global humanitarian dynamics." It reveals local Palestinian agency as much as the reproduction of global hierarchies of power.

As in *JQ* 93, this issue includes a series of historical photographs that were generously made available by the UNRWA Film and Photo Archive and the Institute for Palestine Studies (donated by UNRWA).

The idea for these special issues derived from the perceived need to share scholars' reflections about their research encounters with UNRWA archives, their criticalities and potentialities. We aimed to energize a critical conversation about a most paradoxical state of affairs whereby UNRWA's collections, despite (or perhaps because of) their overall institutional relevance and status locally and internationally, are somewhat ghostly, phantasmatic, and chimerical. As part of a vigorous deconstructionist trend in critical archival theory, we looked at the history of UNRWA archives as a political process in itself. We consider archives as congealed representations of power relations, both disciplinary and enabling. Palestinian refugees were produced as subjects by the disciplinary practices to which they were subjected, the first being quantification and labeling, that is, being defined as deserving aid recipients. As such, they were able to articulate claims with an agentive potential, to challenge their subalternity by appropriating and manipulating this same disciplinary normative discourse. All of the essays in these two issues highlight how UNRWA sources can be used to illuminate areas of subaltern agency or complex interactions between subalterns and power, in addition to integrating alternative archives (visual) or sources (oral history) to this effect. At the same time, they debunk the myth of apolitical humanitarianism, exposing UNRWA as a political field itself operating within an already politically saturated environment of multi-scalar power relations, as outlined also in recent publications, conferences, and workshops.[5]

Twenty-five years after the workshop on "Palestinian Refugee Archives: Uses for Research and Policy Analysis," organized by the Institute of Jerusalem Studies and held at the French Institute for the Near East in Amman, Jordan, in June 1998 – whose contribution resulted in the seminal volume edited by Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik, *Reinterpreting the Historical Record*[6] – and in the current ominous political scenario, we aspire to keep open (or, if necessary, re-open) a necessary debate on Palestinian refugees, archives, and their mutual agency.

Francesca Biancani is associate professor of Middle Eastern history and international relations at the University of Bologna. She is an expert in Middle Eastern colonial history with a special interest in critical archival theory, subaltern studies, biopolitics, gender, and migration. She is author of Sex Work in Colonial Egypt: Women, Modernity, and the Global Economy *(I. B. Tauris, 2018).*

Maria Chiara Rioli is assistant professor at the University of Modena and Reggio Emilia and co-principal investigator of the ITHACA – Interconnecting Histories and Archives for Migrant Agency project. She is the author of A Liminal Church: Refugees, Conversions, and the Latin Diocese of Jerusalem, 1946–1956 *(Brill, 2020).*

Endnotes

1   In our longer introduction to the first of these two issues, we situated these contributions more fully in the scholarly literature on UNRWA. See Francesca Biancani and Maria Chiara Rioli, "Phantom Archives in a Dispersed History," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 93 (Spring 2023): 6–12.

2   Halima Abu Haneya, "The Intertwined History of Shuʻfat Refugee Camp in Jerusalem: The Making of Refugees," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 93 (Spring 2023): 36–60.

3   Jalal Al Husseini, "The Dilemmas of Local Development and Palestine Refugee Integration in Jordan: UNRWA and the Arab Development Society in Jericho (1950–80)," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 93 (Spring 2023): 61–79.

4   Valeria Cetorelli and Dorothée Klaus, "UNRWA Archives of Palestine Refugee Family Files," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 93 (Spring 2023): 80–87.

5   See, for example: Anne Irfan, *Refuge and Resistance: Palestinians and the International Refugee System* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2023); and Amal Khaleefa's and Valentina Napolitano's synopsis in this issue of the symposium organized by the French Institute for the Near East (Ifpo) in Amman, Jordan, entitled "Migrations in Jordan: (Counter-)Narratives of Whom and for What?" 2–3 May 2023.

6   Salim Tamari and Elia Zureik, eds., *Reinterpreting the Historical Record*: *The Uses of Palestinian Refugee Archives for Social Science Research and Policy Anal*ysis (Jerusalem: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2001). See "Elia Zureik: In Memoriam," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 93 (Spring 2023): 138–49.

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* is pleased to announce the winner of the 2023

Ibrahim Dakkak Award
for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem

Fadi Ragheb

Department of Near and Middle Eastern Civilizations,
University of Toronto

for his essay on

Sharing the Holy Land:
Islamic Pilgrimage to Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem
during the Late Medieval and Early Modern Period (1000–1800)

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The essay will be published in a forthcoming issue of the
Jerusalem Quarterly.

*****

Jury

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No Bridge Will Take You Home: The Jordan Valley Exodus Remembered through the UNRWA Archives

Atwa Jaber

Abstract

In the summer of 1967, Israel occupied the Jordan Valley and transferred most of its Palestinian population eastward toward the opposite bank of the Jordan River, including thousands of Nakba refugees who had resided in camps run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). At the time, Israel aspired to as much land and as few Palestinians as possible in the Jordan Valley, and so deployed vicious strategies to forcibly displace and deny the return of many Palestinians. In the post-1967 years, Israel demolished tens of Palestinian communities it had depopulated in the Jordan Valley, preparing the ground for its expansionist settlement enterprise in the area. This recent period of the Jordan Valley's past remains overlooked. In the absence of a comprehensive historiography, the oral history of Palestinians and UNRWA's archives are key sources for the study of the social history of the displaced population. This article draws from these two sources to examine the circumstances of the Jordan Valley's occupation and to document, analyze, and preserve fading narratives of the Palestinians.

On 5 June 1967, the Israeli military forces occupied the Jordan Valley (Ghawr al-Urdun), the area which

extends from 'Ayn Jidi on the Dead Sea to the northernmost borders of the West Bank near Bisan. At the time, the Jordan Valley had been home to around three hundred thousand Palestinians who lived in prosperous communities throughout this vast geography.[1] A large part of this population were Nakba refugees, who had settled in refugee camps in the aftermath of their displacement from historic Palestine in 1948. Following the occupation of the Jordan Valley, this article argues, Israel envisaged the area as an empty frontier – a depopulated space to be designated for permanent Israeli settlement. This expansionist, settler-colonial vision of the occupied Jordan Valley materialized at the expense of Palestinian land and lives. In the Jordan Valley – more than elsewhere in the occupied West Bank – Israel displaced the vast majority of Palestinians, residents and 1948 refugees, and systematically prevented their return to their lands and homes, marking a rupture in their longstanding communities and the beginning of a prolonged displacement. In the Jordan Valley, an abrupt exodus occurred from which Palestinians are yet to return.

This article explores this period of the Jordan Valley's past which, in the literature addressing the history of Palestine and the Palestinians, remains a narrowly charted territory. To do this, the article draws from two sources that offer substantial knowledge about the Jordan Valley's Palestinian societies: oral histories and materials from the UNRWA archives. The testimonies of Palestinians that appear in this article were gathered as part of my research in the Jordan Valley and in Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, where I am conducting in-depth interviews with Palestinians whom Israel expelled in 1967 across the Jordan River.[2] The UNRWA archives hold digitized written and audio-visual materials about the Jordan Valley's population, especially refugees, from the early 1950s.[3]

The critical and decisive role of oral history for the study of Palestine's past and present is well established, particularly its role in documenting Palestinians' experiences of displacement and exile.[4] In the problematic absence of primary written Palestinian sources, as historian Saleh Abdul Jawad suggests, oral testimonies become a principal source to retrieve, preserve, and write Palestine's recent history.[5] In the Jordan Valley, where written sources on the Palestinian exodus are almost nonexistent, there is particular necessity to gather and document the oral history of the displaced Palestinian population. In this context, oral testimonies become the foundation to reconstruct fading narratives of Palestinians about key moments of survival, struggle, and displacement, which they have lived since Israel occupied the Jordan Valley.

The archives of UNRWA have also gained increasing scholarly attention that addresses the histories behind the archives' establishment, the politics of their curation, and their advantages for historical research.[6] As an institutional archive that reflects the policies and politics of a foreign humanitarian aid agency, it is imperative to critically approach the UNRWA archives and the materials that they offer. Nevertheless, as Anne Irfan and Jo Kelcey rightly emphasize in part one of this *Jerusalem Quarterly* special issue, the fragmented Palestinian archival landscape – due to Israel's continuing attempts to loot and destroy Palestinian archives – make the archives of UNRWA "a de facto Palestinian national archive," one that holds great potential for research on

the Palestinians since the Nakba.[7] In the Jordan Valley, where tens of thousands of refugees settled in 1948 and were displaced again in 1967, materials from the UNRWA archives offer a deeper understanding of their social history, both at home and in exile.

Drawing from both of these sources, this article provides key insights about the history of the Jordan Valley and its Palestinian communities. First, by discussing the reality of life in the Jordan Valley before Israeli occupation in 1967, the article argues that the Nakba refugees formed an integral part of the social and economic fabric of the area, despite their catastrophic uprooting that led them to resettle in the Jordan Valley in 1948. In this vein, whereas the Jordan Valley was largely portrayed as a grim, arid space in which Palestinian refugees struggled to find shelter, the article highlights that the refugees found the determination and the resources to gradually transform their initial living conditions and to establish thriving communities. Secondly, by exploring the circumstances and consequences of the Israeli occupation in 1967, the article argues that the Jordan Valley had been central to Israeli plans for permanent settlement in the occupied lands, which entailed the forcible transfer of most of the Jordan Valley's Palestinian population – particularly the Nakba refugees – toward the east bank of the Jordan River. Guided by these plans, Israel devised and implemented three strategies that transformed the demographic reality of the Jordan Valley and planted the seeds for Israel's ongoing settler colonialism in the area: the mass displacement of Palestinians, the systematic denial of their return, and the demolition of their communities.

The Israeli occupation of the Jordan Valley not only led to the dispossession of Palestinians and the perpetual control of their land, but also forced many Nakba refugees into another cycle of displacement without return. The article therefore perceives the Jordan Valley exodus from two entwined perspectives: as a space, the Jordan Valley is an area which the refugees had passed into, settled, flourished, and were displaced again, and which Israel had long envisaged as an inseparable part of its expansionist settler-colonial project; and as a point in time, the exodus of the Palestinians from the Jordan Valley in 1967 constituted a continuity of a prolonged displacement, one that began during the 1948 Nakba and is still ongoing today. Finally, the article ends with a glimpse of the current reality of life in the Jordan Valley, where the past and present collide, and the exodus of Palestinians continues by other means.

The Way to the Bridge: Settling the Nakba Refugees

During the Nakba in 1948, which marked the forced displacement of more than half of Palestine's native population at the hands of Zionist militias, many of the displaced Palestinians took refuge to the north, in Lebanon and Syria, while others were forced eastward toward the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. At the time, not all refugees who headed eastward crossed the Jordan River, and tens of thousands settled in the Jordan Valley. They mainly gathered near bridges that functioned across the Jordan River, where four refugee camps soon emerged.[8]

Close to King Husayn Bridge (referred to as Allenby Bridge by Israelis, and Karama Bridge by Palestinians), in the surroundings of Jericho, the refugees settled

in three camps: 'Aqbat Jabr camp to the southwest of Jericho, 'Ayn al-Sultan to the northeast of the town, and al-Nuway'ima camp to the north.[9] While the exact number of refugees who settled in each of these camps at the time of their establishment is unclear, their population on 4 June 1967 is estimated at around ninety-three thousand refugees.[10] Close to Damya Bridge (called Adam Bridge by Israelis), near the village of al-Jiftlik, al-'Ajajra camp (also known as Abu al-'Ajaj) emerged, with an estimated population of thirty thousand refugees.[11]

After the establishment of UNRWA in December 1949 and the beginning of its operations in May 1950, the agency started providing relief services to the refugees in the Jordan Valley.[12] UNRWA archival records on the Jordan Valley's refugee camps and their populations also date back to this period, including demographic data on the refugees, reports of UNRWA operations, and photographs and films that document the agency's services in these camps. Through UNRWA archival records, especially photographs and films, distinct stages of the refugees' lives in the Jordan Valley emerge.

In 'Aqbat Jabr, as the photographs in figures 1 and 2 illustrate, the refugees initially settled in a desert-like area where the lack of infrastructure or adequate shelter made their living conditions dire. As in most other refugee camps, classes for refugee children were held in the open air, and the refugees were sheltered in basic tents. Here, as historian Issam Nassar suggests, photos of the earliest days in the refugee camps allow us to clearly see the historical conditions of the refugees at the time, uncovering visual evidence that delineates "the violence of their uprooting, and the misery of their daily life at the time when the lens shutter closed."[13] But it is by combining these images with the testimonies of the refugees themselves that refugees' experiences can be fully grasped.

Figure 1. "One of the earliest photographs of Nakba refugees in the Jordan Valley, taken in 'Aqbat Jabr camp around the time of its establishment, shows a class being held for refugee children in the open air." Photographer unknown. © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

Figure 2. "Tents as shelter for refugees in 'Aqbat Jabr in the early 1950s. Still image from film F-045, titled *Early Education in West Bank Refugee Camps*." © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

During an interview with Abu Sa'id, a Palestinian refugee from 'Aqbat Jabr, he recounted how the refugees who first settled in the camp were intending to cross the bridges toward the east bank of the Jordan River:

> After leaving their towns and villages in Palestine, refugees crossed a long distance, and when they arrived at the borders [with Jordan], they heard that people were already gathering here. The area of 'Aqbat Jabr was the largest gathering of refugees at the time because of its proximity to the borders. This area was a vast empty piece of land with many wild plants; even apes would not have lived here! But there was water, which was the most necessary thing for our life. There was a wide waterway that surrounded the camp … and this made 'Aqbat Jabr a green area for many years. There were agricultural farms all around us.[14]

Such testimonies reveal aspects of refugees' lives that are missing from UNRWA's photographs. Uprooted from their homes and dispossessed from their lands, on their way to the bridge, the refugees found a source of life, a stream, in the middle of an area where life was barely possible. The refugees found in the Jordan Valley a resourceful environment which allowed them to transform their initial living conditions in the arid spaces of shelter and gradually establish thriving communities in the refugee camps. Indeed, throughout the 1950s, the Jordan Valley camps grew in size and population, and the refugees found the potential to create small but growing economies. This transformation is also documented in UNRWA's records.

Figure 3. "Mud-brick structures, which the refugees themselves built, replaced the tents in ʿAqbat Jabr during the mid-1950s. Still image from film F-045, titled "*Early Education in West Bank Refugee Camps*." © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

In 1967, UNRWA reported that reliance on the agency's services had gradually decreased and "some of the refugee camps had developed into thriving communities, even though they were still at a fairly low social and economic level and still contained many families living on the edge of subsistence."[15] Palestinian testimonies further demonstrate how refugee camps in the Jordan Valley became vibrant communities that stood out as key population centers in the area.

Abu Salim, a refugee from ʿAqbat Jabr, discussed how the lives of refugees in the Jordan Valley changed during the 1950s and the early 1960s, shaped by transformations in housing conditions, UNRWA services, and the social and economic status of many refugees:

> Most of the refugees who settled in ʿAqbat Jabr were originally farmers from Jaffa and its surrounding villages, who had worked in the orange orchards before the Nakba. When they came to ʿAqbat Jabr, after they had lost everything, they found new ways to live. For example, people from [the depopulated village of] al-ʿAbbasiyya started producing straw mats. The raw materials were plentiful, and the products had a big market … as an alternative for carpets. There was even an association for the women who worked and produced the mats.[16]

Having lost everything during the Nakba, many refugees found in the Jordan Valley alternative livelihoods, despite the stark difference between the environments of the Jordan Valley and the areas from which the refugees were displaced in 1948. With the support

of UNRWA, particularly the agency's vocational training programs, refugees utilized the potentially fertile lands that surrounded the camps, established small but growing businesses, and marketed their products in the camps' markets (figures 4 and 5).[17]

Figure 4. "The vegetable market in 'Aqbat Jaber camp in 1956." Photographer unknown. © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

Eventually, 'Aqbat Jabr camp became a prominent commercial center in the Jordan Valley. Abu Sa'id clearly remembered:

> In 'Aqbat Jabr, there were shops for textiles, vegetables, and fruits. There were coffee shops, and even watch repair shops. Some of the prominent Palestinian merchants also had stores in the camp, and people from other areas used to come and buy goods here [in 'Aqbat Jabr]. At the time, the town of Jericho did not have the significance it has today, and 'Aqbat Jabr was the commercial center of the Jordan Valley, even for the people of Jericho.[18]

Within two decades of the refugees' settlement in the Jordan Valley, the initial grim conditions of life in the refugee camps had eased, and the camps gradually became flourishing communities.
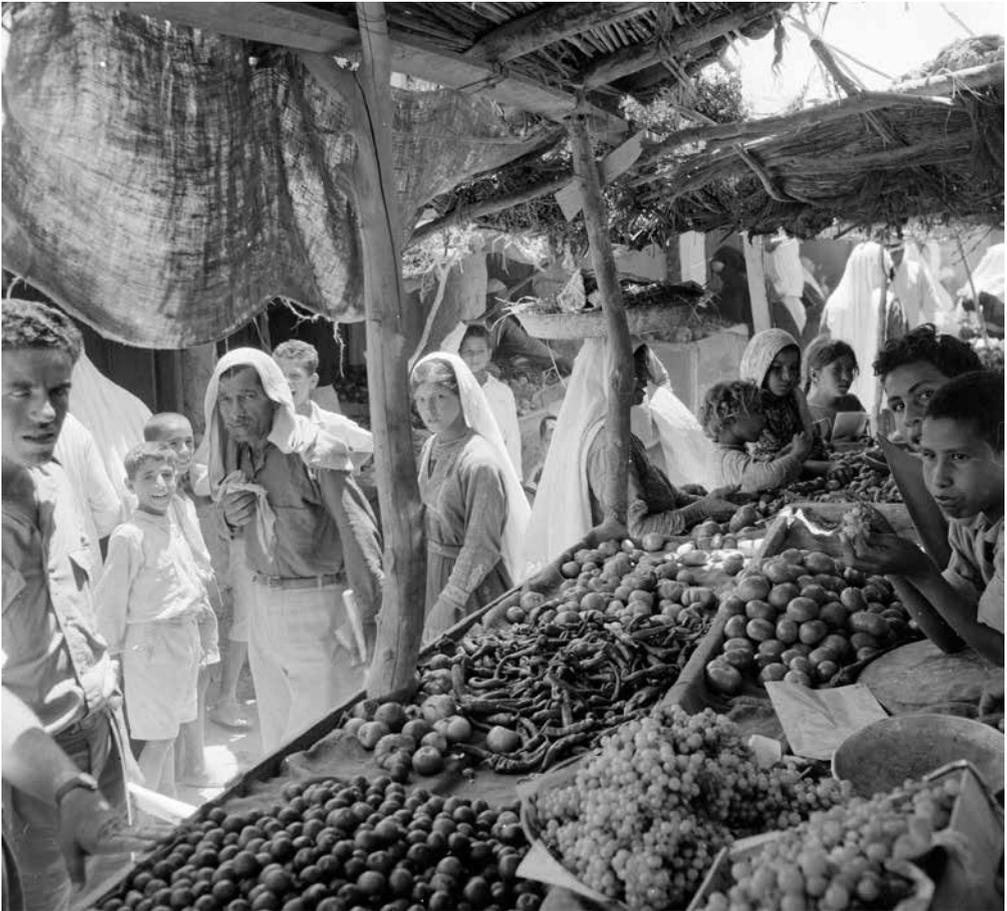
Figure 5. "A later photo of the vegetable market in 'Aqbat Jabr camp, taken in 1959." Photographer unknown. © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

In other parts of the Jordan Valley, refugees and non-refugees worked hand-in-hand in agriculture, cultivating large plots of the Jordan Valley's lands and benefiting from the area's generous water resources. Historian Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh states that "after the Nakba in 1948, Palestinian refugees settled in the Jordan Valley and transformed its arid and salty lands to flourishing paradises, growing various fruits, diverse vegetables, dates, grain crops, flowers, and many trees."[19] Such was the story of al-'Ajajra refugee camp near al-Jiftlik, where most of the refugees who settled in the camp were peasants from the depopulated village of 'Ajjur, northwest of Hebron. They were experienced farmers and skillfully contributed to working al-Jiftlik's fertile lands.

Abu Ibrahim, an elderly Palestinian from al-Jiftlik, remembered how agriculture in the village flourished after the refugees arrived:

> After the Nakba in 1948, refugees started coming [to al-Jiftlik] and renting plots of land to cultivate. They took half of the crops, and we [the landowners] took the other half. Many refugees from 'Ajjur came here because the lands were fertile, and water was abundant. Of course, there were refugees from other areas of Palestine who also lived in the camp, but the majority came from 'Ajjur, which gave the camp its name, al-'Ajajra or Abu al-'Ajaj. There was no difference between Bedouins, peasants, or refugees. We [the locals of al-Jiftlik] and the refugees lived as one, we also used to marry each other … We supported our brothers who were displaced after the Nakba, we split our bread with them.[20]

Like the camps around Jericho, al-'Ajajra gradually grew to become an integral part of al-Jiftlik. By the mid-1960s, the camp became a commercial center for the village, where many Palestinians from the surrounding areas marketed their agricultural produce.[21]

There is not much data in the UNRWA archives about al-'Ajajra refugee camp, which is striking, especially when oral and written sources indicate that UNRWA built schools, a clinic, and a cafeteria for the refugees in the camp.[22] Yet the agency never recognized al-'Ajajra as one of the official camps in the Jordan Valley, unlike 'Aqbat Jabr or 'Ayn al-Sultan. Here, as Irfan and Kelcey argue, UNRWA's decision-making power plays a role in reproducing silence in its archives – a source of epistemic injustice toward the thousands of refugees who lived in al-'Ajajra.[23] In this case, oral testimonies can tell us a lot about refugees' life in the camp, their displacement after Israel's 1967 occupation, and eventually the camp's demolition.

Bridges in Ruins: The Jordan Valley Exodus

"There is no such thing as wilderness, only depopulation."

– Patrick Wolfe[24]

Under the swift blows of the 1967 war, Israeli military forces occupied the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan (al-Jawlan) heights. Shortly after the occupation, a plan devised by Yigal Allon – then member of the Israeli cabinet and former commander of the Zionist Palmach militia – called for permanent Jewish settlement in most of the occupied territories, and intensely so in the Jordan Valley.

In its broadest terms, Allon's plan proposed the replacement of Israel's 1949 armistice line borders with enlarged "defensible borders" that followed the region's topography, to protect Israel from Arab attacks coming from the east. To achieve this, Allon proposed the fortification of a frontier area extending from the Israeli-

occupied part of the Golan heights in the north to the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula, which entailed the annexation of a twenty-kilometer-wide strip of the Jordan Valley. In the annexed Jordan Valley, Allon further proposed a series of agricultural settlements and paramilitary outposts spread along the Jordan River.[25] Beneath Allon's security narrative lay a Zionist ideological motive, by which he perceived the establishment of agricultural settlements in the Jordan Valley as the "regeneration" of Labor Zionism and the "revival" of its agricultural pioneering spirit, aiming "to make the desert bloom."[26] Allon assumed that eventually Israel would formally annex the Jordan Valley, keeping this occupied border area under full Israeli control.[27]

According to the blueprints set forth in Allon's plan, Israel perceived the Jordan Valley as a frontier geography, an area that would bring about "maximum security and maximum territory for Israel with a minimum number of Arabs."[28] This settler-colonial logic of acquiring as much land and as few Palestinians as possible, unfolded in the Jordan Valley through the strategies of violence that Israel implemented during and after the occupation: the mass displacement of Palestinians, the systematic prevention of their return, and the demolition of their communities.

Figure 6. "Palestinians cross the demolished King Husayn (Allenby) Bridge toward the east bank of the Jordan River during their exodus in 1967. Many had been displaced from towns, villages, and refugee camps in the Jordan Valley." Photographer unknown. © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

Mass Displacement

Across the ruins of King Husayn Bridge, destroyed by Israel during the war, the vast majority of the Jordan Valley's Palestinian population – now displaced from Jericho and its surrounding refugee camps, from al-Jiftlik and al-'Ajajra refugee camp, and from numerous other Palestinian communities – moved to the east bank of the Jordan River. The scale of the mass displacement of Palestinians from the Jordan Valley is conspicuous in the statistics available through UNRWA's records. According to the agency's reports from September 1967, within three months of the Israeli occupation, around two hundred thousand Palestinians had already crossed from the West Bank toward Jordan, including sixty-five thousand registered refugees from the area of Jericho and its surrounding refugee camps.[29] In al-Jiftlik, where UNRWA's statistics are lacking, Palestinians testify that Israel displaced two-thirds of the village's population, including refugees who had lived in al-'Ajajra refugee camp.[30]

The abrupt displacement of Palestinians is also documented in materials from the UNRWA Film and Photo Archive. Figures 6 and 7 show Palestinians crossing the demolished bridges toward the east bank of the Jordan River, carrying on their backs their children and whatever belongings they could take with them. Israeli soldiers, standing atop the bridge, watch them as they scramble to cross. In these photographs, the struggles of the displaced and the intimidation of the occupier are both portrayed within the frame of the image, one below the other, signifying the stark cruelty of the exodus.

Figure 7. "Palestinians crossing the demolished King Husayn (Allenby) Bridge in the summer of 1967. In this photo, Israeli soldiers appear atop the bridge, watching Palestinians as they struggle to cross. Photographer unknown." © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

While UNRWA's statistics reveal the magnitude of the Jordan Valley exodus and the agency's photographs capture the suffering of the displaced population, the oral testimonies of Palestinians recount many untold episodes in the story of their displacement from the Jordan Valley. Many of the displaced Palestinians were refugees who had witnessed the atrocities of the Nakba. They crossed the river toward Jordan fearing similar Israeli massacres would take place in the Jordan Valley. Abu 'Ali, an elderly Palestinian from al-Jiftlik, recounted:

> When Israel occupied the Jordan Valley, thousands of Palestinians from al-Jiftlik were forced to leave the village and cross the [Jordan] river, including refugees from al-'Ajajra refugee camp. Among many others, I and my three brothers took refuge in the Jordanian village of Ma'addi on the opposite bank of the river, waiting for the situation to calm down …. We were fearful of bloodshed similar to what the Zionists committed during the Nakba in 1948.[31]

Indeed, Israel actively facilitated the exodus through terrorizing and coercion, which generated a strong fear of bloodshed among Palestinians. In a report to the UN General Assembly on the conditions affecting civilian populations in the aftermath of the occupation in 1967, Nils-Göran Gussing, the special representative of the UN secretary general, mentioned "persistent reports of acts of intimidation by the Israeli armed forces and of Israeli attempts to suggest to the population, by loudspeakers mounted on cars, that they might be better off on the East Bank." Gussing stated further that "there have also been reports that in several localities buses and trucks were put at the disposal of the population for [their transfer] to the East Bank," and that in some situations Israel dynamited Palestinian homes as a form of intimidation to expel Palestinians from their communities.[32] Other accounts describe Israel killing and torturing hundreds of displaced Palestinians who attempted to return.[33]

Such accounts are consistent with Palestinians' own testimonies about Israel's policies which facilitated the Jordan Valley exodus, as Abu Sa'id from 'Aqbat Jabr recalled:

> During the occupation, the Israeli army entered the camp [of 'Aqbat Jabr] and arrested many people. For many days, the Israeli warplanes were flying over the camp to intimidate the refugees, many of whom fled out of fear. I remember one time when the Israelis hung the dead body of a fedayee [a Palestinian freedom fighter] from a helicopter and flew over the camp. They also used to throw pamphlets from planes that threatened Palestinians with war and asked them to surrender. This is how they made many Palestinians leave.

Israel's policies continued until around 88 percent of the Jordan Valley's population ended up on the east bank of the Jordan River.[34] Neither UNRWA nor the Jordanian government was ready to accommodate the sudden influx of displaced Palestinians.

According to the UNRWA commissioner general, in September 1967, half of the Palestinians whom Israel displaced from the West Bank took refuge with relatives

or friends, often in the UNRWA-run refugee camps that the agency established in Jordan after the Nakba. The rest of the refugees remained in the open air, under trees, in Jordanian government buildings, in UNRWA schools, or in mosques.[35] To respond to the severe shortage of infrastructure and facilities, the Jordanian government established nine temporary tented camps near the borders, commissioning UNRWA to run six of them. Together, the new camps provided shelter for most of the Palestinians displaced from the Jordan Valley.

Figure 8. "Wadi al-Dulayl camp, one of the first emergency tented camps that UNRWA set up on the east bank of the Jordan River to accommodate the refugees displaced from the West Bank, 1967. UNRWA's original caption states: this camp "was closed at the start of winter and the refugees moved to new camps in the east Jordan Valley where the winter climate is milder." Photographer unknown. © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

As figures 8 and 11 illustrate, the new camps sheltered the refugees in conditions that resembled the earliest years of their settlement in the Jordan Valley. Two decades after their exodus from historic Palestine, many of the refugees who had settled in the Jordan Valley after the Nakba found themselves, yet again, back in tents. Both UNRWA and the Jordanian government treated the incoming refugees as a temporarily displaced population that could soon return to the West Bank. Meanwhile, camps throughout Jordan became even more overcrowded with refugee families whom Israel continued to displace.

Displacement without Return

It was not long before the Jordanian government, UNRWA, and the international community realized the great scale of the displacement from the areas that Israel occupied in 1967, especially the Jordan Valley. In Jordan, where the largest numbers of the displaced Palestinians had settled, diplomatic pressure increased on Israel to facilitate the return of the displaced Palestinians, including persistent calls by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) that Israel as an occupying power should abide by its obligations stipulated under the Fourth Geneva Convention.[36]

Israel accordingly announced on 2 July 1967 that it was willing to authorize the conditional return to the West Bank of the displaced Palestinians, with the ICRC acting as an intermediary between the Jordanian and the Israeli governments. With hopes that the crisis was going to end, UNRWA

> immediately appealed to all those who might still be contemplating leaving their homes to stay where they were, and urged all concerned, on grounds of common humanity, to encourage those persons who had already left to return to their former place of residence, and to do everything to allay the fears which deterred them from going back.[37]

On 10 July 1967, Israel laid out the process for the repatriation of the displaced Palestinians who were willing to return: the head of each of the displaced families must fill and submit a form for himself and his family members, accompanied by everyone's identity documents, by 10 August 1967.[38] After the Israeli and the Jordanian governments agreed on the text of the application forms, Israel was to print and deliver the forms to the ICRC, which would then forward them to the Jordanians for distribution. The agreement also specified that the approved returnees were to be repatriated through temporary bridges, which Israel erected across the Jordan River, with a capacity to receive returning Palestinians at a rate of five thousand per day.[39] In reality, however, Israel created numerous obstacles to hinder this process.

On 17 July, the Jordanian government received the first batch of application forms, on Israeli Ministry of Interior letterhead. As this was not part of the initial agreement, the Jordanians refused the printed forms and returned them to the Israelis. The ICRC steered lengthy negotiations between the two governments, culminating in a meeting at Allenby Bridge between representatives of the Jordanian Red Crescent and the Israeli government. In that meeting, according to UNRWA, Israel agreed on a new heading that included the names of both states with the ICRC emblem in the middle, and the ICRC pressured Israel to extend the deadline for submitting the application to 31 August 1967.[40] All of this created a substantial delay in the delivery of the revised return applications, which reached the Jordanian government on 12 August. This meant that the Jordanians had less than three weeks to ensure that displaced Palestinians completed the application process, let alone arrange for the logistics of the actual return.[41]

Figure 9. "The ICRC flag appearing on King Husayn (Allenby) bridge in 1967, where delegates of the organization were stationed to monitor and report on the situation of displaced Palestinians. Still image from a film titled "*The Aftermath*." © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

Despite these practical obstacles that Israel had erected, the Jordanian government, UNRWA, and the ICRC spared no effort to ensure the distribution, completion, and return of the application forms before the 31 August deadline. In fact, as UNRWA reported at the time, the Jordanian government managed to forward to the Israeli Ministry of Interior the completed repatriation applications of 32,000 displaced families, involving some 160,000 Palestinians – around 75 percent of the displaced population.[42] Israel, however, accepted only a fraction of the submitted return requests.

Indeed, Israel only approved applications related to persons who had permanently resided in the West Bank until 5 June 1967 and crossed to the east bank between 5 June and 4 July. This automatically excluded tens of thousands of Palestinians who were displaced after that period. Also, the Israeli guidelines for the approved returnees required that adult sons and daughters were obliged to apply separately from their families, and that all application forms must be accompanied by passports, identity cards, and UNRWA registration cards. Furthermore, Israel stipulated that it would not approve the request of any applicant whose return it considered to involve a risk to Israel's security or its legal order.[43]

In many cases, the Jordanian government received the lists of approved applicants from the Israelis with less than twelve-hours notice for them to cross the bridges back to the West Bank. A single list sometimes included Palestinians in different camps, leaving only a few hours to locate, contact, and transport them to the crossing points set up for repatriation.[44] Israel often included some members of a single family while excluding others, and thus "families were faced with the choice of either leaving a son or daughter behind or of losing their opportunity of return."[45] Consequently, Israel discouraged many Palestinians from returning even when their applications were approved.

Figure 10. "Two refugee children cross the temporary bridge that replaced the destroyed Allenby Bridge, 1967." Photographer unknown. © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

Between 18 and 31 August 1967, Israel allowed only 14,051 of some 200,000 displaced Palestinians to return to the West Bank.[46] Despite all of the efforts led by the ICRC, UNRWA, and the Jordanian government, Israel refused to relax its restrictive criteria for repatriation or to extend the deadline for return any further, even for Palestinians whose applications were duly submitted and approved but could not return in time. As UN special representative Nils Gussing concluded at the time, Israel's strategy to prevent the return of the displaced Palestinians was clear:

> even without the many initial difficulties which were bound to arise during such an extensive and delicate operation, the deadline set by the Israel Government could not have allowed the return of all those who wished to do so. Even if the potential daily rate of 5,000 returnees mentioned by Israel had been reached every day during the period of 18 through 31 August, only some 55,000 displaced persons could have returned.[47]

Most of the Palestinians whom Israel displaced from the Jordan Valley never returned. Even when approvals where issued, Israel explicitly excluded Palestinians displaced from the area of Jericho, including UNRWA-registered refugees from the camps of 'Aqbat Jabr, 'Ayn al-Sultan, or al-Nuway'ima. Following the exodus of the Palestinians, Israel consolidated the new demographic reality of the Jordan Valley through mass demolitions, especially in the refugee camps.

Figure 11. "Ghor Nimrin, the largest of the six emergency tented camps that UNRWA established in autumn 1967 for new refugees in the Jordan Valley, 1968." Photographer unknown. © UNRWA Film and Photo Archive.

Mass Demolitions

Among the small minority of the displaced Palestinians who returned to the Jordan Valley was Abu Rizq Masaʿid, a peasant from al-Jiftlik. In his testimony about the return journey, he recounted:

> We left al-Jiftlik in July [1967] and stayed in the [temporary] camp of Maʿaddi on the east bank for three months. When the Red Cross called for the displaced Palestinians to register for returning to the West Bank, we registered and eventually returned to our home … Most of the displaced people did not return, because Israel stopped the registration process when they saw that many people were willing and registering to return. My father was approached at night and told that our family's request was approved. They put us in Red Cross trucks and took us to Ghor Nimrin camp [the largest of the temporary camps on the east bank of the Jordan River]. We stayed there for one night, and in the morning we crossed the [temporary] bridge near al-ʿAwja. There were nine of us. Each one was given five Jordanian dinars, blankets, and canned food, and we returned home.[48]

Upon returning to the Jordan Valley, Abu Rizq remembered, he found that the

Palestinians who had remained were scattered and most of the villages were depopulated. In al-Jiftlik, most houses were empty, and their inhabitants had not returned:

> After those who returned settled, [the Israelis] went to all of the areas of the Jordan Valley. They demolished every village where no Palestinians remained, and this happened throughout the entire Jordan Valley. In al-'Ajajra, the remaining handful of families were moved to empty houses in al-Jiftlik, and they wiped the camp out. The thousands who had lived there were all displaced to Jordan. They then combed the entire village [of al-Jiftlik], neighborhood by neighborhood. They destroyed any empty structure. They confined us in the remaining areas, and from that day onward, if we build, they demolish. There were many other areas in the Jordan Valley that Israel wiped off the face of earth.[49]

Indeed, al-Jiftlik was one of approximately thirty Palestinian communities – villages, *khirab* (hamlets), herding communities, and refugee camps – that Israel demolished, in whole or in part, after the exodus of the Palestinians in 1967.[50] In addition to al-'Ajajra camp, Israel completely demolished al-Nuway'ima camp and transferred the remaining refugee families to 'Aqbat Jabr or 'Ayn al-Sultan.[51]

Figure 12. Interview with Sa'id Dajani, 'Aqbat Jabr Camp Service Officer, UNRWA video clip F-069 (1987), online at (unrwa.photoshelter.com) bit.ly/43k8llD (accessed 8 June 2023).

In 'Aqbat Jabr, Israel also carried out demolitions in the areas where the displaced

refugees never returned. As the demolitions continued, they were disguised by a security narrative similar to that which Allon used to justify his plan to depopulate, annex, and permanently settle in the Jordan Valley. Abu Salim recounted:

> After the Israeli occupation, there were many empty houses in the camp. They were all demolished in 1984. When the Israelis took the decision to destroy these houses, they said the reason was that Palestinian fedayeen [freedom fighters] who infiltrated from Jordan were coming to these houses and hiding there. They informed UNRWA and carried out the demolition as planned. This drastically changed the camp.[52]

In the autumn of 1968, the weather got colder, and the temporary camps that the Jordanian government and UNRWA erected for the displaced Palestinians became uninhabitable. Schools in UNRWA refugee camps throughout Jordan were still overcrowded with new refugees, and thousands of Palestinian families who could not return to the West Bank needed more permanent accommodation. The refugees were thus relocated toward the highlands of Amman, where the temporary camps became more condensed, and gradually transformed into spaces of prolonged shelter. Once again, the refugees were forced to move farther away from their homeland, across the river from the West Bank, still hoping that some bridge will take them home.

Conclusion

Today, fifty-six years after Israel's military occupation and the ensuing exodus, the Jordan Valley is home to sixty thousand Palestinians whose present is as ominous as their past.[53] Through the intertwined strategies discussed above, Israel laid the ground for its expansionist settler-colonial project, gradually transforming the Jordan Valley into the space that Allon envisaged in his plan. In place of many of the depopulated and demolished Palestinian communities, Israel has thus far established thirty settlements, inhabited by thirteen thousand settlers who control 95 percent of the Jordan Valley's lands.[54] Meanwhile, Palestinians in the Jordan Valley continue to face systematic policies of oppression and erasure, which Israel began during the occupation in 1967: daily evictions, home demolitions, movement restrictions, and denial of access to land and resources. More recently, Israel has been calling for the formal annexation of the Jordan Valley, marking another step toward permanent settlement in the area. Between the past and the present of the Jordan Valley, there are many unexamined stories of survival and displacement which Palestinians lived before and after the exodus. Some were explored in this article, while many other stories are yet to be told.

Revisiting this history offers new insights as to what the Jordan Valley can tell us about the logic and manifestation of Israel's settler colonialism. On the one hand, as the memories of Palestinians and the UNRWA archives both reveal, the Jordan Valley was a harbor for thousands of Palestinian refugees in the aftermath of the Nakba. Despite their catastrophic displacement from their homes, refugees found in the Jordan Valley the will and resources to survive, and settled in camps near the bridges of the Jordan River. The transformation in the living conditions in the camps led the refugees to become an integral part of the Jordan Valley's communities, where they lived and even prospered until Israel occupied the Jordan Valley in 1967. At that time, as the stories of the refugee camps indicate, Israel spared no effort to continue what it had started during the Nakba – to forcibly transfer the Jordan Valley's refugees across the Jordan River to the east bank. Even when Israel allowed the repatriation of some of the displaced Palestinians, only a small minority of the Jordan Valley's displaced population ever returned. With that in mind, it is important to approach the Israeli occupation and the consequent exodus of the Palestinians in 1967 not as an isolated event, but rather as part of the ongoing Nakba that began in 1948.

On the other hand, the examined materials highlight the particularity of the Jordan Valley among the areas occupied by Israel in 1967. In the Jordan Valley, Israel had aspired for as much land and as few Palestinians as possible, following the longstanding Zionist logic of settler-colonial expansion. This led Israel to perceive the Jordan Valley as an empty frontier, but nothing could have been farther from the truth. To achieve this vision, Israel's military strategies were most aggressive in the occupied Jordan Valley; in this particular space, the real and direct complement to the formation of a settler society was the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians. This is manifest not only in the plan which Allon devised for the area, but also in the scale of the displacement, dispossession, and denial of return which Israel organized against the Jordan Valley's Palestinians, especially the Nakba refugees. This analytical path allows us to understand the history that this article narrates from broader perspectives across time and space, offering new insights into Israel's ongoing settler colonialism in the Jordan Valley and in larger Palestine, a settler colonialism that is being further entrenched every day.

Endnotes

1 Estimates of the Jordan Valley's population on the eve of the occupation in 1967, ranging between 200,000 and 320,000, are inconclusive. This is due in part to inconsistent data from the Ottoman and British periods, as well as the major demographic shift that occurred after the settlement of the Nakba refugees in the Jordan Valley in 1948. See: Ahmad Heneiti, *al-Siyasa al-Isra'iliyya tijah al-aghwar wa afaquha* [Israeli policy toward the Jordan Valley and its prospects] (Beirut and Ramallah: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2016), 26; Ghazi Falah, Salwa Massad, Lina Adwan, Rawan Kafri, Hadil Dalloul, and Alyssa Rhodes, "Israel's Spatial and A-Spatial Strategy of Dispossessing the Jordan Valley's Palestinian Inhabitants," *GeoJournal* (2023): 8, online at doi. org/10.1007/s10708-023-10876-9 (accessed 8 June 2023); and PLO Negotiations Affairs Department–Negotiations Support Unit, "Israeli Annexation of the Jordan Valley" (map), online at www.passia.org/maps/view/74 (accessed 18 May 2023).

2 Some of the interviews that appear in this article are drawn from my previous research on the history of the village of al-Jiftlik, conducted between October 2018 and June 2019 for my master's thesis at the Geneva Graduate Institute. See Atwa Jaber, "Disrupted Past, Suspended Present: Colonialism, Displacement, and Resilience in the Jordan Valley: The Case of Al Jiftlik." unpublished master's thesis, Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva, 2019. The more recent interviews are from my doctoral research on the oral histories of Palestinians from the Jordan Valley, which has been ongoing since September 2021.

3 I submitted an official request to UNRWA in February 2023 to access their central registry in Amman. As I write these words, this request is still being processed.

4 For example, see: Rosemary Sayigh, "Oral History, Colonialist Dispossession, and the State: The Palestinian Case," *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (2015): 193–204; Hana Sleiman and Kaoukab Chebaro, "Narrating Palestine: The Palestinian Oral History Archive Project," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 47, no. 2 (Winter 2018): 63–76; Rosemary Sayigh, "Self-Recording of a National-Disaster: Oral History and the

Palestinian Nakba," *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies* 19, no. 1 (2020): 1–13; Saleh Abdul Jawad, "Le témoignage des victims palestiniennes entre l'historiographie israélienne et l'historiographie arabe: Le cas de 1948," in *L'histoire trouée: negation et témoignage*, ed. Catherine Coquio (Nantes: L'Atalante, 2004), 627–40; Saleh Abdul Jawad, "Limadha la nastati' kitabat tarikhina al-mu'asir min dun istakhdam al-tarikh al-shafawi? Harb 1948 ka-hala dirasiyya" [Why are we unable to write our modern history without using oral history? The 1948 war as a scholarly condition], *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filastiniyya* 64 (Autumn 2005): 42*ff*; Nur Masalha, "Remembering the Palestinian Nakba: Commemoration, Oral History, and Narratives of Memory," *Holy Land Studies* 7, no. 2 (2008): 123–56; and Dima Saad, "Materializing Palestinian Memory: Objects of Home and the Everyday Eternities of Exile," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 80 (Winter 2019): 57–71.

5 Abdul Jawad, "Limadha la nastati' kitabat tarikhina," 58.

6 See: Michelle Hamers, "The UNRWA Film and Photo Archive," *Photography and Culture* 14, no. 3 (2021): 401–13; Stephanie Latte Abdallah, "UNRWA Photographs, 1950–1978: A View of History or Shaped by History?" in *I Would Have Smiled: Photographing the Palestinian Refugee Experience*, ed. Issam Nassar and Rasha Salti (Jerusalem: Institute for Palestine Studies, 2009), 63–104; Anne Irfan and Jo Kelcey, "Historical Silencing and Epistemic In/Justice through the UNRWA Archive," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 93 (Spring 2023): 13–33; and Issam Nassar, "Photography and the Oppressed: On Photographing the Palestinian Refugees," *International Journal for History, Culture, and Modernity* 8, no. 1 (June 2020): 38–57.

7 Irfan and Kelcey, "Historical Silencing," 14.

8 Until the end of the British Mandate, according to historian Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, there were six functional bridges between the two banks of the Jordan River: Banat Ya'qub, al-Majami', Shaykh Husayn, Damya, King Husayn, and a railway bridge on the Haifa–Dar'a line; Mustafa Murad al-Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastin* [Our Country, Palestine] (Kafr Qari': Dar al-Huda, 1991), vol. 1, 76. As I discuss in this article, Israel

demolished the bridges in the Jordan Valley during the 1967 war to sever the West Bank from Jordan.

9   The camps of 'Aqbat Jabr and 'Ayn al-Sultan were established in 1948 by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). As Jalal Al Husseini indicates, before the establishment of UNRWA, the ICRC was "tasked in December 1948 with registering and providing for refugees' basic needs under the guidance of the UN Relief for the Palestine Refugees (UNRPR)." See Jalal Al Husseini, "The Dilemmas of Local Development and Palestine Refugee Integration in Jordan: UNRWA and the Arab Development Society in Jericho (1950–80)," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 93 (Spring 2023): 63.

10 I say "estimated" because, while statistics for the 'Aqbat Jabr and 'Ayn al-Sultan populations are relatively clear, statistics for the al-Nuway'ima population are still lacking, especially in official UNRWA records. For UNRWA's official statistics, see UNRWA, "Profile: Ein el-Sultan Camp" (factsheet), May 2015, online at (unrwa. org) bit.ly/46ABs7i (accessed 23 May 2023); UNRWA, "Profile: Aqbat Jabr Camp" (factsheet), March 2015, online at (unrwa. org) bit.ly/3D2MYe8 (accessed 23 May 2023). The overall estimate used here is based on the statistics compiled in Heneiti, *al-Siyasa al-Isra'iliyya*, 26.

11 Like al-Nuway'ima camp, the exact population of al-'Ajajra is unknown. The available estimates come from Palestinian testimonies. Author interviews with: Abu 'Ali Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 11 October 2018; Abu Sharif Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 20 March 2019; Abu Rizq Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 26 May 2022; Abu Ibrahim Srour, Furush Bayt Dajan, 13 June 2022; Umm Amjad Masa'id, al-Baqa'a camp, 13 February 2023; and Umm 'Atiyya Masa'id, al-Baq'a camp, 21 February 2023. Some names have been changed to protect the privacy of individuals.

12 UNRWA was created on 8 December 1949 by the United Nations General Assembly (GA Resolution 302 [IV]) "to carry out direct relief and works programmes for Palestine refugees." See UNRWA, "Who We Are," online www.unrwa.org/who-we-are (accessed 8 June 2023).

13 Nassar, "Photography and the Oppressed," 53.

14 Author interview with Abu Sa'id, 'Aqbat Jabr Refugee Camp, 6 July 2022.

15 "Report by the Secretary-General under General Assembly Resolution 2252 (ES-V) and Security Council Resolution 237 (1967)" (S/8124), 18 August 1967, para. 31, online at (digitallibrary.un.org) bit.ly/43tN89j (accessed 8 June 2023).

16 Author interview with Abu Salim, 'Aqbat Jabr Refugee Camp, 6 July 2022.

17 Since the beginning of UNRWA's operations, vocational training constituted one of its main assistance programs to the refugees, aiming to integrate them in the job markets of the host countries. For more on the history of UNRWA's mandate, including vocational training, see Riccardo Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2–3 (2000): 229–52.

18 Author interview with Abu Sa'id, 'Aqbat Jabr Refugee Camp, 6 July 2022.

19 Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastin*, vol. 1, 97.

20 Author interview with Abu Ibrahim Srour, Furush Bayt Dajan, 13 June 2022

21 Author interview with Abu 'Ali Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 11 October 2018.

22 Dabbagh, *Biladuna Filastin*, vol. 2, 571.

23 Irfan and Kelcey, "Historical Silencing."

24 Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (London: Verso, 2016), 23.

25 Yigal Allon, "Israel: The Case for Defensible Borders," *Foreign Affairs* 55 (October 1976): 38–53.

26 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2017), 57–59.

27 In a forthcoming book chapter, I explore in detail Allon's plan and its links to former and later stages of Zionist settler colonialism in the Jordan Valley. I argue that the blueprints that Allon put forward, although never officially endorsed by any Israeli government, have constituted the foundation for Israel's ongoing policies against Palestinians and their lands in the Jordan Valley. See Atwa Jaber, "The Israeli Annexation of the Jordan Valley: Exploring a History of Settler-Colonial Expansion," in *Contemporary Debates on the Question of Palestine*, ed. Riccardo Bocco and Ibrahim Saïd (Geneva: Graduate Institute Publications, forthcoming).

28 Yigal Allon as quoted in Weizman, *Hollow Land*, 58.

29 "Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1966–30 June 1967" (New York: United Nations, 1967), General Assembly Official Records: 22nd session, Supplement no. 13 (A/6713), online at (digitallibrary.un.org) bit. ly/44cVEup (accessed 8 June 2023).

30 Author interviews with Abu Sharif Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 20 March 2019; Abu 'Ali Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 11 October 2018; Abu Rizq Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 26 May 2022; Umm Amjad Masa'id, al-Baq'a camp, 13 February 2023; and Umm 'Atiyya Masa'id, al-Baq'a camp, 21 February 2023.

31 Author interview with Abu 'Ali Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 11 October 2018.

32 "Report by the Secretary-General under General Assembly Resolution 2252 (ES-V) and Security Council Resolution 237 (1967)" (S/8158), 2 October 1967, para. 48, online at (digitallibrary.un.org) bit.ly/3OtIwLR (accessed 9 June 2023).

33 See: Peter Dodd and Halim Barakat, *River without Bridges: A Study of the Exodus of the 1967 Palestinian Arab Refugees* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1969), 40; Tom Segev, "The June 1967 War and the Palestinian Refugee Problem," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36, no. 3 (Spring 2007): 17; and Shlomo Sand, *The Invention of the Land of Israel: From Holy Land to Homeland* (London: Verso, 2014), 5.

34 Munir Nuseibah, "The Second Nakba: Displacement of Palestinians in and after the 1967 Occupation," *Orient XXI*, 1 June 2017, online at (orientxxi.info) bit.ly/3PEvr3s (accessed 8 June 2023).

35 "Report by the Secretary-General" (S/8158), 2 October 1967, annex 2, para. 2.

36 "The Middle East Activities of the International Committee of the Red Cross, June 1967–June 1970," *International Review of the Red Cross* 10, no. 113 (August 1970): 427.

37 "Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, 1 July 1966–30 June 1967" (A/6713), para. 34.

38 "Report by the Secretary-General" (S/8158), 2 October 1967, para. 185.

39 "Report by the Secretary-General" (S/8158), 2 October 1967, para. 191.

40 "Report by the Secretary-General" (S/8158), 2 October 1967, paras. 185–88.

41 "Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, 1 July 1966–30 June 1967" (A/6713), para. 36.

42 "Report by the Secretary-General" (S/8124), 18 August 1967, para. 8.

43 "Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, 1 July 1966–30 June 1967" (A/6713), para. 35.

44 "Report by the Secretary-General" (S/8158), 2 October 1967, para. 192.

45 "Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA, 1 July 1966–30 June 1967" (A/6713), para. 36.

46 "Middle East Activities of the ICRC," 448.

47 "Report by the Secretary-General" (S/8158), 2 October 1967, para. 196.

48 Author interview with Abu Rizq Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 26 May 2022.

49 Author interview with Abu Rizq Masa'id, al-Jiftlik, 26 May 2022.

50 See: 'Abd al-Rahman Tamimi, *al-Khutat al-Isra'iliyya fi al-aghwar al-Filastiniyya bayn al-ibtila' wa al-ifshal* [Israeli plans in the Palestinian Jordan Valley: between absorption and frustration] (al-Bireh: Palestinian Center for Regional Studies, 2002); and MA'AN Development Center, "Markaz ma'an yarsud 'asharat al-qura wa al-khirab wa al-tajammu'at al-mudammara ba'da 'am 1967 fi al-aghwar" [MA'AN Center monitors tens of destroyed villages, hamlets, and gatherings after 1967 in the Jordan Valley], *al-Quds*, 6 January 2013.

51 Interview with Sa'id Dajani, 'Aqbat Jabr Camp Service Officer, appearing in UNRWA video clip F-069 (1987), online at (unrwa. photoshelter.com) bit.ly/43k8llD (accessed 8 June 2023).

52 Author interview with Abu Salim, 'Aqbat Jabr Refugee Camp, 6 July 2022.

53 Falah et al., "Israel's Spatial and A-Spatial Strategy," 1.

54 Peace Now, "Construction in Settlements in the Jordan Valley in 2019," 18 March 2020, online at (peacenow.org.il) bit.ly/43fntRi (accessed 26 May 2023).

Popular Services Committees in West Bank Refugee Camps: Political Legacies, Formations, and Tensions

Ala Alazzeh

Abstract

Formed in the mid-1990s, the Popular Services Committees (PSC) in West Bank refugee camps have played a dual role: on the one hand, they are a liaison body between the camps and UNRWA and the Palestinian Authority (PA), and on the other, they perceive themselves as a political body and guardian of the right of return. In this article, Ala Alazzeh ethnographically historicizes the formation and position of the PSCs within the Palestinian political field. The author shows the role of the camp Youth Centers in the formation of PSCs, the post-Oslo tension between camp residents and the PA, and the camp residents' capitalization on the PLO's legacy and authority. He also points out the tension between self-representation of PSCs as a political body versus their de facto practice as municipal-like mediators between refugee camp communities and UNRWA, and the PA.

Keywords

Popular committees; UNRWA; refugee camps; right of return; national liberation.

On Nakba commemoration day in 2022 – under an arch supporting what is claimed to be the largest key in the world, symbolizing the right of return for Palestinian refugees – the head of 'Ayda refugee camp's Popular Services Committee (PSC) addressed hundreds of refugees from the camp and guests from other camps in the Bethlehem area (namely, Dahaysha and al-'Azza (Bayt Jibrin) camps):

> More than seventy-four years of the ongoing Nakba, the suffering
> and injustice continue, the international [community's] complicity to
> liquidate [*tasfiya*] our case as refugees continues. And yet, we as refugees
> take – in one way or another – an active role in this. In our case, the first
> wedge was the formation of the popular committees, which were quickly
> transformed into services committees used to facilitate UNRWA's
> reduction of services …. reduction and more reduction and more reduction
> until the PCs became responsible for every detail in providing services
> to the refugees … In my name and that of my colleagues in the Popular
> Committee in 'Ayda camp, I call upon the PLO through the Department
> of Refugee Affairs to cancel the services component and character of the
> PCs and return these functions to the UN through UNRWA.

These harsh, self-critical, and reflective words from Sa'id al-'Azzeh, head of 'Ayda's
PSC since 2018, illuminate the tensions: between the mandate and political role of the
PSCs; UNRWA as a legal body and service provider; the Palestinian Authority (PA)
as host political entity of the refugees; and the PLO as the political umbrella under
which the PSCs formally operate.[1] These can be understood broadly as tensions:
between the PA and the PLO over political representation of the refugees; between
the PA and UNRWA over the welfare of the refugees; among various parties over the
goal of improving the living conditions within the camp versus the right of return;
and more generally around the refugees' position in the larger Palestinian political
structure following Oslo. Addressing the formation, rise, and decline of the PSCs'
role in the context of the political and social needs of the refugees in the camps helps
to unpack these multilayered tensions. In this article, I show how the formation of
the Popular Services Committees in the mid-1990s has a long history within West
Bank refugee camps linked to previously existing institutions, particularly the Youth
Centers (*marakiz al-shabab*, officially called Youth Activities Centers) established by
UNRWA.[2] The article then examines how the PSCs negotiated their position between
UNRWA, the PA, the PLO, and the local community. More recently, the PSCs have
been subject to critique and self-critique because of their decreased political role.

Although the Popular Services Committees perceive themselves as a continuation
of the anti-colonial ethos and movements that grew from the 1970s, they must also
negotiate with a new Palestinian political body (the PA) and the transformation of
UNRWA's role over the years. After the establishment of the PA in 1994, its Ministry
of Local Government suggested that the refugee camps either become part of the
municipalities in which they are located or become governed by local bodies under
the auspices of the ministry. Refugee camp activists rejected both proposals; they
viewed them as tantamount to surrendering the right of return and normalizing the
presence of the refugee camps, by giving them the same status as any other locality
and thus stripping them of the specific history of their formation due to the Nakba.
Such normalization would also signify a recognition of the camps as permanent rather
than affirmation of their temporary nature, a status that the refugees hold onto. The

camps' rejection of this change in status was rooted in mobilization that began two years earlier, initiated by the Union of Youth Activity Centers (UYAC). The refugee camp activists insisted that the PA was a "host country," and the PLO was the legal and political representative of the refugees.[3] They put pressure on the PLO leadership – at the time officially independent from the PA – to maintain the refugee camps' distinct status. Their political representation would continue to be through the PLO (not the PA) and UNRWA would continue to provide services, bearing sole responsibility for development of the refugee camp and relief of the camp residents. The PLO Department of Refugee Affairs thus officially established PSCs in all nineteen refugee camps in the West Bank in 1996.

In this article, I discuss three components of this history: UYAC mobilization in the refugee camps leading up to the first intifada; refugee camp initiatives in the 1990s that sought to maintain a national liberation ethos built around the right of return; and the PSCs' negotiation of their position in relation to the PA, UNRWA, and local communities in an effort to maintain their culture around the right of return while improving the living conditions for the residents of the refugee camps. Recent academic work on refugee camps as an object of inquiry has studied camps through a number of lenses, including the materiality of the camp, its relationship to the city, spatial and identity positioning, modes of negotiation of daily life challenges, governance and exception, UNRWA's humanitarian mission and practices, transformations of UNRWA's humanitarian approaches, and critique of the anti-political humanitarianism of UNRWA.[4] Yet, refugee camps – arguably among the most highly politicized Palestinian communities and the site and target of symbolic and tangible violence of the ongoing settler-colonial project in Palestine – have been understudied concerning the political agency of the refugee camp residents.[5] Here, I approach the refugee camp not as an object or site of inquiry or a designator of spatial politics and violence, but as a place of political agency that challenges dominant mappings of politics in Palestine. I demonstrate through the voices of the people from the camp how the formation and practices of PSCs in three refugee camps in the West Bank disrupt the dominant paradigm that understands Palestinian politics through a sharp differentiation of the periods before and after the Oslo accords, which represented the transition for Palestinians from a struggle for national liberation to a state-building project.[6]

From Youth Centers to a Refugee Political Movement

At the entrance to 'Ayda camp near the office of the UNRWA camp director (*mudir al-mukhayyam*), political slogans painted on the walls express the right of return, support for political prisoners, and politically loaded symbols. Mustafa, a local tour guide from the camp in his mid-twenties, explained to me that some alternative tourist agencies had assigned 'Ayda camp as a tourist site. As he was conducting a tour with German tourists, he introduced me as a refugee from Bayt Jibrin (al-'Azza) camp (where I used to live). He explained to them how the three refugee camps in the Bethlehem area share a common history and similar living conditions and aspirations. To highlight

this history, he explained how the three camps used to have one soccer team from the 1980s to the early 1990s. Such an introduction was not a surprise to me, as the team was seen and thought of as a political endeavor in addition to an athletic one.

The connection between sports and politics in refugee camps in the West Bank goes even further back in the history of the political culture and organizing in the camps. In the 1950s, UNRWA created Youth Centers in the refugee camps to offer a space for sport activities, predominantly targeting male refugees. (A different institution called the Women's Program Centers targeted female refugees.)[7] The Israeli occupation closed some centers in the West Bank from 1967 to 1972; they then reopened in 1972 as sports sites operated, financially supported, and monitored by UNRWA. Kamal from Dahaysha camp recalled: "The UNRWA social services department used to offer uniforms, balls, and basic sports equipment, and monitor the annual elections [for the YC administration]." Khalid, another Dahaysha soccer player and active member in its YC described the transformations in the YC in the following way:

> The Youth Center used to be led by a few men from the older generation who cared only about sports, no political or intellectual affiliation, a group of traditional leaders [*taqlidiyyin*]. In 1976 or 1977 those traditional leaders lost the election to a new group, mainly leftists and almost all of whom were recently released from Israeli jails. That was the moment when the center became full of activities beyond sports …. It became full of cultural activities, including book readings of political texts and novels. The center hosted music events and theatrical plays. All played a role in creating a generation of political activists.

In similar terms, Hussam Khader, a central figure in the Fatah movement and community leader from Balata Camp in Nablus, described the election of 1979–80 for leadership of Balata's YC as one in which political activists (mainly from Fatah and many ex-political prisoners) ran against what he described as an "apolitical, sports only, traditional administration" of the YC. Khader described the moment with a smile on his face: "We collected all politically affiliated youth from the camp, al-Najah University students, and those in the [labor] unions, and asked them to become members in the YC. We became the majority and won by an enormous margin."

In both accounts, winning the YC elections meant transforming the centers from apolitical institutions into pro-PLO establishments. The change coincided with the overall dynamic in the West Bank, where mass organizations such as labor unions, voluntary work organizations, and student and women's organizations became part of the national infrastructure that replaced traditional structures and colonial control and enabled the mass mobilization of the first intifada in 1987.[8] Meanwhile professional and cultural institutions such as universities and cultural forums, although not adopting mass mobilization strategies, also played a major role in advancing anti-colonial political consciousness.[9]

Soon, small UNRWA-established sport facilities became sites at the heart of national politics. In a 1977 interview in *al-Fajr* newspaper with Hamdi Farraj, the head of

administration of Dahaysha camp's YC, the interviewer's editorial introduction states: "One feels proud to see national institutions growing in the homeland that show the human face and the best image of the struggle."[10] In the interview, Farraj stressed the cultural and social role of the YC beyond the camp and beyond soccer. He stressed the center's participation in voluntary work activities, hosting lectures, producing a cultural publication, and participating in the Palestinian heritage days at Bethlehem University, among other activities. The YC was seen as a national institution. In 1978, the YC administration sought donations from the pro-PLO elected Hebron municipal council to fulfill its "national duties," and in less than one week the head of the council, Fahd al-Qawasmi, approved the donation.[11]

In contrast to Dahaysha camp's YC, 'Ayda camp's YC maintained a sports-only administration. Nevertheless, the general atmosphere made politics inevitable and cultural-political activities started to develop in the 'Ayda YC in the early 1980s.[12] Anas Abu Srour, the current director of 'Ayda camp's YC, described the YC as an "authentic institution that symbolizes the political history of the camp and which is open to everyone in the community." His words speak to the centrality of the YCs in the refugee camps' political history and memory and the rapid gains of the pro-PLO activists in the West Bank camps in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The reference to "authenticity" in Anas's account was elaborated upon by another member of the YC in Dahaysha: "We built it. It has an open membership to all male members of the community, and its administration is democratically elected annually."[13]

According to all accounts, the YCs' buildings were built through the voluntary work of young people in the communities. UNRWA reported in 1978 that

> cash, labor, and materials were contributed by members of the centers and the refugee community as a whole. Youth services to the community included special programs for orphans, informal classes for illiterates, tutoring lessons for pupils, assistance in cleanliness campaigns and visits to sick and elderly camp residents.[14]

Yet within a few years, Israel started shutting down the Youth Centers in the camps, beginning with Qalandiya camp on 13 December 1981, followed by Dahaysha camp, Balata camp, and 'Arrub and Fawwar camps in Hebron (in April, May, and June 1982, respectively).[15] Tulkarm's YC was shut down from 29 October 1983 until 17 May 1984, and 'Ayda's YC remained closed after 11 March 1983.[16] UNRWA stated in its report in 1983: "Discussions continue with the Israeli authorities to have all these centers reopened, but the Agency has been informed that this is not yet possible for security reasons."[17] UNRWA continued to report to the UN General Assembly about the YCs until 1986, when a noticeable change can be identified in its way of reporting. UNRWA distanced itself from the YCs by highlighting that "the agency also encourages but does not organize or administer youth activities."[18] Despite the closure of the YCs in Dahaysha and 'Ayda, a new initiative emerged by local leaders in Dahaysha at the time. To bypass the Israeli closures of the YCs, Salah 'Abid Rabbu established a new soccer team named *'Ud* (عد). The two-lettered name was an abbreviation of the first

letter of the two camps' names and is the imperative "return" in Arabic. The new team continued to play a political role. Its formation was announced during a game with al-Bireh's YC and Ibrahim al-Tawil, the pro-PLO elected head of al-Bireh municipality whom Israel had just removed from office, was to honor the winner. Two years later, the team refused to continue playing in a tournament in Jericho because the Israeli-appointed head of the municipality came to honor the winner.[19]

With the outbreak of the 1987 intifada, all cultural and sports activities were suspended, and the YCs continued to be closed by Israel. In 1992, the centers were re-opened with no official clearance from the Israeli occupation authorities, and sports activities in the West Bank resumed. During this time, political activists from Dahaysha, Qalandiya, and Balata camps formed the Union of Youth Activity Centers (UYAC) as an umbrella institution for the refugee camps' social and cultural activities. In the following few years, most of the YCs elected new administrations and the UYAC gained the legitimacy to address refugee political issues, this time confronting the PLO official line.

What originated as a small UNRWA relief and social institution shifted to become a site for political pedagogy and organizing, and a mobilizing force that defies the common trope of refugee camps as isolated or states of exception. Adel Yahya, among others, argued that the refugee camps were at the heart of national politics some twenty years before the outbreak of the 1987 intifada.[20] Such a claim has merit when considering that the camps had been the target of more intense Israeli occupation, harassment, and punishment than other localities in the West Bank.[21] Moreover, political mobilization and organizing, and confrontation with the Israeli military occupation, were present in the refugee camps since the early moments of occupation in 1967.[22]

In August 1994, the UYAC and other refugee camp leaders – most of whom were invited by Hussam Khader of Balata – attended a meeting for refugee camp leadership to be held in Nur Shams camp in Nablus. Hussam told me, "The meeting was a response to Arafat's speech on the day in July 1994 he arrived in Gaza, after the Oslo accords, where Arafat did not mention the right of return for refugees. Part of the meeting discussed forming a political movement to represent and unify Palestinian refugees in Palestine and the diaspora."[23] The result was the Committee for the Defense of Palestinian Refugee Rights (CDPRR).[24]

From Refugees' Political Movement to Popular Committees

The CDPRR put aside its goal of creating an independent (that is, outside the auspices of the PLO) refugee political movement and instead focused on building a grassroots challenge to the official leadership of the newly formed PA. The Committee outlined its aims as "unifying the goals of the Palestinians toward the right of return as a political right and standing against projects promoting the re-settlement [of refugees], their integration [within the host countries], and compensation [instead of return]."[25] This political statement insinuated that the PLO's position as the sole political

representative of the Palestinian people was compromised and thus needed to be reshaped. The CDPRR also stressed improving living conditions for the residents in the refugee camps, as well as preserving UNRWA as the "international institutional body that represents the international community's responsibility toward the refugee question."[26] In 2009, Salah 'Abid Rabbu, spokesperson of the Union of Youth Activity Centers, described these early efforts to give Palestinian refugees a voice in the wake of the Oslo accords requiring "nonstop coordination with all activists we know in the refugee camps, from all political backgrounds in order to develop the best strategy to make our concerns visible."[27] Such efforts were an early warning from refugee camp activists about the Oslo process's compromises, and also a threat to the PA's emerging societal control.

Sociologist Jamil Hilal analyzed the PA's formative years in 1995–96, when the majority of first intifada activists (mainly from the Fatah movement) were incorporated into either the security forces or the civil bureaucracy and controlled civil society institutions, as a period during which the PA sought to establish hegemony.[28] A grassroots initiative coming from the UYAC challenged PA hegemony over the refugee camps. Coming on the seventh anniversary of the PLO's declaration of independence (1988), the UYAC published a statement on 13 November 1995 in *al-Quds* newspaper stating:

> The Oslo accords pushed aside the refugee question in its first phase and threw it into the unknown of the final phase [negotiations], creating disappointment and depression among the refugees, while raising concern and questions about their national destiny and social future, primarily because the refugee question is the mother of all national questions and the center of national struggle, and it is the question that the PLO was created for.[29]

This critique of the Oslo accords did not come from rival political factions but rather from a substantial sector of Palestinian society and specifically from the refugee camps with their symbolic weight. The UYAC claimed a representational position as a "democratically elected voluntary union representing a wide youth base from all the refugee camps" in the West Bank.[30] The UYUC's legitimacy was key, as 'Abid Rabbu pointed out: "The UYAC is not a political union in its missions or goals, and yet, coming from a sense of historical responsibility, the UYCA saw it as national duty" to produce the statement that called upon all "national, religious, and social forces to take the initiative in forming active [right of return] defense committees in the refugee camps and to hold regional conferences leading up to a general conference for Palestinian refugees to study the challenges and dangers that face them."[31] The statement stressed the right of return as a central slogan and also addressed the intended Palestinian Legislative Council elections, arguing that the proposed election law "does not reflect the factional, political, and ideological diversity of Palestinians and therefore endangers the unity of the Palestinians … and also adds more challenges to the refugee question."[32]

At the time, the common belief among refugees and the general public was that the Oslo accords would lead to a final agreement in which the PA would surrender the right of return and instead accept financial compensation for the refugees. UNRWA's direct involvement in potential political solutions, which first took place in multilateral negotiations held in Turkey in 1994, also put its position under suspicion. As 'Adnan 'Ajarama from 'Ayda Camp's PSC commented: "We saw UNRWA's actions – such as the move of its headquarters from Vienna to Gaza, the Peace Implantation Project (PIP), and its participation in the multilateral negotiation meetings – as politically motivated steps that had nothing to do with its [UNRWA's] mandate but rather a step toward dismantling the agency and compromising the right of return."[33] With these political transformations, the UYAC called for a refugee conference to be held on 8 December 1995 in the recently evacuated Far'a jail, a former Israeli interrogation center, near al-Far'a refugee camp. The location and timing were significant, marking the eighth anniversary of the 1987 intifada. A year later, Salah 'Abid Rabbu reflected on the symbolism of the conference in a poetic description:

> Refugees from all generations walked under the banner of the UYAC with its nineteen rays representing the nineteen refugee camps … the generation of 1948 and the generation of the intifada met, both generations carrying the same meaning, worries, and questions … and in their eyes [we see] the concerns and the fear for the most sacred national questions.[34]

He added another layer to the description when he described the conference starting over an hour late because attendees from the generation of the intifada were busy examining the jail cells and recalling their memories:

> They [the generation of the intifada] insisted on communicating to the generation of 1948 … not only their experiences with interrogation and hanging in the cells and torture, but also how upon their release [mostly] at nighttime, they found the camp [al-Far'a] awaiting them with warmness, accommodation, food, and tenderness, and the stories of al-Far'a refugee camps' kids coming and throwing packs of cigarettes to the prisoners and telling them the news of the outside world … This jail contains ten years of stories and legends … of torture and steadfastness.[35]

While the UYCA was organizing on the meta-politics of national representation, the newly formed PA was establishing its control over the refugee camps. A suggestion came from the Ministry of Local Government to create an administrative body in each camp. As Kamal, a member of the first PC in Dahaysha told me: "They [PA] want to treat us as any other locality, like a municipality or a village council, and do not see the refugee camp as a political space or a question."[36] The ministry's proposal was rejected by the activists in the camps as an attempt toward "normalization of the abnormal, making the temporary permanent."[37] The activists stressed the political

nature, abnormality, and temporariness of the camp and sought political representation through the PLO and not the PA, pressuring the PLO not to abandon the right of return.

This grassroots pressure contributed to the PLO's formation of the Department of Refugee Affairs in its 1996 National Council meeting in Gaza. The department began to establish Popular Services Committees in each refugee camp for the purpose of facilitating the services provided by UNRWA and the PA to the refugee camps, as well as maintaining the political nature of the refugee camps, defending the right of return, and overseeing the negotiation on the issue of the refugees.[38] Ibrahim from al-ʿAzza camp described his confrontation with the head of the PSC in the camp in the late 1990s: "When I asked the head of the PSC to put pressure on UNRWA to improve the sanitation in the camp, the head was angry and pulled a paper from his shirt pocket saying that he was appointed by Arafat. He said: 'I am a representative of the PLO. I am not the municipality.'"[39] The PSCs found themselves operating in a field of power among institutional structures like the PA, UNRWA, and the PLO, while balancing the right of return as a political project and the daily living needs of the camp residents. Such positioning foregrounded questions of their authority, legitimacy, responsibilities, and visions, which were also undergoing continual transformations according to shifting power dynamics between the major institutional actors.

The Tension of Services

> They are not called Services Committees … This is a name associated with and used by UNRWA. We call ourselves the Popular Committees … to make it clear, the committees were formed as a political reaction to the disregard of the refugee issue by the peace-making project between the PLO and the state of Israel.

This was the response of ʿAdnan ʿAjarama, the previous head of the Popular Committee in ʿAyda refugee camp, when I asked about the PSCs.[40] Although officially the committees are called Popular Service Committees, committee members are uncomfortable with the notion of "services." For them, services mean, on the one hand, providing for the needs of the residents of the camps and therefore taking on UNRWA's mandate, and, on the other an attempt by UNRWA "to depoliticize refugees and their representatives."[41] The committees' self-perception as a form of refugee political representation can be seen in discussions about the committees' composition and their involvement in municipal elections in the West Bank.

Since the late 1990s, the composition of PSCs was based on an agreement among political faction representatives in the camps and a process of nominating individuals politically connected to PLO factions. In ʿAyda, Dahaysha, and al-ʿAzza refugee camps, Hamas-associated individuals were also nominated. Some camp residents did not support elections for the PSCs because of their concern that electoral legitimacy

could be co-opted by institutional powers, largely the PA, to compromise the right of return in political negotiations. Other residents questioned the legitimacy of the PSCs and requested that PSC representatives be elected. Several committee members told me that they were not against elections, but they feared that the committees would be viewed as a municipal council and would replace UNRWA as a service provider.

Since the al-Far'a conference, the issue of refugee camp residents' participation in municipal elections has been discussed. The overwhelming majority rejected the idea that refugee camp residents participate because they viewed the PA as a "host country" for the refugees, like any other Arab state. Thus, to participate in the municipal elections would be to treat the refugee camp as any other neighborhood or community, dissolving the legal status of refugee. It would also enable UNRWA to absolve itself of the responsibility to provide services to the camps, while also diminishing the political signification of the camps as symbolizing the right of return. This rejection was maintained in PSC meetings in 1996 and 1997. In 2004, the Department of Refugee Affairs held a workshop on the issue of refugee camp participation in local elections attended by more than fifty individuals from the PSCs and representatives from political factions.[42] Several presented papers for discussion on issues related to PSC or municipal elections, such as their legality, their potential impact on the development of the camps and relations with UNRWA, and their political consequences.

After the workshop, and without involving the Department of Refugee Affairs, PSCs in the West Bank issued a statement that stressed the necessity to maintain the independence of the refugee camps and their particularity and political identity to "remain as witnesses to the Zionist crime" [the Nakba], as well as an assurance that refugee camp residents can elect their representatives for the PSCs within the borders of the camp and under the political, legal, and administrative direction of the Department of Refugee Affairs. The statement also requested that the department coordinate with the PA and its ministries to create a legal regulation for these camp elections.

The legal regulation, officially called the internal code for the PSCs, was instituted in 2011 and required the creation of a general assembly comprised of individuals from PLO factions and those active in institutions within the camp such as the Youth Activity Centers, Women's Program Centers, and other initiatives. The general assembly, which should be no less than 1 percent of the refugee camp population, would have the mandate to elect from seven to thirteen PSC members. The shift from the 2004 statement that spoke about general elections in the camps to choose their representatives to the 2011 code that limited the electing body to be in effect 1 percent of the residents was a politically motivated transformation due to the Department of Refugee Affairs' fear that Hamas would win camp elections following its victory in the 2007 legislative elections. We see this clearly in point 2 of article 7 of the code that states that the PSCs must acknowledge "the PLO as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."[43] These two aspects of the code were meant to prevent Hamas-affiliated members from participating in the elections or leading the PSCs. Many camp residents criticized the code as subverting legitimate representation of the camps.[44]

With regard to UNRWA, the code stated that among the PSCs' responsibilities was to follow up daily with UNRWA's administered services, to encourage the development of those services, and to protest their reduction as well as any initiative to cancel the right of return. The PSCs put pressure on UNRWA to improve its services to the camps in terms of its emergency and regular programs of relief, education, and health. At the same time, the PSCs were aware of the political agenda, led primarily by the United States, to dismantle UNRWA and undermine its mandate.[45] This was most visible during Donald Trump's presidency, when he stopped all U.S. funding to UNRWA. In 2007, the Department of Refugee Affairs held a meeting for all the PSCs in the West Bank, UNRWA's director, and UNRWA's head of programs. In the meeting, the PSCs played the role of monitoring and questioning UNRWA's operations, programs, and practices in the camps, including their employment policies, the existence of health clinics, and the quality of education, to name only a few.[46] As one of the members of the PSCs in 'Ayda refugee camp proudly told me: "We know everything within UNRWA, who works to serve the refugees and who does not. We follow their work and reports. We are UNRWA's monitoring body."[47]

PSC members have described UNRWA's policies as being based on a language of humanitarian relief and "need."[48] In this dynamic, UNRWA expects PSCs to play a mediating role with the refugee camp community that in effect facilitates UNRWA's operations while giving the PSCs a sense of meaning to their work. Ahmad, an al-'Azza refugee camp PSC member, commented:

> They [UNRWA] want us to play a mediator role for them … and we were willing to do that, but we were not willing to be a replacement for UNRWA … We will always be on the side of our community … everyone in the community talks about their rights and UNRWA's obligations … at times we feel that we and UNRWA speak different languages.[49]

The PSCs see UNRWA's services not only as interim humanitarian interventions but as a matter of rights and obligations – in other words, the right of refugees to get some form of "symbolic compensation" for their daily suffering. The food ration (as an example) signifies the world's responsibility for the refugees' conditions embodied in UNRWA's mandate toward them, while also serving as a status-affirming practice, namely recognition of their legal status as refugees.[50]

The PSCs' mediating role is one of negotiation that at times compromises what are considered the rights of the community. As one Dahaysha refugee camp PSC member told me:

> The formal policy of assessing a family's needs takes the form of a visit by an UNRWA social worker who implements guidelines of who is and who is not considered in need. We [PSC members] have little control to revise these guidelines. We [the PSC] argue with them about the criteria in general … usually failing … We then go to the UNRWA employees starting from the lower-ranking ones, making our way up to the chief of

the program … In the end, how does the issue get solved? Usually they give us an additional number of food rations for the community and in return UNRWA expects us to convince the excluded families to accept.[51]

Although the PCSs are often able to achieve some increase in the number of relief recipients, they acknowledge their difficulties in negotiating or addressing UNRWA's policies.

The Popular Services Committees' presence in the community becomes more visible during planning and implementation of UNRWA's emergency relief and infrastructure development programs because of UNRWA's increased daily contact with the PSCs in those moments. However, since 2018, PSC members have seen fewer development projects undertaken by UNRWA in the refugee camps. PSCs have thus sought funding from other sources such as PA ministries, Mahmud 'Abbas's presidential office, the PLO Department of Refugee Affairs, and international donors in order to implement development projects in the camps such as paving streets, creating public spaces for residents, and maintaining houses, sewage systems, and water pipelines. The tensions highlighted in my interviews with PSC members were based on their understanding of the needs of the refugee communities alongside the fear that the PSCs were being forced to take over UNRWA's role and responsibilities. These dynamics maintain the PSCs' role as service recipients and facilitators, which is seen by PSC members as depoliticizing and limiting the political vision of the PSCs.

Conclusion

Since their formation, the PSCs have played a role that aids both UNRWA's and the PA's governing of the refugee camp communities. Yet they also proudly define this role as one that uses the power and resources offered by UNRWA and the PA to actively maintain the culture of the right of return. PSC negotiations with UNRWA and the PA are bounded by a national liberation discourse that grew from political consciousness activities within the camps and that has not dissolved under the hegemony of the state-building project. Because of their affiliation with the PLO (and not the PA), their discourse and adherence to the right of return, and their foundation in the national consciousness from the early days following the 1967 occupation, the PSCs also challenge the dominant paradigm of thinking about Palestinian politics – one that views Oslo as a historical, social, and economic break between national liberation politics and a state-building project.

While representation of Palestinian resistance to Oslo has often focused on the political discourse of rival factions, this article elaborates a different modality of opposition and critique, one manifested specifically through grassroots mobilization. As refugee camps are themselves living sites of the settler-colonial project and its violence, the multilayered, transforming politics of the refugee camps are central to Palestinians' anticolonial consciousness. The construction of this political consciousness over the years must be understood from the perspectives of refugee camp residents themselves, including how camp residents hold the PSCs accountable

to a national liberation ethos centered on the right of return. The experiences of the refugee camps' residents thus provide a lens that gives historical depth to Palestinian national politics, institutional power dynamics, and grassroots mobilization.

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Endnotes

1   In interviews, most members of the PSCs self-described the committees as Popular Committees because of the apolitical connotation of the term "services." Interviews for this article were conducted in two phases: the first was in 2009 and the research based on these interviews was presented at a panel ("Sixty Years On: A Critical Revisiting of UNRWA for Palestine Refugees") supported by the Palestinian American Research Council at the 2009 annual conference of the Middle East Studies Association of North America; the second research phase was conducted in 2022. The main interviews for this article were thus conducted over ten years apart, while the research continued via informal interviews and media analysis of the PSCs. It is important to note that utilizing what may be considered "old" ethnographic data becomes necessary and beneficial when practices are governed by relatively stable fields of power and when the ethnographic object of inquiry is institutional; thus, individual interlocutors' reflections and narratives become illuminating traces of the structures of power rather than a main site of analysis.

2   This research is based in the West Bank due to colonial restrictions on the movement of Palestinian researchers. Therefore, it is difficult to extricate ethnographically valid comparisons between the case of the PSCs in the West Bank and Gaza.

3   'Adnan 'Ajarama and Samir 'Ata from 'Ayda refugee camp's PSC, interview by author, summer 2009. Under pressure from the refugee camp PSCs and the larger refugee movement, the PLO requested that the PA be treated by UNRWA as a "host country," the same as Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria. This status signifies that refugees are temporarily under the authority of the PA until the question of the refugees would be resolved, which for Palestinian refugees entails the return to the villages, town, and cities in which they resided before 1948.

4   See, for example: Nasser Abourahme, "Assembling and Spilling-Over: Towards an 'Ethnography of Cement' in a Palestinian Refugee Camp," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 39, no. 2 (2014): 200–217; Dorota Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska, "The Right to the Camp: Spatial Politics of Protracted Encampment in the West Bank," *Political Geography* 61 (2017): 160–69; Alessandra Gola, "Homing Displacements: Socio-Spatial Identities in Contemporary Urban Palestine," in *Making Home(s) in Displacement: Critical Reflections on a Spatial Practice*, ed. Alessandra Gola, Luce Beeckmans, Ashika Singh, and Hilde Heynen (Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2022), 239–64; Dorota Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska, "The Meanings of Ordinary in Times of Crisis: The Case of a Palestinian Refugee Camp in the West Bank," *Polish Sociological Review* 187 (2014): 395–410; Penny Johnson, "Tales of Strength and Danger: Sahar and the Tactics of Everyday Life in Amari Refugee Camp, Palestine," *Signs* 32, no. 3 (2007): 597–619; Sari Hanafi and Taylor Long, "Governance, Governmentalities, and the State of Exception in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon," *Journal of Refugee Studies* 23, no. 2 (June 2010): 134–59; Ilana Feldman, "Palestinian Refugee Experience in a Changing Humanitarian Order," Birzeit University Working Paper 2011/58(ENG), online at (ssrn.com) bit.ly/3OqXSAU; Jalal Al Husseini, "UNRWA and the Refugees: A Difficult but Lasting Marriage," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 40, no. 1 (2010): 6–26; and Linda Tabar, "The 'Urban Redesign' of Jenin Refugee Camp: Humanitarian Intervention and Rational Violence," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 2 (2012): 44–61.

5   See Maya Rosenfeld, *Confronting the*

Occupation: Work, Education, and Political Activism of Palestinian Families in a Refugee Camp (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

6 See, for example, Jamil Hilal, *al-Nidham al-siyasi ba'd Oslo: dirasa tahliliyya naqdiyya* [The Palestinian political system after Oslo: a critical assessment] (Ramallah and Beirut: Muwatin, the Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy, and Institute of Palestine Studies, 1998).

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8 Lisa Taraki, "Mass Organizations in the West Bank," in *Occupation: Israel over Palestine*, ed. Naseer Aruri (Belmont, MA: Association of Arab-American University Graduates, 1989), 431–52.

9 Lisa Taraki, "The Development of Political Consciousness among Palestinians in the Occupied Territories," in *Intifada: Palestine at the Crossroads*, ed. Jamal Raji Nassar and Roger Heacock (New York: Praeger, 1991), 53–72.

10 'Umran al-Sharabati, "Waqfatun 'ala nashatat markaz shabab al-Dahaysha" [Elaborating on the Activities of the Dahaysha Youth Center], *al-Fajr* (Jerusalem), 8 June 1977, 5, online at (palarchive.org) bit.ly/3Y38Ob7 (accessed 22 May 2023).

11 Letter sent on 16 July 1978, response received on 25 July 1978. These letters can be found online in the Palestinian Museum Digital Archive, at (palarchive.org) bit.ly/3K888LW and (palarchive.org) bit.ly/3XDMynU, respectively (accessed 22 May 2023).

12 Interview with one of the football players and political activists from the first intifada from al-'Azza refugee camp, summer 2022.

13 Their notion of inclusivity is clearly gendered.

14 "Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1977–30 June 1978," General Assembly 33rd session, Supplement no. 13 (A/33/13), online at (digitallibrary.un.org) bit.ly/44ezdEX (accessed 22 May 2023).

15 "Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1981–30 June 1982," General Assembly 37th session, Supplement no. 13 (A/37/13), online at (un.org) bit.ly/3pKas4u (accessed 22 May 2023).

16 "Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1982–30 June 1983," General Assembly 38th session, Supplement no. 13 (A/38/13), online at (digitallibrary.un.org) bit.ly/46z3jEN (accessed 22 May 2023).

17 "Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, 1 July 1982–30 June 1983."

18 Report of the Commissioner-General of UNRWA to the UN General Assembly, 1986.

19 Interview with Khalid, a football player from Dahaysha refugee camp, summer 2022.

20 Adel Yahya, "The Role of the Refugee Camps," in *Intifada*, ed. Nassar and Heacock, 91–106.

21 Sarah Graham-Brown, "Impact on the Social Structure of Palestinian Society," in *Occupation*, ed. Aruri, 167–222.

22 Rosenfeld, *Confronting the Occupation*.

23 Hussam Khader, conversation/interview with the author, summer 2022. Khader is a Fatah leader and well known for his opposition to PA chairman Mahmud 'Abbas. Before the first intifada, he had already been arrested twenty-three times, and in early 1988 he was in the first group of intifada activists to be deported.

24 Several committees with similar names were formed in the mid-1990s in the West Bank and Gaza, 1948 occupied Palestine, and in the diaspora.

25 "About CDPRR," online at (yafa.info) bit.ly/3rfslJ9 (last accessed 6 August 2022; link no longer active).

26 "About CDPRR."

27 Salah 'Abid Rabbu, interview with the author, summer 2009.

28 Hilal, *al-Nidham al-siyasi*.

29 "Bayan ittihad marakaz al-shabab al-

ijtima'iyya fi mukhayyamat al-daffa yu'akkad 'ala huquq al-laji'in wa al-tamassuk bi-l-munadhdhama mumathilan shari'an wa wahidan" [Statement of the Union of Youth Activity Centers in the West Bank camps affirms the rights of the refugees and adheres to the (Palestine Liberation) Organization as sole legitimate representative], *al-Quds*, 13 November 1995.

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31 "Bayan ittihad marakaz al-shabab."

32 "Bayan ittihad marakaz al-shabab."

33 'Adnan 'Ajarama from 'Ayda refugee camp's PSC, interview with the author, summer 2009.

34 'Abid Rabbu, *al-Laji'un*, 31–45.

35 'Abid Rabbu, *al-Laji'un*, 31–45. The timing and location of the conference, drawing on the memory of the beginning of the 1987 intifada and the site being the interrogation jail near the refugee camp, shows the links between memory and politics in the settler-colonial context where memory and commemorations are valuable resources for mobilization and the production of futuristic political visions. See: Anaheed al-Hardan, "The Right of Return Movement in Syria: Building a Culture of Return, Mobilizing Memories for the Return," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 2 (2012): 62–79; and Ala Alazzeh, "al-Dhakira bi-wasfiha khitaban wa ru'ya mustaqbaliyya: mumarisat takhlid intifadat 'am 1987" [Memory as discourse and futuristic vison: mnemonic practices of the 1987 Intifada], *Idafat: The Arab Journal of Sociology* 43–44 (Summer–Fall 2018): 63–80.

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40 'Adnan 'Ajarama, interview with the author, summer 2009.

41 'Adnan 'Ajarama, interview with the author, summer 2009.

42 Proceedings of the meeting published as *Mukhayyamat al-laji'in wa al-intikhabat al-mahaliyya (al-daffa al-gharbiyya wa qita' Ghazza)* [Refugee camps and local elections (West Bank and Gaza Strip)] (PLO Department of Refugee Affairs, 2005), which can be found online at bit.ly/43iNS0G (accessed 23 May 2023).

43 "al-Nidham al-dakhili al-mu'addal li-l-lijan al-sha'biyya li-l-khidmat fi mukhayyamat al-laji'in al-Filastiniyyin" [Amended rules of procedure for the popular service committees in the Palestinian refugee camps], PLO Department of Refugee Affairs, April 2011.

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45 Anwar Hamam, an official from the Department of Refugee Affairs, interview with the author, summer 2022.

46 Proceedings of a workshop titled "Baramij wikalat al-umum al-muttahida li-ghawth wa tashghil al-laji'in (al-UNRWA) fi al-daffa al-gharbiyya" [Programs of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Refugees (UNRWA) in the West Bank], held on 8 August 2007 in Ramallah, published by the PLO Department for Refugee Affairs, online at (plord.ps) bit.ly/3O0d0VI (accessed 22 May 2023).

47 Interview with PSC member of 'Ayda refugee camp, summer 2009.

48 Ahmad from Bayt Jibrin refugee camp, PSC member, interview with the author, summer 2022.

49 Ahmad from Bayt Jibrin refugee camp, PSC member, interview with the author, summer 2022.

50 In 2011, UNRWA changed its food-ration-based Special Hardship Assistance Program to a Social Safety Net Program with criteria based on the national poverty line, while also ending its emergency food assistance program in the West Bank.

51 Ahmad from Bayt Jibrin refugee camp, PSC member, interview with the author, summer 2022.

Managing Palestinian Refugees in Syria: A Socio-historical Overview of UNRWA's Relationship with Syrian Authorities, 1950–70

Valentina Napolitano

Abstract

Based on a study of previously unexplored UNRWA archives covering a period from the 1950s to the 1970s, this essay examines the relationship between the UN agency and the Syrian government agency PARI (Palestine Arab Refugee Institution) in managing Palestinian refugees in Syria. It offers insight into this decisive phase during which refugee camps were constructed and the Syrian host policy was developed. By contributing to the debates on humanitarianism in displacement, the author sheds light on divergent visions and economic and political interests, but also on the negotiations that arise between international humanitarian actors and local authorities in the management of refugee arrivals. More precisely, it argues that PARI's policies aimed to support Syria's political line on the Palestinian cause in general, and were also designed to attract international aid to the country. From its side, UNRWA attempted to take maximum advantage of the favorable socio-economic conditions that Syria conferred on the refugees to offload some of its responsibilities and save on its budget intended for them.

Keywords

Palestinian refugees; Syria; UNRWA; Palestine Arab Refugee Institution (PARI); humanitarianism.

In each country where it operates, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) has had to deal with local institutions created to manage the

Palestinian presence in line with the host country's national interests. In Syria, the Palestine Arab Refugee Institution (PARI) was established in 1949 following the arrival of nearly ninety-five thousand Palestinian refugees displaced by the formation of the state of Israel in 1948.[1] This organization, under the responsibility of the interior ministry, was mandated to register refugees and determine their legal status, to establish camps on Syrian territory, and to mediate between the Syrian authorities, on the one hand, and refugees and international aid organizations on the other.[2] As the official vehicle for Syrian policy on Palestinian refugees, PARI thus became UNRWA's main interlocutor in Syria.

PARI and UNRWA had divergent visions of the hosting policy toward Palestinian refugees, and different political and economic interests. PARI aimed to support Syria's political line on the Palestinian cause in general, based on the country's opposition to Israel and its defense of the refugees' "right of return." PARI was also designed to manage Palestinian refugees in Syrian territory, to attract international aid, and to develop Syria's urban infrastructures in areas around refugee camps. UNRWA sought to take maximum advantage of Syria's favorable socio-economic conditions for Palestinian refugees to offload some of its responsibilities and reduce its budget in a context of fluctuating funding that characterized the agency since his inception.[3] At the same time, UNRWA policy in Syria favored the integration of Palestinians into their host society as a long-term solution to the refugee issue, an approach always considered controversial by Syrian authorities. Thus, UNRWA and PARI's relationship was marked by suspicion but also strained cooperation, as each needed the other to help implement their policies.

By exploring the relationship between UNRWA and PARI in the management of Palestinian refugees in Syria, this article aims more generally to illustrate the discrepancies and negotiations that arise between international humanitarian actors and local authorities and organizations in managing refugee arrivals. Recent debates on humanitarian responses to displacement has analyzed the interaction between initiatives led from the Global North and those led from the Global South, which are informed by different visions of refugee welcoming and political priorities.[4] Local hosting and assistance practices, both institutional and informal, have contested the supremacy of Global Northled humanitarianism, showing how local actors can appropriate, and sometimes subvert, international aid for their specific interests.[5] Research on Syrian displacement post-2011, for example, shows how refugee crises turn into conflicts of interest between multiple actors called upon to care for refugees. Decisions to host refugees can provide humanitarian income that can then be used for internal development projects, as highlighted by Jordanian authorities' efforts to link the humanitarian response to resilience, reserving funds to serve vulnerable members of the host society.[6]

Syria's management of the Palestinian refugee presence attempted not only to use UN humanitarian aid to improve local infrastructures for both the refugee and host population, but also to insert its refugee policy into broader political propaganda. By accusing UNRWA of pursuing the permanent resettlement (*tawtin*)

Figure 1. "Palestine refugee students at an UNRWA school in Yarmouk camp, Syria." © 1988 UNRWA Photo by Munir Nasr.

of Palestinian refugees in neighboring countries, and of reducing its aid to them, Syria attempted to present itself as the main defender of the Palestinian cause and of the refugees' right of return.[7]

This article elucidates negotiations between PARI and UNRWA in the decisive period during which refugee camps and most important infrastructure were constructed and improved. In doing so, it contributes to a growing body of research on the Palestinian refugee community in Syria,[8] which, compared to Palestinian communities in other host countries, remains understudied especially in the period before 2011.[9] The bulk of the existing literature concentrates on the management of Palestinian refugees in Syria and their relatively favorable juridical status – including its effects on Palestinians' social, political, and urban life in Syria.[10] The evolution of Yarmuk camp and the issue of refugee camp interactions with urban centers in Syria have also been studied to better understand Palestinians' integration into Syrian host society and the shaping of distinct forms of national belonging, at the center of which are forms of transmitting collective memory.[11] Little attention has been given to UNRWA's role, with the major exception of Nell Gabiam, who focused on rehabilitation projects in Nayrab and 'Ayn al-Tall camps, on the outskirts of Aleppo, in 2010.[12] Gabiam underlined UNRWA's increasing shift toward a development approach to Palestinian refugees, refugees' perceptions of this policy, and their efforts to insert UNRWA's depoliticized relief into a discourse that presented as "the

symbol of continued international responsibility for finding a satisfactory political solution to their predicament."[13]

The article seeks to expand on this work by centering on PARI's role. Access to both UNRWA's headquarters in Damascus and PARI's offices was, even before 2011, extremely difficult. This inaccessibility was compounded by the general censorship that reigned in Syria around sensitive political issues and the complications of accessing material in UNRWA's archives in Amman – explaining in large part the relative dearth of research on Palestinian refugees in Syria. This essay is based on research in UNRWA's archives in Amman, including internal correspondence and memoranda exchanged between the directors of UNRWA headquarters in Beirut, the director and acting director of Syrian affairs, the director of relief services in Damascus, the UN secretary general, and the commissioner general of the UNRWA, as well as correspondence with the director of PARI.[14] UNRWA's archives also hold articles from the Syrian press addressing the relationship between Syria and the UN agency, as well as communication from Palestinian and Syrian political actors.[15] These sources illuminate the tensions and negotiations between UNRWA and PARI, rooted in the disparate visions and interests of each.

I wrote this article analyzing historical documents on Palestinian refugee management in Syria more than eleven years after consulting the archives and in a context when nearly half of the Palestinian population has been displaced internally or to neighboring countries, and refugees camp infrastructure has been seriously damaged. Piecing together the history and evolution of the Palestinian camps in Syria based on previously undiscovered archives is an effort to document a part of their history in this crucial period for the country. It also aims also to provide a better understanding of the reconstruction and management plans that will be put in place in Palestinian camps once the still ongoing war ends.[16]

Syria's Nationalist Approach to Refugees

Palestinian refugees settled in Syria in several waves. The two most important periods of Palestinian displacement to Syria were the period from 1947 to 1956 (or from the UN partition resolution until the combined British-French-Israeli attack on Egypt), and the period immediately following the June 1967 war, which displaced between sixteen thousand and nineteen thousand new Palestinian refugees, as well as one hundred thousand others (Palestinians and Syrians) from the Golan region.[17] Later, thousands more Palestinians settled in Syria as a result of conflicts in other Arab host countries that had further displaced refugees who had settled in Jordan, Kuwait, and Iraq.[18]

While Syrian authorities' reception policy shifted according to the different flows of Palestinian refugees, it was mainly designed to support an Arab nationalist policy that envisioned Syria as a pillar in the struggle against Israel.[19] Syria's nationalist

perspective explains its choice to provide Palestinian refugees with favorable living conditions compared to other host countries, such as Lebanon. While Syrians showed genuine solidarity with Palestinian refugees, this policy can also be explained by the relatively small number of refugees who arrived there. In 1949, Palestinians did not exceed 2 to 3 percent of the total Syrian population, whereas in Lebanon they represented almost 10 percent and in Jordan more than half the population.[20]

Syria also granted full civil rights to Palestinians, although it differentiated between Palestinian refugees and Syrian citizens in political and economic terms.[21] Law no. 260, adopted in 1956, stipulates that "Palestinians residing in Syria shall be considered as ethnic Syrians in all areas covered by the law and concerning work,

Figure 2. "This elderly Palestine refugee woman fled north to Syria seeking safety during the war in 1948 and then again during the 1967 Arab-Israeli hostilities. She became a permanent refugee in exile living in Yarmouk refugee camp in a small concrete shelter built by UNRWA." © 1975 UNRWA Archive. Photographer unknown.

trade and military service, while retaining their original nationality."[22] This law only applies to Palestinians who arrived in the country between 1947 and 1967 and registered with PARI; Palestinian refugees who came to Syria during subsequent migratory episodes are treated according to the same legislation as other foreigners.

Camps for Palestinian refugees were first established near urban centers (Damascus, Aleppo, Dar'a, Homs, Hama, and Latakia), where refugees settled because of work opportunities. These camps are differentiated by the status of the land on which they were constructed, which also determines UNRWA's involvement in their management, as well as that of PARI and local institutions. Indeed, PARI contests UNRWA's categorization of camps, demanding that all Palestinian camps be treated the same.

According to UNRWA, there are three types of camps: "organized" or "official" camps, "unofficial" or "unorganized" camps, and "emergency" camps. Official

camps are defined as "those which were established by the Agency to accommodate Palestine Refugees who came into Syria as a result of the 1948 hostilities. At these camps the Agency provides all relief, health, and education services."[23] In Syria, nine camps meet this definition. These were built between 1949 and 1951, and were established through coordination between UNRWA and PARI. Each Palestinian family was given a plot of land, leased by the state to PARI, the size of which depended on the number of family members.[24] UNRWA, for its part, was responsible for providing materials enabling refugees to build their own living quarters. This practice was specific to the Syrian context; in other Arab countries, UNRWA was tasked with construction of housing.

Table 1. The location and status of Palestinian refugee camps in Syria, according to the official correspondence from the Director of Relief Services to UNRWA General Commissioner, "Camps," 1 April 1970, in RE 400, UNRWA Archives, Amman.

Camps	Status
Damascus region	
Yarmuk	Unofficial
Jaramana	Official and emergency
Sbeineh	Official and emergency
Khan Dannun	Official
Qabr al-Sitt	Official and emergency
Khan al-Shih	Official and emergency
Northern region	
'Ayn al-Tall	Unofficial
Latakia	Unofficial
Nayrab	Official
Hama	Official
Homs (al-'A'idin)	Official
Southern region	
Dar'a	Official and emergency

Beginning in the mid-1950s, the Syrian authorities established four additional refugee camps to accommodate the growing population and to provide shelter for Palestinians who remained in a precarious situation. UNRWA classified these camps as "unorganized" or "unofficial." Unofficial camps, including Yarmuk, were run directly by the local Syrian authorities. Unlike the official camps, where a "camp leader" acted as an intermediary between UNRWA and the local population, official camps had no such figure.[25] Moreover, in unofficial camps, UNRWA was not responsible for

Figure 3. "In-service health training: To keep up-to-date with new trends in medical care, UNRWA holds in-service training sessions for its health staff. This session was held in Yarmouk camp, Syria." © 1988 UNRWA Photo by Munir Nasr.

the maintenance of communal infrastructure, nor for waste collection; however, it continued to provide education and health services as well as food. "Emergency" camps were created after the 1967 war to deal with the arrival of new refugees and displaced persons who settled mainly in and around the city of Damascus.[26] These camps resulted from the expansion of official and unofficial camps, and thus adopted the type of administration that already existed in each respective camp. In addition to camps, there were also "gatherings" (*tajammu'at*) consisting of about twenty-five families that established themselves in Syrian neighborhoods but still benefited from UNRWA services.[27] Over time, many Palestinians also settled in Syrian cities without benefiting from UNRWA assistance.

It is within this specific context that UNRWA attempted to fulfill its mission in Syria. While UNRWA benefited from a relatively favorable situation for Palestinian refugees, the agency was careful not to align itself too closely with Syria's explicitly benevolent approach, which would have been seen as an effort to permanently resettle the refugees. This also explains UNRWA's aspiration in Syria to balance intervention with withdrawal, which enabled it to slash its budget. UNRWA was also confronted in Syria by an adverse local environment dominated by wary authorities.

Acting in a Critical Environment: UNRWA's Strategy in Syria

Since the start of its mission in Syria, PARI criticized UNRWA, accusing it of taking advantage of Syria's support for refugees to limit its own aid. In November 1960, for example, (Arthur Frederick) John Reddaway, UNRWA's acting director in Syria, acknowledged that its spending in Syria was not in direct proportion to the number of Palestinian refugees there, telling PARI's director:

> You well know how limited our fund[s] are … It is undeniable that, in general, the refugees accommodated in the Syrian Region are better off than those in, say, the Gaza Strip and Jordan Valley. If there has, as you suggest, been any tendency in the past for the Agency to spend proportionately more of its funds in those areas and proportionately less in the Syrian region, this is the explanation and not that there has been any deliberate policy on the part of the Agency to discriminate against the refugees in the Syrian Region.[28]

Budgetary considerations but also a general vision of refugees' integration in host countries also informed UNRWA's housing policy in Syria. Responding to PARI's accusation that UNRWA was discriminating against Palestinians in Syria by merely providing materials for families to build their own accommodation rather than undertaking the construction itself, UNRWA's director of Syrian affairs, Arthur L. Geaney, argued that this was not a financial decision but one serving Palestinians' rehabilitation within Syrian society through work and self-sufficiency. In October 1960, Geaney wrote to Reddaway:

> From the beginning it was felt that the refugees should be encouraged to rely upon their own efforts toward social and financial rehabilitation, without, of course, any prejudice to their right for repatriation and/ or compensation. Until 1953 there was no distinction of treatment between the refugees in Syria and in other host countries as nowhere was the Agency authorized to build shelters in anything which might look permanent …. In 1953, the Syria Government lifted the ban on permanent dwellings, and although not authorizing construction in anything more solid than mud bricks, all or most of the tents and reed huts disappeared and were replaced by mud brick huts. The Agency could have taken the responsibility of building these huts but it was felt that as mud bricks require only labor (without speaking of a very small amount of money for tibben [chaff] to be mixed with the mud), the refugees themselves should do it …. Without taking into consideration the financial benefit which the Agency has drawn from such a policy, it is my contention that the refugees have largely benefited from it, in as much as they have developed their sense of responsibility and also have, in living in their own houses built by themselves, regained the

sense of dignity which they definitely lose when they are herded in big army-type camps.[29]

Thus, although Geaney acknowledged the financial savings associated with UNRWA's policy in Syria, he rooted the defense of this policy in a liberal discourse of self-help that saw the refugees rehabilitating their dignity through work. Geaney's letter also exemplifies the defensive stance adopted by UNRWA, which was obliged to justify its choices and balance its attempts to improve refugee conditions against accusations, on the one hand, of pursuing the permanent settlement of refugees and, on the other, of providing inadequate funding to make genuine improvements to these conditions.

Another issue of tension between PARI and UNRWA was the provision of services in "unofficial" camps. Having been created at the initiative of the Syrian authorities, UNRWA disengaged from certain spheres of action in these camps, while PARI argued that they should benefit from the same services as "official" camps, given that both hosted refugee populations in need. In a November 1960 letter to UNRWA's director of Syrian affairs, the director of PARI, Mr. Yafi, wrote:

> We cannot approve in any case whatsoever the principle of sorting the camps into organized camps and unorganized camps for several considerations. In these camps which you consider to be organized, this Directorate was and is still performing services which it is difficult to continue to render. Moreover, these camps became in urgent need of certain basic services which are considered to be within the jurisdiction of the Agency. With our intense care to continue the cooperation existing between us as regards all the camps, we shall be very grateful if you will kindly take the necessary steps to consider all the camps existing in the Syrian region as organized camps inasmuch as there is, generally, no difference between the conditions of refugees residing therein.[30]

In response, UNRWA claimed to have been involved in several infrastructure improvements in the "unofficial" camps, where it continues to provide the same basic services as in the other camps. However, as Geaney maintained in internal correspondence, UNRWA's smaller presence in these camps is justified both by the fact that Syrian authorities did not consult UNRWA during their construction and by the desire to promote integration of the "unofficial" camps into the Syrian urban fabric:

> The reason why there has always been a very firm distinction between organized and non-organized camps in Syria is partly financial. But the true reason why we have not accepted new official camps in Syria

is, as in the case of our shelter policy, a psychological and economic one. It was felt that the camp atmosphere was good neither for the spirit of the refugees nor for their social and human development. In an official camp the refugees are treated as a separate entity within the country. The responsibility of UNRWA makes it so that they never have the feeling of being on their own. In agglomerations where the refugees are living next to Syrians, and where UNRWA is not constantly present, the amalgamation, even temporary, is much easier.[31]

This acknowledgement that UNRWA sought to promote the integration of refugees into the host society is particularly controversial because, since UNRWA's establishment, Palestinians and Arab governments have seen it as an instrument of the United States and Israel for "liquidating the refugee issue" by promoting their permanent settlement.[32] For example, a July 1965 article in the Ba'th party newspaper *al-Ba'th*, translated into English by UNRWA's press office, refers to a conference of supervisors of Palestinian affairs in Arab host countries held in Amman at which the Syrian delegation presented several memoranda, one of which "demands that a joint Arab plan be laid down to foil UNRWA's schemes for the liquidation of the refugee problem."[33] Another addressed "the poor quality of certain commodities supplied by the agency [UNRWA] to the Palestinians."[34]

Such criticisms, which can be found in many archival documents, were part of a general effort by PARI and the Syrian government more generally to discredit UNRWA and to present it as a part of a foreign conspiracy. Similarly, al-Sa'iqa, a Palestinian faction linked to the Syrian Ba'th party, released a statement in 1964 entitled "The Conspiracy Shows Its Hands: The Role of the Americans and of UNRWA."[35] This communiqué criticized the Palestine Liberation Organization, which the Ba'th party historically opposed, for collaborating with the "American University and UNRWA which are two foreign institutions which are definitively under the influence and control of the U.S.A., which is also their financial backer."[36]

This broader political context framed PARI's efforts to discredit UNRWA and present itself as the main body providing assistance to the refugees, thus reinforcing Syria's nationalist rhetoric. By discrediting UNRWA, Syrian authorities would be in a stronger position to negotiate with the UN agency and other international bodies for financial aid to improve the infrastructure in camps and surrounding areas. The management of Yarmuk Camp demonstrates these dynamics clearly. While Syrian authorities attempted to make it a symbol of their favorable host policy and the Palestinian issue in Syria, UNRWA refers to it as a Syrian "city" or "village," rhetorically emphasizing the camp as part of the host society and distancing itself from its management.

Making Yarmuk: Model Camp or Syrian Resettlement?

The management of Yarmuk Camp was frequently at the heart of conflicts between PARI and UNRWA. This camp, built in 1954, became the largest Palestinian settlement in Syria, hence its importance for both parties.[37] Yarmuk's construction was launched at Syrian initiative to accommodate Palestinian refugees who were then housed in the official Alliance camp, in the Jewish quarter, and in the Maslakh quarter in the Old City of Damascus. As the director of PARI explained, Yarmuk was established to provide for "refugees who were residing in the mosques and awkaf buildings … Their dwelling there was very disdainful. This in addition to the hindering of exercising religious rites in the mosques for several years."[38] That PARI chose to dismantle an official camp, and without prior consultation with UNRWA, was the initial cause of discord between the two.[39]

UNRWA subsequently classified Yarmuk as an "unofficial" camp, which led PARI to accuse UNRWA of discrimination. PARI explained that, while UNRWA had built classrooms and the Lutheran Federation operated a clinic to provide healthcare to the Palestinian refugees living in Yarmuk camp, the camp's population had "doubled and will redouble once again," rendering these insufficient. UNRWA's insistence that the camp was "unofficial" effectively denied services, according to PARI, "whereas necessity calls for immediate and effective contribution inasmuch as this camp has become the chief center of congregation for refugees and the largest camp in this region."[40] PARI's director thus requested that UNRWA "consider this camp as an organized camp in order to ensure all the services be rendered the refugees residing therein."[41]

UNRWA, for its part, saw Yarmuk's construction as a kind of double standard:

> We thought that the plan was smelling very strongly of resettlement. If the project had been sponsored by UNRWA there would have been a general outcry from the refugees and the Government. The project being entirely PARI's, it was accepted without a murmur and even with great enthusiasm. Thus, the village developed at great speed and after [the influx of] people from the mosques, refugees expelled from the South borders for different reasons, then the whole of Alliance camp. Yarmouk is now a developing town where there is a large proportion of UNRWA registered refugees, but also non-registered Palestinians and even Syrians.[42]

Over time, Yarmuk camp underwent significant urban development, becoming a symbol of the favorable living conditions enjoyed by Palestinians in Syria. In 1960, UNRWA recognized the necessity of providing services in the camp, and adopted a new policy to offer health care and education, and to share with Syrian authorities in funding major infrastructure projects.[43] PARI, meanwhile, made the camp an icon of Syria's refugee policy. Although it continued to call for (and accept) UNRWA

assistance to improve services in Yarmuk camp, PARI sought to appear as the sole sponsor and manager of the Yarmuk construction project. As an UNRWA official wrote:

> No one ever went to visit the agglomeration (including the UNRWA representative) without first paying a visit to the PARI camp leader, or without being accompanied by a representative of PARI. Many foreign visitors were brought in and explained that this was a PARI venture, and that UNRWA had nothing to do with it.[44]

PARI's attempt to monopolize control of the camp and promote development projects within it is part of a broader effort to make Yarmuk a showpiece of Syria's commitment to Palestinian refugees. PARI also worked to improve services and infrastructure (including the electricity grid, drinking water pipes, and the public transport system) in Yarmuk long before other camps. Yarmuk's location in an area of Damascus that rapidly expanded from the 1960s due to rural-urban migration also meant that it needed to be served by Damascus's public transport system. Toward this end, in 1968 PARI tried to obtain UNRWA funding to construct a street linking Yarmuk to the new neighborhoods surrounding it. The chief of UNRWA's budget division, W. M. Rowland, noted that the Syrian proposal was estimated at approximately 480,000 U.S. dollars (or two million Syrian pounds), whereas UNRWA had spent less than eighty thousand dollars total on road construction in all the areas it operated in the preceding five years.[45] Although UNRWA had "no indication of the specific request of the proposed roads," Rowland suggested:

> The real point at issue is probably not one of specifications and lengths of roads but more simply of yielding a little to pressure for the sake of cordial liaison, as indeed the Agency did in 1961 to the tune of $25,000 per year over a three-year period … It is more than sufficient to build all the roads in Yarmouk which we would have constructed had this been an official UNRWA camp; it is the amount which Budget would suggest.[46]

UNRWA was concerned that PARI was seeking to funnel UNRWA funds toward serving Syria's entire population, not just refugees (in this case, as Rowland put it, "a complex of first-class urban highways rather than a few austere camp streets"). Similarly, in 1960, UNRWA claimed reimbursement of an excess budget allocated for a railway that PARI had not returned, demonstrating the latter's lack of transparency and UNRWA's concerns that it sought to profit from assistance to Palestinian refugees.[47] The Yarmuk case is thus highly illustrative of PARI's and UNRWA's divergent objectives. The former wished to derive maximum financial and political benefits from the management of the camp, the latter to maintain a posture of withdrawal that benefited UNRWA's budget and, supposedly, the refugees.

Conclusion

Previously unexplored documents in the UNRWA archives thus shed light on Syrian state policies during the first phases of Palestinian refugee management. Syria sought to position itself as a welcoming sanctuary to the refugees and, at the same time, a defender of their right of return. From UNRWA's perspective, Syrian authorities presented new challenges by establishing "unofficial" camps and engaging in practices that could otherwise be seen as facilitating permanent resettlement. The establishment and management of Yarmuk camp captures the tensions between PARI and UNRWA; yet, despite their contrasting visions and approaches, and the harsh criticism that each directed toward the other, it is also clear that PARI and UNRWA relied on each other in their efforts to accomplish their respective missions.

Examining the historical interplay of local and international actors in Syria can also shed light on more recent events. Indeed, based on prolonged sociological fieldwork carried out in Yarmuk Camp between 2006 and 2011, it seems that certain attitudes of Syrian authorities toward the Palestinian refugee issue and UNRWA have not changed drastically. In the 2000s, for example, PARI pragmatically supported several camp "rehabilitation" projects to encourage infrastructure development of the surrounding areas, even if this contradicted its rhetorical opposition to permanent refugee resettlement.[48] A street-paving project in 2010, realized by the Yarmuk Local Council, part of the Damascus governorate, with the help of a Turkish NGO in a context of political rapprochement between Turkey and Syria, demonstrated how local infrastructural projects linked to broader policies and how Palestinian refugee management could catalyze different national and international interests and discourses.[49]

For local authorities, refugee management can become a political and economic tool to gain legitimacy, to strengthen their political discourse, and to improve local services and infrastructures. For international humanitarian actors, a favorable local host policy paves the way for long-term refugee integration and a progressive withdrawal from the field. Despite contrasting approaches and visions, each needs the other to accomplish its mission and must find ways to negotiate toward this end. The perspectives of Palestinian refugees and political factions, to which there is little reference in the UNRWA archives, would provide further points of view on refugee management policies in Syria by both local and international actors. A less monolithic vision of humanitarianism and refugee aid shows how these are the product of contrasting visions and divergent interests, far from the universal principles of humanity and neutrality on which they are supposedly based.

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Endnotes

1 Anaheed al-Hardan, "The Right of Return Movement in Syria: Building a Culture of Return, Mobilizing Memories for the Return," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 41, no. 2 (Winter 2012): 62–79. Since 1974, PARI has been officially known as the Government Administration for Palestinian Arab Refugees (GAPAR), overseen by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Labor. GAPAR is currently composed of two departments: the first in charge of social affairs and civil status, the second in charge of accommodation. See Khadija Fadhel, "Recompositions socio-spatiales d'un camp de réfugiés palestiniens à Damas: Le cas d'al-Yarmûk," in *Les Palestiniens entre État et diaspora: Le temps des incertitudes*, ed. Jalal Al Husseini and Aude Signoles (Paris: Karthala and IISMM, 2011), 312–34.

2 See: Laurie Brand, "Palestinians in Syria: The Politics of Integration," *Middle East Journal* 42, no. 4 (1988): 621–37; Hamad Sa'id Maw'id, *Mukhayyam al-Yarmuk: muqarabat fi susiyulujiyya al-mukhayyam al-Filastini* [Yarmuk camp: approaches in the sociology of the Palestinian camp] (Damascus: Dar al-shajara, 2006); and Fadhel, "Recompositions socio-spatiales." The director of PARI is appointed by the Syrian prime minister and approved by the Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs.

3 Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "The Changing Faces of UNRWA: From the Global to the Local," *Journal of Humanitarian Affairs* 1, no. 1 (2019): 28–41.

4 Julia Pacitto, "South–South Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement" (University of Oxford Refugee Studies Center, October 2012), online at (rsc.ox.ac.uk) bit.ly/3PJ0s6g (accessed 6 June 2023); Alastair Ager, "Faith and the Secular: Tensions in Realising Humanitarian Principles," *Forced Migration Review* 48 (November 2014): 16–18; Beste İşleyen, "Humanitarianism and the Non-European World," in *The Routledge International Handbook of Critical Philanthropy and Humanitarianism*, ed. Katharyne Mitchell and Polly Pallister-Wilkins (New York: Routledge, 2023), 125–34.

5 Eva Svoboda and Sara Pantuliano, "International and Local/Diaspora Actors in the Syria Response: A Diverging Set of Systems" (Humanitarian Policy Group Working Paper, March 2015), online at (cdn.odi.org) bit.ly/3JLjgOD (accessed 6 June 2023); Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh, "Southern-led Responses to Displacement: Modes of South–South Cooperation?" in *Routledge Handbook of South–South Relations*, ed. Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Patricia Daley (New York: Routledge, 2018).

6 Jalal Al-Husseini and Valentina Napolitano, "The Jordanian Policy toward Syrian Refugees: Between Hospitality and Protection of Interests," *Confluences Méditerranée* 110, no. 3 (2019): 127–42.

7 Fadhel, "Recompositions socio-spatiales." *Tawtin* refers to the permanent establishment of Palestinian refugees outside Palestinian territories. It first emerged as a term of protest against improvements in refugee camp infrastructure – when camps were supposed to symbolize the "temporary" nature of Palestinian refugees in the Arab countries. See Riccardo Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees: A History within History," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2–3 (2009): 229–52.

8 Before the outbreak of the war in 2011, Syria hosted nearly 525,000 Palestinian refugees officially registered by UNRWA. In 2022, UNRWA counted up to 280,000 Palestine refugees from Syria (PRS) displaced inside Syria, with a further 120,000 displaced to neighboring countries, including Lebanon, Jordan, and Turkey, as well as Egypt and, increasingly, Europe. See "Syria@11," online at www.unrwa.org/syria-crisis (accessed 6 June 2023).

9 After 2011, a number of studies have addressed Palestinian refugees in the context of the Syrian uprising and subsequent civil war, including their secondary displacement to neighboring countries. See: Nidal Bitari, "Yarmuk Refugee Camp and the Syrian Uprising: A View from Within," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 1 (Autumn 2013): 61–78; Salim Salamah, "The Unacknowledged Syrians: Mobilization of Palestinian Refugees of Yarmouk in the Syrian Revolution," *Confluences Méditerranée* 99, no. 4 (2016): 47–60; Jalal Al-Husseini and Kamel Doraï, "La vulnérabilité des réfugiés palestiniens à la lumière de la crise syrienne," *Confluences Méditerranée* 87, no. 4 (2013): 95–107; Valentina Napolitano, "From Syria to Lebanon: Migratory and Militant Trajectories of Three Palestinian Women" (Civil Society Knowledge Center, 2016), online at (civilsociety-centre.org) bit.

ly/3OcoTYR (accessed 6 June 2023); and Valentina Napolitano, "Palestinian Refugees and the Syrian Uprising: Subjectivities, Mobilizations, and Challenges," in *The War for Syria: Regional and International Dimensions of the Syrian Uprising*, ed. Raymond Hinnebusch and Adham Saouli (New York: Routledge, 2019), 86–101.

10 See: Sari Hanafi, "Governing the Palestinian Refugee Camps in Lebanon and Syria: The Cases of Nahr el-Bared and Yarmouk Camps," in *Palestinian Refugees: Identity, Space and Place in the Levant*, ed. Are Knudsen and Sari Hanafi (London: Routledge, 2010); Brand, "Palestinians in Syria"; Faedah Totah, "Les Palestiniens de la vielle ville de Damas," in *La Syrie au present: Reflets d'une société*, ed. Baudouin Dupret, Zouhair Ghazzal, Youssef Courbage, and Mohammed al-Dbiyat (Paris: Actes Sud, 2007); and Fadhel, "Recompositions socio-spatiales."

11 See: Faedah M. Totah, "Palestinian Refugees between the City and the Camp," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 52, no. 4 (November 2020): 607–21; and Anaheed al-Hardan, *Palestinians in Syria: Nakba Memories of Shattered Communities* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016).

12 See: Nell Gabiam, "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development': The Politics of International Aid in Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps," *American Anthropologist* 124, no. 1 (2012): 95–107; and Nell Gabiam, *The Politics of Suffering: Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016).

13 Gabiam, "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development'," 104.

14 The names of these officials are noted here when mentioned in the original documents.

15 For the list of the archives to which I was given access and consulted, see appendix. The documents to which I had access represent only a fraction of UNRWA's material concerning Syria. The folder I was given was chosen by UNRWA employees based on a request for information on Yarmouk camp's construction and management, with no reference to a catalogue of material. Thus, the data here is only partial and gives insight to a circumscribed set of issues pertaining to the relationship between UNRWA and PARI. Moreover, after 2011, I made attempts to access UNRWA's archives again in the hopes of collecting additional data, but my requests have not been approved. This coincided with a change in the official responsible for the archive and in the archive's access policy.

16 See Valentina Napolitano, "Construction, Deconstruction, and Reconstruction of Yarmuk Camp: A Long-Term History of Urban Evolution and Management of a Palestinian Camp in Syria," in *Camps: Genealogy of Refugee Camps in the Middle East*, ed. Ayham Dalal and Kamel Doraï (Beirut: Presses de l'Ifpo, forthcoming).

17 Correspondence between UN Secretary General and UNRWA Commissioner General, "Assistance to Syrian Displaced Persons," 9 October 1967, UNRWA Archives, Amman.

18 Before the outbreak of the war in 2011, Syria hosted nearly 525,000 Palestinian refugees, according to UNRWA figures.

19 This struggle has often been more rhetorical than material. See Ghada Hashem Talhami, *Syria and the Palestinians: The Clash of Nationalism* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2001).

20 Jalal Al Husseini, "The Arab States and the Refugee Issue: A Retrospective View," in *Israel and the Palestinian Refugees*, ed. Eyal Benvenisti, Chaim Gans, and Sari Hanafi (Berlin: Springer, 2008), 436–64.

21 Palestinians have neither the right to vote nor the right to stand for election to the main organs of power. Moreover, they cannot own more than one property per person.

22 Zafir Ibn Khadra, *Suriya wa al-laji'un al-Filastiniyyun al-'arab al-muqimun* [Syria and the resident Palestinian Arab refugees] (Beirut: Dar Kan'an, 2002), 115.

23 Official correspondence from Director of Relief Services to UNRWA General Commissioner, "Camps," 1 April 1970, in RE 400, UNRWA Archives, Amman.

24 Official correspondence between Director of UNRWA and Director of PARI, 27 December 1960, in RE 400(I), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

25 The figure of the camp leader, an intermediary between UNRWA and the Palestinian refugees, disappeared with the assertion of Palestinian political actors in the 1960s and the desire of the UN agency to reduce its involvement in camp management. Extract from Organization Directive no. 5, "Organization of Syrian Region Field Office, Part VII(b)," 1 June 1960, in RE 400, UNRWA Archives, Amman.

26 The refugees who arrived in 1967 settled mainly around Damascus in the Jaramana and Qabr al-Sitt camps and were later resettled in the Yarmuk and Sbeineh camps.

27 The most important Palestinian gatherings in Damascus are in Hayy al-Amin, also known as the Jewish Quarter, and in al-Barza, Rukn al-Din, and Dummar, among others. Totah, "Les Palestiniens."

28 Draft letter from Acting Director, UNRWA, to Mr. Yafi, PARI, 3 November 1960, in RE 400 (1), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

29 Inter Office Memorandum from AD/OPS (Deputy Director of the Syrian Office) to Acting Director, "Yarmouk Camp," 26 October 1960, in RE 400 (I), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

30 Official correspondence from the PARI official in charge with the UNRWA Representative in Syria, 23 November 1960, in 949(23/1), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

31 Inter Office Memorandum from AD/OPS (Deputy Director of the Syrian Office) to Acting Director, "Yarmouk Camp," 26 October 1960, in RE 400 (I), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

32 Jalal Al Husseini, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Nation-Building Process," Journal of Palestine Studies 29, no. 2 (Winter 2000): 51–64; Bocco, "UNRWA and the Palestinian Refugees."

33 "Syria Calls for Joint Arab Plan to Counter UNRWA Plans, [to] Liquidate Refugee Problem, and Calls on Arab States to Guarantee Palestinians Freedom of Movement and Work," al-Thawra, 6 July 1965, translated into English by the UNRWA Press Office. This conference for Palestinian refugee host countries was organized by the Arab League and met every two years.

34 "Syria Calls for Joint Arab Plan."

35 "The Conspiracy Shows Its Hands: The Role of the Americans and of UNRWA," 1 May 1964, circular no. 11, translated from Arabic to English, in RE 150, UNRWA Archives, Amman.

36 "Conspiracy Shows Its Hands."

37 In 2012, it hosted nearly 150,000 Palestinians officially registered by UNRWA.

38 Letter from S. Yafi, Director of PARI, to Chief of UNRWA Operations, Syrian Region, Damascus, 10 October 1959, in 743(106/1), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

39 Inter Office Memorandum from Director of the Syrian Headquarters to Director General of UNRWA, "Move of Alliance Camp to Yarmouk (Midan)," 26 January 1960, in RE 400 (I), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

40 Letter from S. Yafi, Director of PARI, to Chief of UNRWA Operations, Syrian Region, Damascus, 10 October 1959, in 743(106/1), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

41 Letter from S. Yafi, Director of PARI, to Chief of UNRWA Operations, Syrian Region, Damascus, 10 October 1959, in 743(106/1), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

42 Inter Office Memorandum from AD/OPS (Deputy Director of the Syrian Office) to Acting Director, "Yarmouk Camp," 26 October 1960, in RE 400 (I), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

43 "Unorganized Camps," extract for Quarterly Report for the period ending September 1960 from A/UNRWA Representative, Northern Region of U.A.R., 7 October 1960, 14, in RE 400 (1), UNRWA Archives, Amman. The report reads: "With Alliance camp completely vacated and refugees moved to Yarmouk, the question of UNRWA's policy in regard to responsibility for services [in the] camp [rise] acutely to the fore. Proposals for this new policy were discussed in the HQ cabinet and decision was reached by the Agency expressing its readiness to put in regular health and education and distribution facilities in Yarmouk and participate up to 50% in financing the cost of major undertakings listed in an order of priority (water supply, drainage, etc.) to be constructed and operated by the Syrian authorities was communicated to PARI."

44 Inter Office Memorandum from AD/OPS (Deputy Director of the Syrian Office) to Acting Director, "Yarmouk Camp," 26 October 1960, in RE 400 (I), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

45 Inter Office Memorandum from Chief of Budget Division to General Commissioner, "Road Construction – Yarmouk Camp," 8 August 1968, in BO/7/19 (S/17), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

46 Inter Office Memorandum from Chief of Budget Division to General Commissioner, "Road Construction – Yarmouk Camp."

47 Draft letter from Acting Director to Mr. Yafi, 3 November 1960, in RE 400 (1), UNRWA Archives, Amman.

48 Gabiam, "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development.'"

49 See Valentina Napolitano, "S'engager à Yarmouk: Sociologie de la militance palestinienne en Syrie" (PhD diss., École des hautes études en sciences sociales [EHESS] of Paris, 2015).

Appendix

UNRWA's list of archival files for author's access, consulted in 2011 at UNRWA headquarters, Amman. This list was provided by UNRWA and does not contain all of the archives actually consulted (such as RE 400 and RE 400 (I)).

File Ref.	Subject	Years	Vol.	Location/ Box
RE 210/06	Displaced Refugees in Syria	1967–75	I	RE 8
RE 210/06	Displaced Refugees in Syria	1976–83	II	RE 90
RE 400(7)	Emergency Camps Jordan	1967–70	I, II, III, IV	RE 59
RE 400(7)	Emergency Camps Jordan	Feb. 1970–Nov. 1975	V	RE 60
RE 400(8)	Emergency Camps Syria	1967–75	I, II, III	RE 60
RE 400(12)	Emergency Camps Lebanon	Feb. 1977–80	I, II, III	RE 60
RE 410	Construction and Maintenance	Jan. 1960–85	I, II, III, IV	RE 61
RE 410/1	Road Construction and Maintenance	1959–75	I, II	RE 61
RE 410(S)	Construction and Maintenance, Syria	1959–69	I	RE 63
RE 410(S)	Construction and Maintenance, Syria	1970–85	II	RE 65
RE 410(S)	Construction and Maintenance, Syria	1986–92	III	RE 106
RE 410	Construction and Maintenance	1986–90	V	RE 80
RE 430	Camp Population and Shelter Statistics	1959–77	I, II, III, IV	RE 65
RE 430	Camp Population and Shelter Statistics	1977–85	V, VI	RE66
RE 430	Camp Population and Shelter Statistics	1986–92	VII	RE 107
OR 160/2	Living Condition of Palestine People	1973–92	IV,VI	OR 101
LEG 480(S)	Agreement with Syria	1953–92	I, II, III	LEG 41
LEG 480/5(14)	Loss Damages due to 1967	1967–75	I, II, III, IV	LEG 26

What UNRWA Teaches Us about Humanitarian Histories

Ilana Feldman

In their introduction to this two-part special issue, Francesca Biancani and Maria Chiara Rioli emphasize how much more remains to be considered about UNRWA, an institution at the center of Palestinian life since its establishment in 1949. The essays in the special issue confirm how much can be learned by investigating Palestinian history through the prism of UNRWA. The central importance of the agency underscores the necessity of researchers having more sustained and reliable access to its archival records, as explored by Anne Irfan and Jo Kelcey. In addition, as Atwa Jaber makes clear, the documentary record is only one source for exploring this history. Refugee memories provide crucial details and insights.

Following Biancani and Rioli's insistence on the importance of considering what exploring UNRWA can tell us about humanitarianism more generally, in these brief reflections I draw on my reading of these pieces and my own research in and on UNRWA spaces and practices to call attention to some of the lessons from UNRWA's operations and its interactions with Palestinian refugees. To ask what UNRWA reveals about humanitarian practice, politics, and history broadly is not to turn away from the Palestinian experience. It is to recognize the central importance of Palestinian history and present life to global phenomena.

Scholars of Palestine, exploring any facet of its history and present condition, regularly have to battle against the intellectual and political limitations of discourses of exceptionalism, where the Palestinian experience is deemed to be so distinctive, so unusual, as to be incomparable to any other. When I

applied for research funding for a large research project on the Palestinian refugee experience with humanitarianism across multiple countries and over seven decades – research that culminated in the book, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* – one reviewer of my proposal (which was ultimately successful) argued that the project should not be awarded funding because, although the questions I was asking about humanitarianism were important, the Palestinian instance was a poor "case" through which to consider these dynamics. The aspects that rendered the instance "ungeneralizable" (to use the social scientific language of the funding agency) were the intrusion of politics into the humanitarian terrain and the longevity of displacement, which, according to the reviewer, meant that Palestinians were not refugees and the places where they lived not really camps.

Efforts to disengage from Palestinian history and experiences by mobilizing the language of exceptionality are politically pernicious and intellectually wrongheaded, and they remain all too common. Analysis that begins from the intersection of Palestinian life and UNRWA practice offers significant insight into enduring, transforming, and global humanitarian dynamics.

When I present my research on the long Palestinian experience with humanitarianism, an experience in which UNRWA is a central actor, I am frequently asked about UNRWA's "state-like" activities, sometimes posed as a question about whether an institution that carries such wide-ranging responsibilities can be considered a humanitarian body. In fact, however much state authorities, humanitarian agencies, and donors might say otherwise, humanitarianism is a mode of governance. Didier Fassin calls it "non-governmental government."[1] At the international scale, donor states bring geopolitical and domestic considerations to bear as they seek to influence humanitarian practice. Donors, in other words, try to govern humanitarians. As Valentina Napolitano's article shows, humanitarian agency negotiations with state parties – which often proceed under the guise of clear distinction between governing work and humanitarian action – reveal that governance, in fact, crosses these institutional boundaries.[2] Debates about jurisdiction, about best practices, about financial obligations are debates that take place within, not at the edge of, governance.

Longevity is another apparently distinctive feature of UNRWA operations that, upon closer inspection, is revealed as a general characteristic of humanitarian operations. Rather than the self-described short-term, emergency intervention that frames humanitarian activity, long-term engagement is the more common experience. In Kenya, Thailand, and Nepal, for example, refugees have lived in camps for decades and have received varied forms of humanitarian assistance over that extended period.[3] Recognition of the routineness of protracted displacement, and the concomitant complexity of aid in these conditions, confirms the broad significance of analyses of the interplay between relief and development in UNRWA operations as explored by Jalal Al Husseini.[4] It also underscores the necessity of investigating the dynamism and diversity of refugee camp experiences, including movement from one camp to another and transformations in camps, as Halima Abu Haneya elucidates in the case of Shu'fat.

Palestinian refugee engagement with UNRWA policy and practice over the years reveals another crucial feature of humanitarian dynamics that is often overlooked – that the recipients of aid shape that humanitarian action. Recipients do not act with power equal to donors and governments, but they act consequentially. As Ala Alazzeh describes from the vantage point of West Bank refugee camps, refugees can transform the mandates and missions of humanitarian institutions. They do so by rejecting policies that do not meet their aspirations (for example, refugee refusal of resettlement projects), by affirming a broader vision of humanitarian mandates, and by activating humanitarian apparatuses as platforms for political and social life.[5]

I conclude by noting a final feature of UNRWA operations that reframes understandings of international humanitarianism writ large. Humanitarianism is often described as operationalized concern for "distant strangers." In fact, humanitarian practice is almost always a complex mix of local and foreign, distant and near. The vast majority of UNRWA's staff are themselves Palestinian, making the agency a helpful lens through which to consider how local staff shape on-the-ground operations and dynamics,[6] as well as to trace how humanitarian organizations embody global hierarchies.

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Endnotes

1 Didier Fassin, "Humanitarianism, a Non-governmental Government," in *Non-governmental Politics*, ed. Michel Feher (New York: Zone Books), 151.

2 See also Ilana Feldman, "Mercy Trains and Ration Rolls: Between Government and Humanitarianism in Gaza (1948–67)," in *Interpreting Welfare and Relief in the Middle East*, ed. Nefissa Naguib and Inger Marie Okkenhaug (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 175–94.

3 See: Jennifer Hyndman, "A Refugee Camp Conundrum: Geopolitics, Liberal Democracy, and Protracted Refugee Situations," *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees* 28, no. 2 (2011): 7–16; Rahul Chandrashekhar Oka, "Coping with the Refugee Wait: The Role of Consumption, Normalcy, and Dignity in Refugee Lives at Kakuma Refugee Camp, Kenya," *American Anthropologist* 116, no. 1 (2014): 23–37; Sandra Dudley, "Feeling at Home: Producing and Consuming Things in Karenni Refugee Camps on the Thai-Burma Border," *Population, Space, and Place* 17, no. 6 (2011): 742–55; and Retika Adhikari, "Temporalities of Resettlement: Date-Waiting for an American Future in a Buthanese Refugee Camp in Nepal," *American Anthropologist* 123, no. 2 (2021): 237–49.

4 See also Nell Gabiam, "When 'Humanitarianism' Becomes 'Development': The Politics of International Aid in Syria's Palestinian Refugee Camps," *American Anthropologist* 114, no. 1 (2012): 95–107.

5 See Ilana Feldman, *Life Lived in Relief: Humanitarian Predicaments and Palestinian Refugee Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2018).

6 See Randa Farah, "UNRWA: Through the Eyes of Its Refugee Employees in Jordan," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 28, no. 2–3 (2009): 389–411.
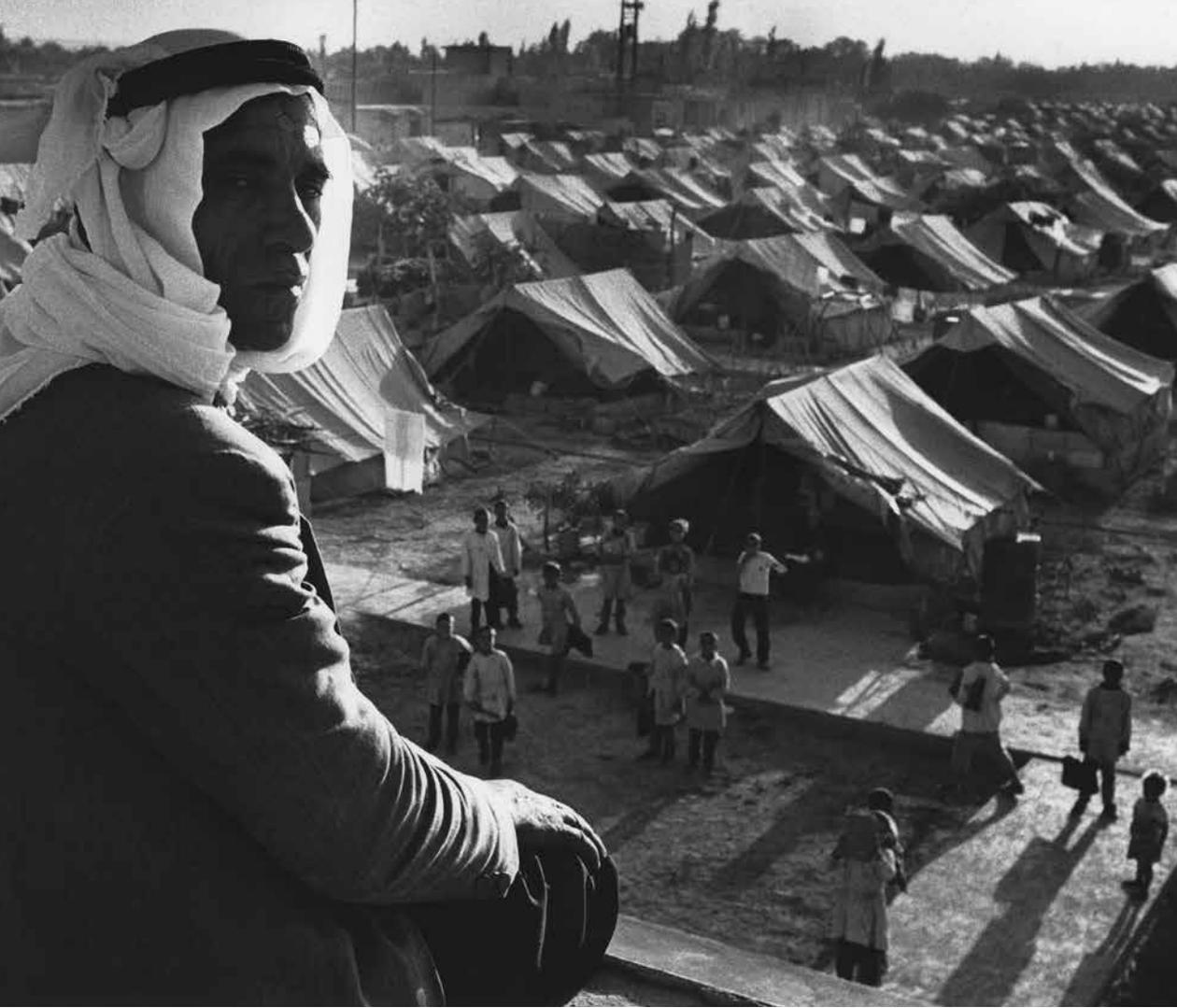
"This UNRWA administered tented camp near Damascus provided temporary shelter for some 3,200 homeless Palestine Arab refugees. As a result of the June 1967 hostilities in the Middle East, 117,500 people were displaced from the Quneitra region of Syria, which was occupied by Israel; among them were 17,500 Palestine refugees registered with UNRWA. Those displaced refugees, unable to find shelter for themselves, numbering over 10,000 persons have been accommodated in four emergency camps near Damascus & Dera'a. The tents have been replaced by more permanent shelters." Photographer: Jack Madvo, 1974. UNRWA Collection, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut.

A Palestine Refugee With Her Child: Sbeineh Emergency Camp, Syrian Arab Republic. Photographer: Jack Madvo, undated. UNRWA Collection, Institute for Palestine Studies, Beirut.

Britain's Position on Establishing the Protestant Church in Jerusalem (1841–45)

Yousef Hussein Omar

Abstract

This paper discusses the establishment of the first Protestant church in mid-nineteenth-century Jerusalem, under Ottoman rule, relying mainly on British Foreign Office archives. It begins with an introduction to the geopolitical context for the spread of Protestantism in Greater Syria, with particular focus on Palestine, including Britain's initial diplomatic efforts to achieve this goal and the challenges it faced on different fronts. The discussion situates these challenges and the ways Britain overcame them within the context of Ottoman imperial regulations, which recurringly stalled or halted construction efforts. As a result, Britain's hopes of establishing a Protestant church in Jerusalem, and the Ottoman sultan's frequent obstruction of these efforts, reflect the layered British-Ottoman relations in the nineteenth century. The paper ends with an examination of the ways the British government managed to secure an Ottoman permit (*firman*) issued by the sultan, that allowed the completion of the church's construction in 1849.

Keywords

Britain; Protestant Church; Ottoman Empire; Jerusalem; Palestine.

In 1819, Britain began to spread Protestantism in Greater Syria through the missionary activity of the Church Mission Society (CMS).[1] The Church Mission Society believed that Jerusalem would be the site of the Second Coming of Christ and that the primary condition

for this to happen was the conversion of the Jews to Protestantism.[2] Because Protestantism was still new in the region, Britain sought international protection for its missionaries – not only from Ottoman authorities, but from rival churches, especially the Catholic and Orthodox churches, which had well-established relationships with the Ottoman Empire.[3] Indeed, Britain's interest in Palestine cannot be separated from its relationship with other European powers, namely France and Prussia.

France's invasion of Egypt in 1798 threatened the communication routes between Britain and its colonies in India. This was directly related to Britain's decision to side with the Ottomans against the French in 1799, resulting in the defeat of the French forces at Acre ('Akka).[4] In 1840, European powers again intervened to protect the Ottoman government from the advancing forces of Muhammad 'Ali, the rebel governor of Egypt. In exchange for its support at 'Akka, Britain made demands on the Ottomans, which included opening European consulates in Jerusalem: Britain established a consulate in 1838 in Jerusalem and appointed William Tanner Young its first vice-consul in Jerusalem, while the British consul general was located in Alexandria.[5]

In general, British-Ottoman relations at the time were cordial, and Britain sought to preserve the sovereignty and integrity of the Ottoman Empire in order to maintain the transportation route to India and quell Russian (or other European) ambitions in the Ottoman Empire. The British foreign secretary Henry John Temple (18 April 1835–2 September 1841) and the British government used soft power to secure their interests. This is evident in the way British politicians and colonialists began to talk extensively about Palestine in relation to its importance to India and for the protection of transportation routes to it.[6]

But Britain's interests in the region went beyond Protestant missions. Over the course of the nineteenth century, Britain – among other European forces – sought to expand its influence in the region militarily, politically, and economically. One way to achieve this was through offering protections to religious minorities who paid homage to European ecclesiastical bodies. This reflected internal developments within the Ottoman Empire, where the centuries-old millet[7] system was being superseded by the capitulation system,[8] which saw European powers offering economic, religious, and commercial freedoms and other privileges to their citizens, and including the Christian minorities in Ottoman domains.[9] The conditions of Christian subjects were not bad in the Ottoman Empire, and at the time were not ready or qualified for capitulation. Perhaps they did not benefit from it on the ground, but European countries took advantage of the capitulations to interfere in the internal affairs of the Ottoman Empire.[10] In turn, this led to a collision between the Ottoman Empire and European forces with interests in the region. France and Russia had already established such protections over Catholics and Maronites, and Orthodox Christians, respectively. However, Protestant communities did not yet exist in the region, so Britain could not claim protection over any religious minority. Thus, the British consulate in Jerusalem expressed concern for British political and commercial interests, and for the protection of British travelers and tourists, which extended to Jews – including

the Jews who were already there and the new ones arriving with the Protestants – and Protestant missionaries who had begun to settle in Jerusalem since the beginning of the nineteenth century.[11] As a result, Protestant missionaries in Palestine sought British government protection through the consulate, which coordinated its efforts with the Protestant ecclesiastical leadership in Britain.[12]

Britain's interest in establishing the first Protestant church in Jerusalem was therefore political, above all, as it secured Britain a foothold in Palestine. To do so, Britain needed to manage the conversion of Jews to Protestantism, and tasked Reverend John Nicolayson, a Danish missionary active with the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews (later the Church's Ministry among Jewish People), with this responsibility.[13] Arriving in Jerusalem in 1826, Nicolayson established the first Protestant community in Jerusalem composed of converted Jews, and spent the next three decades in the city, until his death in 1856. Converting Jews to Protestantism was therefore a strategic move to ensure British influence in the city, an initiative welcomed by the Church of England.[14] In a letter to foreign secretary Temple, vice-consul Young identified "two Parties to be noticed who will doubtless consider themselves entitled to some voice in the future disposition of affairs here [Palestine]. The one is the Jew – to whom God originally gave this land … and the other, the Protestant Christians, his legitimate offspring."[15] The British government's interests in protecting the Jews in Palestine went hand in hand with its support for the establishment of the first Protestant Church in Jerusalem, although the Church of England is not clearly defined as Protestant.[16] Indeed, building the church was a matter of "practical interest,"[17] and Britain expected to be able to buy land designated for the construction of the church on Mount Zion (Jabal Sahyun) in Jerusalem.[18]

Therefore, Nicolayson asked the Church of England to establish a Protestant church in Jerusalem, approved by the British government and official Christian institutions. The London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews also petitioned the British government to obtain official assistance for constructing the church during the period of Egyptian rule in Greater Syria (1831–40).[19] Thomas Baring, president of the London Society and a member of the British parliament, wrote to Palmerston in 1837 asking him to instruct the British consul general in Alexandria, Patrick Campbell, to obtain permission from Muhammad 'Ali to build a small church and buildings suitable for missionaries in Jerusalem. Nicolayson also asked the British ambassador in Istanbul, John Ponsonby, for his support in order to build the church and help in case of any trouble with the Ottoman Empire.[20]

Muhammad 'Ali had previously authorized the purchase of land to be dedicated to a church registered in Nicolayson's name and expressed his personal desire to grant permission to establish a Protestant church in Jerusalem to win Britain's favor in his war with the Ottoman Empire. Still, in the end, he advised the British government to submit its request to the Sublime Porte in Istanbul since the matter was related to the basic laws and the sovereignty of the Ottoman Empire, despite the state of war between the Ottoman sultan and Muhammad 'Ali Pasha.[21] In late January 1841, the Sublime Porte refused to grant a permit (*firman*) to build the church, citing Ottoman

law, the ongoing war with Muhammad ʿAli, and its lack of control over Jerusalem at the time. However, with Palmerston's encouragement, the London Society's directors did not give up; they went ahead with their project and pressed the Ottoman Empire as far as Ottoman law would allow.[22]

After the Ottomans, aided by an alliance led by Britain, expelled Muhammad ʿAli from Greater Syria in 1940 and reestablished the authority of Sultan Abdulmejid I (1839–61),[23] Palmerston forwarded Baring's 1837 letter to Ponsonby in Istanbul, reminding him that the London Society had been aware of the failure to obtain official permission to construct the church. Palmerston confirmed that the London Society wanted to take advantage of the new situation in Syria after Muhammad ʿAli's expulsion by urging the Sublime Porte to approve the establishment of a small Protestant church in Jerusalem and registering this church in Nicolayson's name on behalf of the society. Palmerston emphasized that such approval would be well-received by the British public, who increasingly felt that the Sublime Porte should respect its obligations vis-à-vis the Church of England, and should allow Protestant Christian worship to take place in Jerusalem.[24] Accordingly, the British ambassador submitted another request to the Sublime Porte in order to approve the construction of the church, but this order was rejected again on the basis that *shariʿa* (Islamic law) and the "Pact of ʿUmar"[25] prohibited the establishment of "new" Christian churches.[26]

Britain did not take kindly to the Ottomans' rejection after having helped the Sublime Porte regain control of Greater Syria. There was no doubt in the British government that Catholic and Orthodox states such as France and Russia had played a role in obstructing the establishment of a Protestant church in Jerusalem, thereby impeding the expansion of British power into the region. These unfavorable circumstances brought work on the project to a halt.[27] In fact, the Protestant mission in Jerusalem stopped all work and efforts to build a Protestant church in Jerusalem in 1840, and Nicolayson was left waiting "with faith" for the situation on the ground to change.[28]

New Diplomatic Movement with Rifat Pasha

In July 1841, the Ottoman foreign minister, Sadik Rifat Pasha, affirmed his government's general willingness to work with the British government but ruled out permission to build a Protestant church.[29] According to Rifat Pasha, if churches had been built in the Ottoman Empire previously, this was to fulfill the wishes of its Christian subjects. Those who were not Ottoman subjects or residents remained forbidden to establish churches. Therefore, permission to build a church for a new (Protestant) denomination in Jerusalem was out of the question. Ponsonby informed Palmerston of the sultan's position. However, the sultan had suggested to Ponsonby that he would not object to the use of former church buildings for Protestant churches. Ponsonby's mission was thus to convince the Sublime Porte to see that strengthening the Protestant faith in the Ottoman Empire would be a "great good," and so suggested that a small church could be restored in a short time for this purpose.[30] Nicolayson could thus avoid violating the Ottoman laws prohibiting the construction of new churches.

Meanwhile, Prussia, Britain's Protestant counterpart in continental Europe, sought to cooperate with Britain to obtain Ottoman recognition for the Protestant church.[31] In fact, Prussia played a great role in establishing the first Protestant church in Jerusalem. Prussian-British coordination was uninterrupted and voluminous diplomatic communication was exchanged between the two on this issue. The king of Prussia, Friedrich Wilhelm IV (1840–61), himself hoped to unite Protestant European powers. Because Prussia was politically weak at the time and unable to pressure the Ottoman Empire alone, it sought to coordinate its positions with Britain, for its political and military weight and important influence in the world.[32]

Friedrich Wilhelm IV appointed Chevalier (Christian Karl Josias) Bunsen on a special mission to London to explain the regent's views regarding improving the conditions of the Christian population in the Ottoman Empire. The Prussian government also intended to encourage European Protestants to settle and buy lands in the Ottoman Empire, the idea being that securing Protestant residence, whether they were original subjects of the empire or foreigners who settled in it, would allow them to obtain guarantees and protections like those enjoyed by Christians of other denominations. Palmerston instructed Ponsonby to coordinate steps to achieve these goals with the Prussian ambassador to Istanbul, Karl Hans Königsmark. Evidently, Britain and Prussia's growing colonial interests had brought them into competition with other Christian European powers that wielded influence inside and outside the Ottoman Empire.

When Ponsonby met the Ottoman foreign minister Rifat Pasha in August 1841, the latter promised to support the building of a Protestant church in accordance with the wishes of the British government in an unauthorized manner.[33] He would order the local Ottoman authorities, including the *qadi* of Jerusalem, not to oppose it on condition that the building's appearance and dimensions were modest and not ostentatious. Ponsonby hoped to obtain this promise in writing, but the Sublime Porte would not, according to Rifat Pasha, grant written permission.

British Governmental Change and Its Repercussions

In August 1841, after a vote of no confidence in the British Parliament, Sir Robert Peel succeeded William Lamb as prime minister, with George Hamilton-Gordon replacing Palmerston as foreign minister. The new British government inherited the project of building a Protestant church in Jerusalem, but Peel and Hamilton-Gordon were less enthusiastic than were their predecessors.[34] Peel was afraid of provoking France and feared that his government might be seen as antagonistic to Catholics.[35] The Peel government soon decided to distance itself from the political dimensions of the project, informing leaders of the London Society that its efforts to build a Protestant church in Jerusalem would be "as a purely religious enterprise."[36] This means that the British government would continue to support the project of establishing the Protestant church as a religious project only, so as not to conflict with European powers who had interests in the region.

Meanwhile, Rifat Pasha affirmed that the Ottoman government would respect the empire's Christians and their religious institutions. However, given the small number of Ottoman Protestants at the time, and especially since there was no established Protestant community or leader in the Ottoman Empire, small churches would be sufficient as a start.[37] If Prussian or other Protestants wanted to immigrate to the Ottoman Empire and become subjects of the sultan – as the Jews of Spain had done previously – Rifat Pasha suggested that the Sublime Porte would receive them with pleasure. They would be guaranteed the right to worship freely and enjoy the privileges provided by the Noble Edict of the Rose Chamber (Hatt-i Şerif of Gülhane) of 1839, including the right to buy land and build new churches.[38] This solution would grant the kings of Britain and Prussia only informal protection over Protestant churches formed by Ottoman subjects.[39] It was clear that Nicolayson and the Protestants were not in the process of seeking Ottoman protection or being Ottoman subjects at that time, as Rifat Pasha had wanted, because the Ottomans, and not the British, as minorities, would officially protect them.

In October 1841, Ponsonby met Rifat Pasha again and renewed his demands for permission to build a Protestant church in Jerusalem somewhere other than the old one. Though Rifat Pasha announced his intention to reject the request officially, Ponsonby emphasized that the Ottoman ministers did not personally oppose such a request; rather, they were concerned with some of the scholars in the Supreme Council of Justice led by Shaykh al-Islam, the highest religious authority in the Ottoman Empire. In light of this rejection, Ponsonby went on the offensive, seeking to put Rifat Pasha and the Sublime Porte on the defensive. Ponsonby referred to Article 18 of the agreement between Britain and the Ottomans signed in September 1675, during the reign of Sultan Mehmed IV, which read:

> That all capitulations, privileges, and articles granted to the French, Venetian, and other princes, who are in amity with the Sublime Porte, having been in like manner, through favor, granted to the English, by virtue of our special command, the same shall be always observed according to the form and tenor thereof, so that no one in the future do presume to violate the same or act in contravention thereof.[40]

Arguing that Britain should enjoy every privilege granted to France and Russia, Ponsonby claimed that denying the right of Protestants to build a church in Jerusalem would be an "insult,"[41] and suggested that Rifat Pasha consider the consequences of the Sublime Porte's violation of its treaties with Britain.[42] Ponsonby pressured Rifat Pasha, reminding him not only of previous treaties, but noting that Britain had stood by the empire during its struggle with Muhammad 'Ali. Despite this, Ponsonby described his conversations with Rifat Pasha as "perfectly cool" and "amicable in tone," believing that Rifat Pasha would eventually agree to the request to establish the church.[43]

The British government believed that permission to build a church in Jerusalem was not out of reach, but some delay would be required before the issue could be

successfully raised again. The king of Prussia expressed hope for Britain's success in this matter and directed Prussian officials in Istanbul to assist. As the two most powerful Protestant empires, Prussia and Britain were determined to exert constant pressure on the Sublime Porte to build a Protestant church in Jerusalem – for them, a relatively simple but historic achievement in the wider context of their relations with the Ottoman Empire that would serve as the basis for any future concessions.[44]

Construction Begins and Stops

As diplomatic negotiations took place, the stream of visitors to Palestine grew and Jerusalem's small Protestant community increased in number.[45] On 28 February 1842, Anglican Bishop Michael Solomon Alexander, a Jewish convert to Christianity who played a major role in consolidating the Protestant presence in Jerusalem, laid the first row of stones upon the concrete foundations where the Protestant church would be built, and on 1 November of the same year the ceremonial cornerstone was laid.[46] Although the Sublime Porte appeared to have never approved the construction, it did not prevent the ongoing construction of the church beyond attempts to intervene to halt it – at least according to the official information received by the British government.[47] Indeed, a November 1842 report that reached the British government indicated that the Sublime Porte looked with great displeasure at its progress, though it could not resist British pressure.[48]

The Ottomans drew a clear distinction between carrying out construction work on the church – which was already in progress – officially granting permission to build the church, and legitimizing British protection over the church and its members. In fact, the construction of a Protestant church in Jerusalem was to be the start of the realization of many privileges for Protestants – whose numbers were still relatively low at the time – and not only in Jerusalem, but throughout the Ottoman Empire.[49]

Yet, shortly after construction began, local Ottoman authorities issued orders that brought it to a halt in March 1843. This was a result of the "strongly worded" petition submitted to the Sublime Porte by Jerusalemites, who were described in British documents as "anti-social" (that is, anti-Protestant) in Jerusalem. The petitioners made two main allegations: (a) they questioned the legality of buying land to build a church; and (b) they claimed that there was no precedent for issuing a permit allowing the building of a church in a place where there had never been a church.[50] At that time, it seemed that Britain was violating Ottoman laws and pursuing a fait accompli policy in building this church.

On 20 March 1943, Hamilton-Gordon sent the new British ambassador Stratford Canning to express the British government's dismay as a result of the letters recently received from the British consul general's office in Syria. Evidently, the British government had been led to believe that if the Protestant church was unobtrusive, the Ottoman authorities would not object to its construction.[51] Meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary Hamilton-Gordon asked Canning to raise the issue with Rifat Pasha, expressing the British government's disappointment and asking Rifat Pasha to

order 'Ali Effendi, the governor of Jerusalem, to allow construction to resume without hindrance. The British were reluctant to request a formal *firman* from the sultan on this matter, which would risk an official refusal. Therefore, Hamilton-Gordon left the matter entirely to Canning, being a seasoned British ambassador, to act at his own discretion as he saw fit. Canning was to determine the best course of action according to his personal knowledge of the sultan and his principal ministers, and to coordinate with Königsmark, the Prussian ambassador, to increase their chances of success.[52]

To strengthen British-Prussian cooperation, the new Prussian foreign minister Heinrich von Bülow emphasized the need to coordinate with Canning regarding the Protestant church in Jerusalem.[53] Meanwhile, the ambassador engaged in "secret" negotiations with the Sublime Porte to allow construction on the church to resume. Canning obtained confirmation that neither Sultan Abdulmejid I nor Shaykh al-Islam would object to the church building. However, Canning found it impossible to make progress on the issue of the church since the Sublime Porte objected to Britain's support of the rebellious Serbs against the Ottomans earlier in the century. Although the Sublime Porte did not issue any new refusal, Canning's attempts were met with silence and evasion by the Ottomans; he could only cling to a "weak" hope of communicating Hamilton-Gordon's instructions to the new Ottoman foreign minister, Ibrahim Sarim Pasha, when the opportunity arose.[54] Canning met with Sarim Pasha on the morning of 1 May 1843 for a "secret" conversation and conveyed his hope that he could report that the meeting was "satisfactory," or that permission according to the prevailing conditions would be "ready."[55]

By August 1843, the special Prussian envoy to London Chevalier Bunsen sent to Hamilton-Gordon two copies of plans for the church prepared by an architect and approved by the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews. The plans were drawn up in strict adherence to the principles laid down from the start, including that the church should be part of the dwellings erected in the Prussian consulate and a similar height as the neighboring houses so as not to be obvious. The planned church's external structure was to be discretely simple, without towers or domes. Further, since the British consular residence was adjacent to the building on one side, the church would therefore look like a consular church. Bunsen emphasized that it would accommodate no more than three hundred people, as the number of worshipers in normal circumstances did not exceed fifty.

The most urgent matter, Bunsen stated, was for the Sublime Porte to reverse the "unwarrantable" decision of six months earlier to halt construction work, a decision apparently issued by officials in Beirut and Jerusalem, not Istanbul, due to local protests. Despite local objections to the construction plan, Bunsen was certain the Sublime Porte would not issue further decisions halting it and he pleaded with Hamilton-Gordon to send a copy of the plans for the church to Canning. He requested Hamilton-Gordon's assistance in the efforts to remove obstacles to its construction.[56]

However, a stumbling block emerged between the British government and the London Society. Hamilton-Gordon explained that the British government could not accept a private association, no matter how respectable (referring here to the London

Society), providing official housing for the British government representative in Jerusalem. Thus, the British government was not prepared to rent part of the complex owned by the London Society as a consular residence, nor make any public statement in support of the society's actions. Yet, the property's status as a consular residence was understood as a necessary precondition for Ottoman permission to establish a church there, and Hamilton-Gordon emphasized that this was the only way to build the church without further hindering the process.[57]

In October 1843, Hamilton-Gordon wrote to Canning saying that he had received information of a very positive nature from Bunsen regarding the claim made by the Ottoman authorities. The letter stated that the new information made the Ottoman objections to the church's construction no longer valid. According to the new information, during the Egyptian control of Jerusalem (1831–40), an Armenian bought the plot of land on which Britain planned to build the church from the Jacobite Church, considering it an inalienable Christian endowment (*waqf*) that can be sold for religious purposes only.[58] In turn, the Armenian sold the land to Nicolayson as permitted by law. That is, Ottoman law allowed Christian churches to be rebuilt for the sake of worship. The Protestant church, on which construction had stopped, would thus be in the same place as a former Jacobite church. Hamilton-Gordon emphasized that the ancient church was still partly present in the form of an abandoned mosque.

Nicolayson insisted on traveling to Istanbul with all the necessary documents to prove to the Sublime Porte the permissibility of building the Protestant church. Bishop Alexander and Nicolayson went to Istanbul to make their case, stopping in Beirut to consult with the British consul, Hugh Henry Rose. Rose dissuaded the bishop from appearing suddenly in Istanbul because traveling there and discussing the issue of building a church in Jerusalem may stir competition among the representatives of the European powers in Istanbul and embarrass the British ambassador, who was making strenuous efforts in this regard with the Sublime Porte. Nicolayson continued alone to Istanbul, although he found Rose's position (and that of the Ottoman government and its local authorities in Jerusalem and Sidon) frustrating.[59]

Nicolayson arrived in Istanbul and was preparing a "strenuous endeavor" to overcome the Sublime Porte's objections to completing the church. The British foreign secretary instructed Canning to coordinate with Nicolayson to convince the Sublime Porte to grant permission to resume work on the church and to send instructions in this regard to the local Ottoman authorities in Jerusalem.[60] Canning emphasized the need to link the church to housing for the British and Prussian consuls, and wondered whether it would be safe to propose the site of the Jacobite church to build the Protestant church. Noting that his earlier conversation with Rifat Pasha had not been encouraging, Canning planned a joint meeting with the new Prussian ambassador in Istanbul Karl Emil Gustav von M. Le Coq (1842–47) and Rifat Pasha, hoping that Le Coq might help in his efforts. Still, Canning was firmly convinced that the Sublime Porte would not accede to the joint British-Prussian appeal.[61]

Ongoing Negotiations

Negotiations between the British government and the Sublime Porte entered a new stage in January 1844. The Protestant church in Jerusalem appeared once more on the diplomatic agenda and Bunsen and Nicolayson added their efforts to the "struggle" to change the Ottoman position.[62] Meanwhile, the Prussian foreign minister Bülow assured his British counterpart of Frederick Wilhelm IV's interest in the matter and his efforts to obtain permission.[63] When Canning met with Rifat Pasha and other ministers, he believed that the Sublime Porte was less strenuous in its objections to the Protestant church in Jerusalem; still, Rifat Pasha considered that it would be quite difficult to grant permission, and recommended postponing the matter further.[64] Canning sent Rifat Pasha a new request, upon instruction from his government, to remove any Ottoman barrier to the church's establishment. Canning stressed that he would continue to exert pressure until Rifat Pasha came back with a positive decision regarding the church.[65]

Compared to its previous positions, the Ottoman Empire now faced a new issue on which it had no precedent to base its decision. The Sublime Porte's refusal to allow the completion of the first Protestant church in its realm could be read as closing the door to others as well, intended to prevent other religious minority denominations from making similar claims.

Apparently, the Sublime Porte had not made any new or explicit objection to the completion of the church. However, by adopting the usual delaying tactics, it referred the whole matter to the governor of Sidon, Asad Pasha, who in turn postponed his response for nearly a year, perhaps with some degree of prior coordination between Asad Pasha and Rifat Pasha. Canning expressed hope that Asad Pasha would approve the church's completion according to the "wise influence" of Rose, the British consul in Beirut, who was working for a positive report from Asad Pasha to the Sublime Porte until all "basic" difficulties encountered were removed.[66]

In March 1844, the conversion of 150 Orthodox Christians to Protestantism in the Hasbaya region in Lebanon gave rise to new problems with the Ottoman Empire, diverting attention from the issue of completing the Protestant church after all attempts had been made to solve it.[67] Thus, in light of Ottoman rejectionism, there was no British diplomatic correspondence on the matter of the Protestant church in Jerusalem for about a year, until the British politician Anthony Ashley-Cooper lobbied the Foreign Office to return attention to the church. In March 1845, a petition signed by some fourteen hundred clergy and fifteen thousand laity in support of the project was presented to Hamilton-Gordon,[68] who subsequently asked Canning to resume his lobbying in Istanbul and continued to express his belief that the Sublime Porte could be swayed to accept the church.[69]

Canning met with the new Ottoman foreign minister Mehmed Shekib Effendi in late May 1845 and conveyed to him the essence of British demands. Shekib Effendi asked Canning to present his claims in a note to be studied by the Sublime Porte.[70] Canning met Shekib Effendi again in early July and requested a definite and satisfactory answer

from the Sublime Porte. He was concerned that Ottoman ministers would continue to postpone the matter "indefinitely," and emphasized that other obstacles were likely to arise; still, he was convinced that the "present" intention of the Sublime Porte was to grant the required permission. He also noted that the British government would continue its efforts until it received a decisive response.[71]

Issuing the Firman and Completing Construction

British Ambassador Canning met Ottoman Sultan Abdulmejid I on 25 August 1845. The sultan confirmed that he had agreed to issue a royal firman that included permission to complete the construction of the Protestant church in Jerusalem. Canning considered this a goodwill gesture, enhancing Britain's confidence in its policy toward the Ottoman Empire.[72]

A week later, the Sublime Porte sent a memorandum to Canning stating that the British had permission to establish a place of Protestant worship inside the residence of the British consulate in Jerusalem.[73] The Sublime Porte also sent this decree to Asad Pasha, noting that British Protestant subjects who visited Jerusalem faced difficulties due to the lack of a place of Protestant worship, and that friendly relations between the British government and the Sublime Porte led the latter to grant permission to allocate a Protestant place of worship inside the residence of the British consulate in Jerusalem.[74] Perhaps the issuance of the firman was a result of the historical and generally positive relations between the two empires, or a natural result of the pressure of powerful Britain on the weakening Ottoman Empire.

On 16 October 1845, the consuls of Britain and Prussia informed Jerusalem governor 'Ali Effendi that, based on the sultan's decree, construction on the Protestant church in Jerusalem would proceed. Two days later, 'Ali Effendi visited the site of the proposed building at the head of a large delegation and announced that the construction was contrary to what was stated in the firman. He claimed that the decree did not mention the location of the church and that he did not understand from the document that the intended building would be a real church. Rather, he understood that it would be a place designated for prayers inside the headquarters of the British consulate for British and Prussian Protestants.[75]

The new British consul in Jerusalem, H. H. Newbolt, informed 'Ali Effendi that the church building on which work had already begun was the same place mentioned in the firman and that the British consulate had moved to a place adjacent to the proposed church. Newbolt acknowledged that the decree did not specifically refer to a church, and argued that the building need not be called a church; it could instead be called a Protestant place of worship. Nor did the firman specify the place in which it should be established, except by indicating that this building was inside the headquarters of the British consulate. 'Ali Effendi asked the British to halt construction on the church until he received further orders from the Sublime Porte. Newbolt countered by suggesting that construction continue until they were each able to speak to their superiors; when 'Ali Effendi refused, Newbolt asked him to put his decision in writing, which 'Ali Effendi also refused.[76]

After nearly a month, Canning suggested that time not be wasted waiting for approval from the governor of Jerusalem; rather, the British should express their shock and disappointment to the new Ottoman foreign minister, 'Ali Pasha, who had replaced Shekib Effendi. Canning insisted that 'Ali Effendi's behavior in Jerusalem went against the Sublime Porte's firman and thus merited the sultan's discontent.[77] The British embassy in Istanbul thus lodged a protest with 'Ali Pasha regarding the new obstacles that 'Ali Effendi had put in the way of completing the Protestant church in Jerusalem. The British embassy indicated "with good intentions" that although the church building was not actually inside the consulate, it was planned to be part of the consular establishment in the future. The embassy asked 'Ali Pasha to give clear and definitive orders that no further delay would occur, which should be addressed to 'Ali Effendi and phrased in a way that left no room for doubt. 'Ali Pasha announced that he would send the necessary messages to 'Ali Efendi and Asad Pasha.[78]

A new, more explicit, firman was issued on 9 December 1845, stipulating the resumption of construction work on the church in its current location.[79] Ultimately, the first Protestant church in Jerusalem was completed and consecrated as Christ Church on 21 January 1849. Reverend John Nicolayson served as its rector until his death in 1856.[80] This was a key step toward Britain's subsequent pressure on the Ottoman Empire to officially recognize the Protestant community. In October 1850, Sultan Abdulmejid I issued a firman formally recognizing the Protestant community as an official religious denomination, alongside Catholics and Orthodox Christians.[81] This was considered a great achievement and welcomed in Britain.

Conclusion

Britain was serious about strengthening its influence in the Middle East, especially in Palestine, after the French invasion of Egypt and Muhammad 'Ali's rebellion in Greater Syria. To do so, Britain sought the establishment of a Protestant community in the region that it would directly protect – much like France and Russia did with Catholic and Orthodox Christians in the region, respectively – and pushed to build the first Protestant church in Jerusalem. Missionary organizations, chief among them the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, also had vested interest in the formation of a Protestant community in Palestine.

The common interests of missionary organizations and the British government, along with devoted Protestants such as Nicolayson, brought them to work in concert for the establishment of the church in Jerusalem. This, combined with the persistent diplomatic pressure that Canning and other British diplomats placed on the weakening Ottoman Empire, ultimately led to the construction of the first Protestant church in Jerusalem and the entire Middle East.

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Endnotes

1   Mustafa Kaan Sağ, "Edirne'de Bir İngiliz Misyonerlik Cemiyeti: Evangelikalizm, Milenyalizm ve Yahudiler," *Belleten* 83, no. 296 (April 2019): 309–10; Wilhelm Hoffmann, *The Anglo-Prussian Bishopric of St. James in Jerusalem* (London: Thomas Ward, 1842), 9–10.

2   Hanna Kildani, *Modern Christianity in the Holy Land* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2010), 454; Hoffmann, *Anglo-Prussian Bishopric*, 310.

3   James Finn, *Stirring Times, or Records from Jerusalem Consular Chronicles of 1853–1856*, vol. 1 (London: C. Kegan Paul, 1878), 134; Hoffmann, *Anglo-Prussian Bishopric*, 10. In 1673, King France Louis XIII sent a fleet to the Dardanelles and obtained a new capitulary treaty recognizing him as the sole protector of the eastern Catholics. Catherine II obtained the same right to protect the Orthodox Church and its followers in the Ottoman Empire after defeating the Ottomans and forcing them to sign the Treaty of Küçük Kaynarcaji in 1774. The two churches maintained their position as institutions officially recognized by the Ottoman Empire.

4   Spencer Smith to Granville, 3 September 1798, and Foreign Office to M. Smith, Downing Street, 10 October 1798, in the National Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA), Foreign Office (FO) 78–20.

5   Kildani, *Modern Christianity*, 453; Mihriban Uçar, *19. Yüzyilin İkinci Yarisinda Kudüs Beytüllahim Kilisesi'nde Osmanli İdaresi'nde* (Denizli, TR: Pamukkale Üniversitesi, 2019), s. 3–4; Jerusalem in Diplomatic History (special issue), *Jerusalem Quarterly* 71 (Autumn 2017).

6   Lorenzo Kamel, *Imperial Perceptions of Palestine: British Influence and Power in Late Ottoman Times* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2015), 6–8.

7   Millet was an independent court of law pertaining to "personal law" under which a confessional community (a group abiding by the laws of Muslim shari'a, Christian canon law, or Jewish halakha) was allowed to rule itself under its own laws. Despite frequently being referred to as a "system," before the nineteenth century, the organization of what are now retrospectively called millets in the Ottoman Empire was not at all systematic. Rather, non-Muslims were simply given a significant degree of autonomy within their own community, without an overarching structure for the millet as a whole. The notion of distinct millets corresponding to different religious communities within the empire would not emerge until the eighteenth century. See Fatih Öztürk, *Ottoman and Turkish Law* (Bloomington, IN: iUniverse, 2014), 1–69.

8   The Ottoman Empire generally refrained from interfering with the rights of its Christian subjects or their churches; and although some argue that the Ottomans allowed Christians under their rule to have absolute religious freedom, this was not the case, even after the Tanzimat reforms of the nineteenth century. See: Hoffmann, *Anglo-Prussian*, 9–10; William Miller, *The Ottoman Empire and Its Successors, 1801–1922* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 3; Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 51–52; "Protestantism in Turkey" (from the *Morning Chronicle*), *Littell's Living Age* 31, no. 387 (18 October 1851): 101–2; and Abul-Fazi Ezzati, *The Spread of Islam: The Contributing Factors* (London: Islamic College for Advanced Studies Press, 2002), 12–13.

9   Ramazan Kılınç, *Alien Citizens: The State and Religious Minorities in Turkey and France* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 6.

10 Nicola Migliorino, *(Re)constructing Armenia in Lebanon and Syria: Ethno-Cultural Diversity and the State in the Aftermath of a Refugee Crisis* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2008), 25.

11 Kildani, *Modern Christianity*, 453–54.

12 Kildani, *Modern Christianity*, 453–54.

13 The London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews is an Anglican missionary society founded in 1809. The main goal of the society was to promote Christianity among the Jews. The society's work began among poor Jewish immigrants in the East End of London and soon spread to Europe, South America, Africa, and Palestine. The London Society was the first such society to work on a global basis. In 1914, the society was described as the oldest, largest, richest, most enterprising, and best organized of its type, and had auxiliary societies throughout the British Isles and Canada. A mere five thousand Jews were baptized by the society since its foundation. This number showed a major failure of the society's efforts toward the conversion of Jews to Christianity. The society often adopted a Zionist position, and expressed the view that

the Jewish people deserved a state in the Holy Land, in accordance with the Restoration beliefs of its founders, decades before Zionism began as a movement. It supported the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 and continues to engage in pro-Israel advocacy. In response to changing attitudes toward outreach and the Jewish people, the society has changed its name several times over the years, first to Church Missions to Jews, then the Church's Mission to the Jews, followed by the Church's Ministry among the Jews, and finally to the current name of the Church's Ministry among Jewish People (CMJ), which was adopted in 1995.

14 Geoffrey B. Finlayson, *The Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury, 1801–1885* (British Colombia: Regent College Publishing, 2004), 112–15; Isaiah Friedman, "Lord Palmerston and the Protection of Jews in Palestine, 1839–1851," *Jewish Social Studies* 30, no. 1 (January 1968): 23–41.

15 Sir T. Baring to Viscount Palmerston, Jaffa, 14 March 1839, TNA FO 78/368.

16 J. Gordon Melton. *Encyclopedia of Protestantism* (New York: Facts on File, 2005), introduction, 30.

17 Alexander McCaul, "Retrospective View of the Jerusalem Mission," *Jerusalem Miscellany* 3 (March 1856): 38–47, at 39.

18 McCaul, "Retrospective View," 39–40.

19 McCaul, "Retrospective View," 40; Finn, *Stirring Times*, vol. 1, 134.

20 Sir T .Baring to Viscount Palmerston, Winchester ,1 February 1841 ,in TNA FO 881-207 ;Joseph Moseley, *Russia in the Right: Or, the Other Side of the Turkish Question* (London: Clarke, Beeton, and Company, 1854), 14.

21 Finn, *Stirring Times*, vol. 1, 134

22 Sir T. Baring to Viscount Palmerston; Moseley, *Russia in the Right*, 14.

23 Sir T .Baring to Viscount Palmerston.

24 Viscount Palmerston to Viscount Ponsonby, Foreign Office, 8 February 1841, no. 21, in TNA FO 881-207; Moseley, *Russia in the Right*, 14.

25 *al-ʿUhda al-ʿUmariyya* [Pact of ʿUmar or ʿUmar's Assurance] is a book written by Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khattab to the people of Aelia (Jerusalem) when Muslims entered it in 638 CE, assuring them of their churches and their properties. ʿUmar's Assurance was considered one of the most important documents in the history of Jerusalem. Opinions differ on the authenticity of the different versions of the assurance. Many historians have questioned the authenticity of the Christian versions of this pact and argue that such documents were forged by Christian scribes to secure their possession of some religious sites. See: Maher Y. Abu-Munshar. *Islamic Jerusalem and Its Christians: A History of Tolerance and Tensions* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007), 80; J. J. Van Ginkel, H. L. Murre-Van Den Berg, and T. M. Van Lint, *Redefining Christian Identity: Cultural Interaction in the Middle East since the Rise of Islam* (Leuven: Peeters Publishers, 2005), 22; and Oded Peri, *Christianity under Islam in Jerusalem: The Question of the Holy Sites in Early Ottoman Times* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 128.

26 Finn, *Stirring Times*, vol. 1, 134–5.

27 Finn, *Stirring Times*, vol. 1, 135.

28 McCaul, "Retrospective View," 41–42.

29 M. Pisani to Viscount Ponsonby, Pera, 23 July 1841, and Viscount Ponsonby to Viscount Palmerston, Therapia, 27 July 1841, no. 246, in TNA FO 881-207.

30 Viscount Ponsonby to Viscount Palmerston, Therapia, 11 July 1841, no. 229, in TNA FO 881-207. Ponsonby also ruled out using violence against the sultan or his government to achieve this goal.

31 Chevalier Bunsen to Viscount Palmerston, London, 15 July 1841, in TNA FO 881-207; Viscount Palmerston to Viscount Ponsonby, Foreign Office, 26 July 1841, and Viscount Palmerston to the Chevalier Bunsen, Foreign Office, 30 July 1841, in *British and Foreign State Papers, 1945–1946* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1860), vol. 34, 1144; John Bright, *The Letter of John Bright on the War* (London: W. and F. G. Cash, 1854), 14; and "Protestantism in Turkey," 101.

32 Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 70; David Kushner, *Palestine in the Late Ottoman Period: Political, Social, and Economic Transformation* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), 304–5; and Martin Tamcke and Michale Marten, *Christian Witness between Continuity and New Beginnings: Modern Historical Missions in the Middle East* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2006), 126–30.

33 Viscount Ponsonby to Viscount Palmerston, Therapia, 15 August 1841, no. 288, in TNA FO 881-207; Yaron Perry, *British Mission to the Jews in Nineteenth-century Palestine* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 73; and Moseley, *Russia in the Right*, 15–16.

34 R. W. Greaves, "The Jerusalem Bishopric, 1841," *English Historical Review* 64 (1949): 346–47.

35 Edwin Hodder, *The Life and Work of the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury* (London: Cassell, 1887), vol. 1, 377–78.

36 Greaves, "Jerusalem Bishopric," 349.

37 Viscount Ponsonby to Earl Aberdeen, Therapia, 7 October 1841, extract, no. 11, in TNA FO 881-207; and Moseley, *Russia in the Right*, 16–17.

38 Hatt-i Şerif of Gülhane was a proclamation by Ottoman Sultan Abdülmecid I in 1839 that launched the Tanzimât period of reforms and reorganization in the Ottoman Empire. The proclamation was issued at the behest of reformist Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Pasha. It promised reforms such as the abolition of tax farming, reform of conscription, and guarantee of rights to all Ottoman citizens regardless of religion or ethnic group. The goal of the decree was to help modernize the empire militarily and socially so that it could compete with the Great Powers of Europe. It also was hoped the reforms would win over the disaffected parts of the empire, especially in the Ottoman controlled parts of Europe, which were largely Christian. It was published in the Tekvim-i Vekayi journal in Ottoman Turkish. In addition, it was published in Greek and French. The Edict of Gülhane did not enact any official legal changes but merely made royal promises to the empire's subjects, and they were never fully implemented due to Christian nationalism and resentment among Muslim populations in these areas. Gábor Ágoston and Bruce Alan Masters. *Encyclopedia of the Ottoman Empire* (New York: Facts on File, 2009).

39 Count Kanigsmark to Viscount Ponsonby, 12 September 1841, F.O. 881-207; and "Protestantism in Turkey" 101.

40 "Treaties of Commerce between Great Britain and Turkey; Subsisting between the 2 Powers in 1814," in *British and Foreign State Papers, 1812–1814*, vol. 1 (London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1841), 750; and John Macgregor, *Commercial Statistics, a Digest of the Productive Resources, Commercial Legislation, Customs Tariffs* (London: Charles Knight, 1844), vol. 2, 19.

41 Viscount Ponsonby to Earl Aberdeen, Therapia, 7 October 1841, Extract no. 11, in TNA FO 881-207. Rifat Pasha denied that the matter was an insult, but Ponsonby retorted that it was unfortunately not dependent on the opinion of "His Excellency" (Rifat Pasha).

42 Viscount Ponsonby to Rifat Pasha, Therapia, 11 October 1841, in *British and Foreign State Papers, 1985–1846*, vol. 34 (London: James Ridgway and Sons, 1860), 1147–48.

43 Viscount Ponsonby to Earl Aberdeen, Therapia, 7 October 1841, extract no. 11, in TNA FO 881-207; and Moseley, *Russia in the Right*, 16–17.

44 Mr. Bankhead to the Earl of Aberdeen, Pera, 17 November 1841, extract no. 48, in TNA FO 881-207.

45 Perry, *British Mission*, 70.

46 Perry, *British Mission*, 70–71. When the ceremonies were over and routine construction work commenced, disputes broke out with the architect, James Johns. In January 1843, the London Society replaced Johns with Matthew Habershon and appointed R. Bates Critchlow as construction supervisor.

47 Asked by parliament in February 1843 whether the Ottoman authorities had permitted building a Protestant church in Jerusalem, Peel responded that they had not, as it would be contrary to shari'a. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 67 (London: Thomas Curson Hansard, 1843), 18–22.

48 *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, vol. 67, 20–22.

49 Clark, *Allies for Armageddon*, 71.

50 Perry, *British Mission*, 72–73.

51 Earl of Aberdeen to Sir Stratford Canning, Foreign Office, 20 March 1843, no. 30, in TNA FO 881-207.

52 Earl of Aberdeen to Sir Stratford Canning, Foreign Office, 20 March 1843, no. 30, in TNA FO 881-207.

53 Bülow sent orders for this to Karl Emil Gustav von M. Le Coq, who was to become the new Prussian ambassador to Istanbul. This was confirmed by Hamilton-Gordon in his letter to Canning on 5 April 1843. Earl of Westmorland to Earl of Aberdeen, Berlin, 29 March 1843, no. 41, and Earl of Aberdeen to Sir Stratford Canning, Foreign Office, 5 April 1843, no. 49, in TNA FO 881-207.

54 Sir Stratford Canning to the Earl of Aberdeen, Constantinople, 18 April 1843, no. 82, in TNA FO 881-207.

55 Sir Stratford Canning to the Earl of Aberdeen, Constantinople, 1 May 1843, no. 93, in TNA FO 881-207.

56 Chevalier Bunsen to the Earl of Aberdeen, London, 17 August 1843, in TNA FO 881-207.

57 Earl of Aberdeen to the Chevalier Bunsen,

Foreign Office, 26 August 1843, in TNA FO 881-207.

58 Earl of Aberdeen to Sir Stratford Canning, Foreign Office, 4 October 1843, no. 125, in TNA FO 881-207; Perry, *British Mission*, 72. Waqf, also known as *hubus* or mortmain property, is an inalienable charitable endowment under Islamic law. It typically involves donating a building, plot of land, or other assets for Muslim religious or charitable purposes with no intention of reclaiming the assets. A charitable trust may hold the donated assets. The donor is known as a *waqif*.

59 Perry, *British Mission*, 72; Lyle L. Vander Werff. *Christian Mission to Muslims: The Record; Anglican and Reformed Approaches in India and the Near East, 1800–1938* (South Pasadena, CA: Carey Library, 2000), 155.

60 Earl of Aberdeen to Sir Stratford Canning, Foreign Office, 4 October 1843, no. 125, in TNA FO 881-207.

61 Sir Stratford Canning to the Earl of Aberdeen, Constantinople, 1 December 1843, no. 255, in TNA FO 881-207.

62 Perry, *British Mission*, 72–73. In a long memo from Bunsen to Palmerston, Bunsen indicated his belief that Nicolayson's participation alongside Canning was important to change the decision of the Sublime Porte.

63 Earl of Westmorland to the Earl of Aberdeen, Berlin, 10 January 1844, no. 2, in TNA FO 881-207.

64 Sir Stratford Canning to the Earl of Aberdeen, Constantinople, 16 January 1844, no. 2, no. 93, in TNA FO 881-207.

65 Sir Stratford Canning to Rifaat Pasha, Pera of Constantinople, 31 January 1843, in TNA FO 881-207.

66 Sir Stratford Canning to the Earl of Aberdeen, Constantinople, 3 May 1844, no. 85, in TNA FO 881-207.

67 Samir Khalaf, *Protestant Missionaries in the Levant: Ungodly Puritans, 1820–1860* (London: Routledge, 2012), 234–35.

68 Donald Lewis, *The Origins of Christian Zionism: Lord Shaftesbury and Evangelical Support for a Jewish Homeland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 380; Perry, *British Mission*, 74.

69 Earl of Aberdeen to Sir Stratford Canning, Foreign Office, 20 March 1845, no. 32, in TNA FO 881-207; Perry, *British Mission*, 74.

70 Sir Stratford Canning to the Earl of Aberdeen, Constantinople, 20 May 1845, no. 123, in TNA FO 881-207.

71 Sir Stratford Canning to the Earl of Aberdeen, Constantinople, 2 July 1845, no. 159, in TNA FO 881-207.

72 Sir Stratford Canning to the Earl of Aberdeen, Constantinople, 25 August 1845, no. 199, in TNA FO 881-207.

73 Memorandum from the Porte to Sir Stratford Canning, 29 Shaban 1261, (2 September 1845), Translation in TNA FO 881-207; Perry, *British Mission*, 74.

74 Firman addressed to the wali of Saida (Governor of Sidon), the Governor of Jerusalem, and others, 1 Ramazan 1261 (10 September 1845), translation in TNA FO 881-207; *The Ecclesiastical Gazette, or, Monthly Register* (London: Charles Cox, 1845), 7: 95; "Firman (Protestant Church, Jerusalem), Constantinople, 10 September 1845, Foreign Office," *Treaties between Turkey and Foreign Powers, 1535–1855* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1858), 668–9; William H. Hechler, *The Jerusalem Bishopric Documents* (London: Trübner, 1883), 128–9; and Perry, *British Mission*, 74–75. On 16 September 1845, Canning sent Hamilton-Gordon the English translation of the sultan's decree. In this letter, Canning stated that it must be noted that the permission made it understood that the church had to be linked to the British consulate. Sir Stratford Canning to the Earl of Aberdeen, Constantinople, 16 September 1845, no. 216, in TNA FO 881-207.

75 Mr. Newbolt to Consul-General Rose, 19 October 1845, in TNA FO 881-207.

76 Mr. Newbolt to Consul-General Rose, 19 October 1845, in TNA FO 881-207.

77 Sir Stratford Canning to Mr. Alison, Pera of Constantinople, 12 November 1845, in TNA FO 881-207.

78 Mr. Alison to Sir Stratford Canning, Pera of Constantinople, 12 November 1845, in TNA FO 881-207.

79 Perry, *British Mission*, 75.

80 Karl von Raumer, *Palästina* (Leipzig: Brockhaus 1860), 412; and Kelvin Crombie, *A Jewish Bishop in Jerusalem: The Life Story of Michael Solomon Alexander* (Jerusalem: Nicolayson's, 2006), 241.

81 "Firman of His Imperial Majesty Sultan Abdul Medjid: Granted in Favour of His Protestant Subjects. Communicated October 24, 1850, Foreign Office," *Treaties between Turkey and Foreign Powers 1535–1855* (London: Harrison and Sons, 1858), 66–69; and Perry, *British Mission*, 74–75.

Leah and Nassib: Jerusalem through a Forgotten Story

Norbert Schwake

Abstract

A beautiful building at the entrance to the Rehavia neighborhood in Jerusalem, named "Villa Leah," is a monument to an unusual love story from the early twentieth century – one that gives us insight into discrete social realities of the "Holy City" apart from oft-repeated historical narratives. Nassib Bey Abcarius, the grandson of an Armenian bishop, born in Beirut, arrives in Jerusalem after years studying law in Paris, working for the British army in Cairo, and becoming a judge in Khartoum, and enjoys a lucrative career as a private lawyer. At the age of 54, he falls in love with Leah Tennenbaum, the daughter of a Jewish real estate agent. During World War I, the teenaged Leah had become a focus of celebrity scandal, as the reputed concubine of Cemal Pasha, the Ottoman ruler of Greater Syria. After the war, she had a brief marriage to an officer in Britain's Jewish Legion with whom she had a son, and returned to Jerusalem after her divorce. Nassib and the 30-year-old Leah wed in Paris in a civil marriage, settled in Jerusalem and quickly had two daughters. Five years into the marriage, the Bauhaus-styled Villa Leah was inaugurated but the couple lived in it only a few short years before Leah escaped with her children to Cairo in 1937, never to return. She died in 1967 in Montreal, surviving Nassib by twenty-one years.

Keywords

Jerusalem; cosmopolitanism; intercommunal relationships; social mobility; family history.

The month is ending, but not the more or less naughty comments being made about the projected wedding of Djemal Pasha with a beautiful Jewish lady named Leah Tennenbaum. The news seemed so unlikely to me that I gave it the least importance, but it persists, and there is no one in the city who is not commenting on it.

– Consul Conde de Ballobar, Jerusalem, 31 May 1915[1]

This article recounts the unusual lives of Leah Tannenbaum and Nassib Abcarius, two forgotten Jerusalem figures from the early twentieth century. The article also tells the story of their home, Villa Leah, the beautiful residence that Nassib built in 1934 to celebrate Leah. The accounts in this essay demonstrate that the history of Jerusalem, even if told through its houses, is connected intrinsically to the agency of its inhabitants, since a history of a city without its people is an incomplete one. The stories also reveal the ways in which Palestine has been a setting for dramas propelled by main actors who were not Palestinian. Indeed, of the characters that appear in this history, Leah was the only one born in Jerusalem, pegging her fortunes to men who came to Palestine from elsewhere. Ultimately, the forgotten story of Leah and Nassib, as well as that of their stately house, narrates an untold history of Jerusalem as a cosmopolitan city home to diverse, complicated and controversial characters.

The Tannenbaums

Leah (also called Lisa) Tannenbaum, the eldest child of Israel Mordechai Tannenbaum, was born on 1 September 1899, although she would later revise this to a date several years later. The Tannenbaums arrived in Jerusalem in 1861 or 1862, when Rabbi Avraham Yitzhak Tannenbaum, a shochet (kosher butcher) from Stropkov, in present-day Slovakia, immigrated to Palestine.[2] Avraham settled in Jerusalem, where he married and had two children, and where he was registered as a Talmud student. Avraham's son Elhanan was a founder of the Nahalat Yitzhak Jewish settlement on the periphery of Jaffa and co-owner, with his brother-in-law, of the Sasson Brothers printing office.

Elhanan's son Israel was Leah's father. Sometimes described as on Orthodox Jew from Mea She'arim, one of the oldest Jewish settlements outside Jerusalem's Old City, Israel Tannenbaum was in fact a traditional Jew holding some liberal ideas. As a real estate agent, he arranged the purchase of Ahuzat Beit, a Jewish colony on the outskirts of Jaffa that paved the way for the establishment of Tel Aviv as a Jewish city. Israel Tannenbaum was sociable with his Palestinian neighbors, and spoke some Arabic. One of his friends was 'Arif al-'Arif, the Palestinian historian and nationalist politician (figure 3). Israel must have developed close relations with the Ottoman authorities, which may explain why the British, after conquering Jerusalem in December 1917, exiled him along with his entire family to Egypt – a punishment reserved mainly for the Germans of Jerusalem and Jaffa.[3]

Figures 1 and 2. Israel and Haya Tannenbaum, Leah's parents; Israel States Archives.

Figure 3. From left, brothers Sa'id and 'Arif al-'Arif; Haya Tannebaum, with her daughter Leah, and her youngest two sons (possibly) Elkhanan and David, and Israel, 1918. Photo courtesy of 'Arif Family Photo Collection, Institute for Palestine Studies Archives, Ramallah.

Following the outset of World War I, Leah became a veritable local celebrity as a result of the persistent gossip insinuating a romantic relationship between her and Cemal Pasha, the commander of the Fourth Ottoman Army and wartime governor of Greater Syria.[4] Indeed, one wonders if the rumors of their relationship reached British ears. Often described as a handsome man and a womanizer, Cemal Pasha was a highly controversial figure, partly because of his cruelty but also because of his visibility and unpredictability. Likewise, Leah had an aura of her own among residents of Jerusalem. Known locally as *bint Allah* (the daughter of God), Leah was considered a beauty who became active in the Red Crescent and somehow, not yet sixteen, became Cemal Pasha's mistress.

In May 1915, rumor spread in Jerusalem that Cemal was about to marry her. As the Spanish consul Conde de Ballobar insinuated in his diary on 31 May 1915, this sounded unlikely and unbelievable to most ears due to her religion, yet the rumor did not stop. One local conscript, Ihsan Turjman, was critical of the "well-known" relationship between the two to the extent that he believed Cemal was not worthy of a leadership role.[5] In his diary entry of 7 September 1915, Conde de Ballobar, who was on close and friendly terms with Cemal Pasha, wrote that Cemal Pasha had asked him: "Do you know that I have married an Austrian Jewess?" Ballobar added that all of Syria already knew this news and that even the French newspaper *Le Temps* had reported it.[6]

Along with Leah, other European Jewish female activists in the Red Crescent also became the lovers of Ottoman officers in the army headquarters. This was arguably an effort by the Ashkenazi Jewish community to find favor and gain influence with the Ottoman establishment. Alternatively, it was a way to escape wartime poverty and guarantee themselves and their families the possibility to survive the war.[7]

Cemal Pasha's whereabouts after the war are unknown until his death in 1922, and gossip surrounding his relationship with Leah faded away. Leah's intimate life, however – as turbulent as the early British rule of Palestine – remained a topic of interest in Jerusalem, where it became intertwined with the story of Nassib Abcarius, an important lawyer in Jerusalem who later married her.

After the Great War

After the war, Leah's life in Jerusalem began to take a turn. In 1921, she married Captain Israel Jaffe of the British Indian Army and an important officer in the Jewish Legion. Jaffe was born in 1888 in Belfast to a family of Jewish immigrants from Russia. Before the war, he had moved to Rhodesia, where he worked as a farmer in Old Mutare (Umtali) in Manicaland, near the border with Mozambique. Rumor had it that he was deeply in love with Leah, but that it was unreciprocated. Nonetheless, they wed and had a son, Leon (Len) Jaffe, born in December 1922 in Lausanne, where the couple had married and lived at the time.[8] In 1925, it seems that Jaffe left Switzerland for the United States, without Leah or Leon, before returning to Africa and his smallholding in Manicaland.[9] While it is unclear when and why Leah and Jaffe divorced, Leah returned to Jerusalem with Leon.
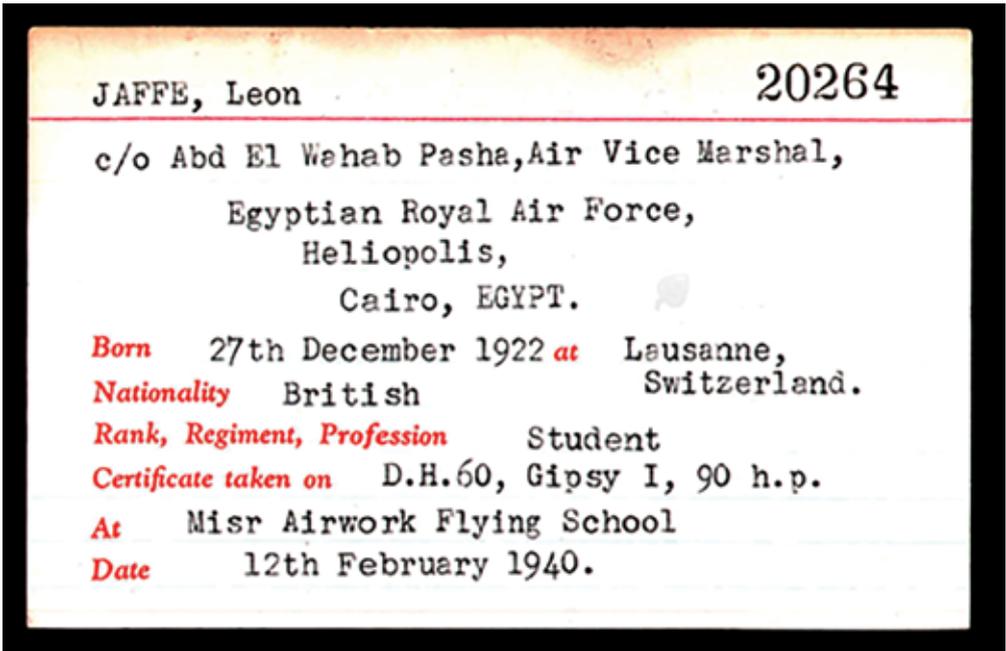
Figure 4. A biography card on Leah's son, Leon Jaffe. Photo courtesy of Carole Düster-Boucherot.

As a divorced woman with a child, Leah likely faced difficulties in Jerusalem and this may explain Israel Mordechai Tannenbaum's willingness to accept a marriage proposal on her behalf from Nassib Abcarius Bey, a lawyer with whom he had established good business relations. The Abcarius family's ties to Jerusalem were both older and more recent than the Tannenbaums' ties. Hagop Abkarian, Nassib's grandfather, was born in 1781 in Akşehir, a city between Afyon and Konya at the Akşehir Lake in present-day Turkey.[10] As a young man, Hagop entered the Armenian St. James Monastery in Jerusalem; in 1818, he was ordained a bishop in Vagharshapat, Armenia. Shortly after, however, Hagop, along with two other bishops, renounced the priesthood, converted to Protestantism, and moved to Beirut sometime before 1824. After he arrived in Lebanon, Hagop married Hawa Mas'ad, a Maronite from Beirut, with whom he had seven children.[11]

Their son, Johannes (Yuhana), born in 1832, went to a Greek Orthodox school where he learned Greek, Armenian, Turkish, and Arabic; at the age of thirteen, he was sent to a "diplomatic school" in Britain for two years. Shortly before the 1860 atrocities unfolded in Lebanon, Yuhana and his family moved to Egypt.[12] Eventually, Yuhana returned to Beirut and became the dragoman (interpreter and chancellor) of the British consulate. He also joined his older sister, Mariam (b. 1824), and brother, Iskandar (b. 1826), in working with American missionaries. It is unclear whether Yuhana's first wife, Zubayda, died in Egypt or Lebanon, but in 1871, he was married a second time, to Afifa Kanawati.[13] Yuhana and Afifa had eight children, the third of which was Nassib.[14]

According to the *Registro dei Morti* (Death Registry) of the Franciscan Parish of Jerusalem, Nassib was born in Beirut on 1 May 1875. He and his brother Amin studied pharmacology at the Syrian Protestant College (later the American University of Beirut). Nassib went on to study law in Paris and apparently, in 1898, he went to Egypt. There, he joined British troops as a pharmacist and participated in British-Egyptian colonial battles in Sudan.[15] He was appointed as a judge in Khartoum by the British and received the title *bey* from King Fu'ad of Egypt – a title that he apparently valued more than any other professional title.

After World War I, the British sent him to Palestine to work in the Mandate's legal department. Eventually, he left his government position and embarked on an independent career as a private lawyer. Out

Figure 5. Passport photo of Dr. Nassib Abcarius Bey; Israel State Archives.

of an office located at 10 St. Paul Street (today's Shivtei Yisrael Street) in western Jerusalem, he specialized in criminal trials and property contracts (working in the same office as David Goitein, who came to Palestine from England in 1924 and in 1953, was appointed to the Israeli Supreme Court).

Nassib was multitalented: a successful lawyer, fluent in Arabic, English, French, and Hebrew, with some knowledge of German, and reportedly a good violinist. His status and qualities – in addition to Leah's vulnerable state – likely helped Israel Mordechai overlook the couple's considerable age difference (Nassib was fifty-four and Leah was thirty). The matter of their different religions was overcome through marriage by civil ceremony in Paris (there was no civil marriage in Palestine), probably in 1929. While Christian-Jewish intermarriage may have raised some eyebrows in Jerusalem, given Hagop's conversion from Armenian Orthodoxy to Protestantism and Leah's previous relations with men outside her community, it may not have presented a significant issue for the couple.
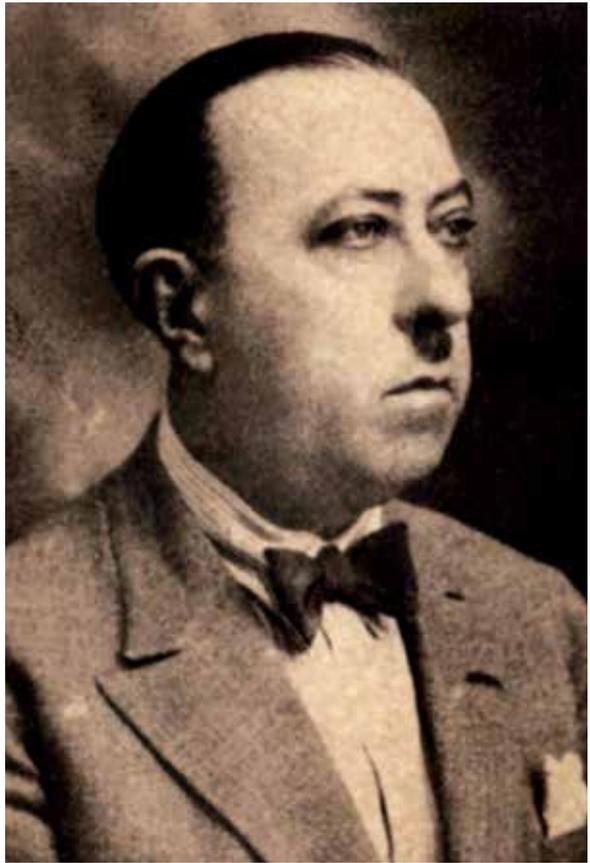
Figure 6. The Abcarius Family: Nassib Bey, Ruth, Tina, Leah, and Leon, c. 1937. Photo courtesy of George Napier.

Soon after their marriage, Leah gave birth to two daughters: Tina (Leontine Dora, b. 1929) and Ruth (Helene Sara Ruth, b. 1930). Nassib and Leah spent time in Jerusalem but also in Abu Ghosh where they had a summer residence probably shared with Nassib's brother Michel. In Jerusalem on 1 May 1934, the couple's grandiose new residence, Villa Leah, was inaugurated (the same day as Nassib's mother Afifa passed away). Villa Leah is located on Ben Maimon Avenue 6, at the entrance to the Rehavia neighborhood in western Jerusalem. The villa was intended to be the expression of Nassib's adoration of Leah. The architects Dan and Raphael Ben Dor designed it in the "international style" (Bauhaus) of the period, with Art Deco gates and windows. The land had been purchased from the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Jerusalem and was registered in Leah's name. Next to the house, Nassib built another house, also registered in Leah's name, to be used as a rental.

When in 1936 Italy's occupation of Ethiopia drove the emperor Haile Selassie and his family into exile, he stopped in Jerusalem on his way to Geneva and Nassib invited him to stay in his modern house.[16] The Negus accepted the invitation, bestowing on Nassib the enormous honor of hosting an emperor. Haile Selassie left Jerusalem after two weeks, but the imperial family stayed on at Villa Leah for months. Despite the prestige that such guests must have conferred on Nassib and Leah in Jerusalem society, by April 1937, the furniture of Villa Leah had been boxed up and shipped to Cairo; it seems that Leah had grown tired of Nassib's adoration and the splendid villa in Jerusalem and left with her three children to reunite with her sister, Rebecca (Bella). The immediate impetus for Leah's departure was likely Bella's marriage to Edward Thomas Guy, a British officer serving in Egypt, which took place in Cairo in 1937.[17]

Figure 7. Tina and Ruth in Villa Leah, 1934 (still one story, the Terra Santa College can be seen in the background). Photo courtesy of George Napier.

Figure 8. The exiled Ethiopian imperial family in Villa Leah, 1936 (with two stories plus roof top apartment). Photo courtesy of George Napier.

After Leah's Departure

While still married to Nassib, in Cairo, Leah found a new partner, the rich and influential Egyptian officer, Major General Hassan Abdul Wahab, a close friend of King Faruq and, after 1952, of the new rulers Muhammad Naguib and Gamal Abdel Nasser. In 1938, seemingly in an effort to sever every contact with her previous life, Leah sent the furniture from Villa Leah back to Jerusalem, and in 1939 she sold the house next to it (though it seems she had considerable trouble receiving the money from the sale). Leon, Leah's son with Jaffe, attended flight school in Egypt in 1940 and became a pilot. In his late twenties, after the establishment of the State of Israel, Leon reportedly flew for El Al, the Israeli national airline.[18] In 1950, at twenty-one, Leah and Nassib's daughter Ruth married Alexander (Iskandar) Nassif in Egypt; they eventually immigrated to France and Canada, where Alexander changed the family name from Nassif to Napier.[19]

Leah lived with Abdul Wahab and her daughter Tina remembers that the couple were married, though there are no records of this. Indeed, until Nassib's death in 1946, Leah would have been unable to marry, and Abdul Wahab was already married to several women when he and Leah met. In 1952, by which time they were separated, Abdul Wahab married the famous Czech opera singer Jarmila Krzywa. The same year, Leah married Thasos Ermou, a Greek living in Egypt. The wedding took place in London (marriages between Jews and Christians were not possible in Egypt), where it coincided with Leon's marriage, with Leah, now going by Lisa Ermou, and Bella serving as his witnesses.[20] Leon and his wife moved to South Africa, while Leah and Bella returned to Egypt. In 1959, Leah and Bella left Egypt for Canada, where they were joined by their adult children and Leon's six-year-old son, Peter.[21] Leah died in 1967 and was buried in the Baron de Hirsch Cemetery in Montreal under the name Leah Eden. One year later, Leon Jaffe died of leukemia, and was buried next to his mother in the Hirsch cemetery.[22]

Villa Leah

When Leah and Bella lived in Egypt, their parents and their brothers remained in Jerusalem, where they lived not far from Nassib and seemingly maintained a close relationship with him. For example, when Nazi Germany occupied Czechoslovakia in 1938, the Tannenbaums sought to exchange their Czechoslovakian citizenship (which they had received as former Austrian citizens) for Palestinian citizenship – a process they undertook with Nassib's legal assistance. Their citizenship applications give their address as Karm al-Ruhban, a section of Talbiyya just across the street from Villa Leah – where the Israeli prime minister's residence is located today.[23]

Nassib apparently kept the empty villa as his official address, but went to live in the fashionable Hotel Darouti (today an office building of the Jerusalem municipality), not far from his law office. He developed a close relationship with its owner, Frida Darouti, who would eventually care for him personally during his illness at the end of his life.[24] After 1940, Nassib spent an enormous amount of money to build a huge, terraced orchard near the Abcarius residence in Abu Ghush.

Figure 9. The Abcarius summer residence in Abu Ghush, as it looks today.

In 1946, Nassib, at that time giving his address as Upper Baqʻa, applied for Palestinian citizenship; until then, he had held Egyptian citizenship. At that point, he was gravely ill, and Mandate immigration officials were instructed to present a naturalization certificate to him – "who," one official wrote, "I understand is dying" – without delay.[25] Officials were instructed not to include Leah, and to forgo consulting with a security check by the police's Intelligence and Criminal Investigation branch. The file contains several errors – Nassib's date and place of birth are given as 1 May 1878 in Cairo, for example, and the naturalization certificate itself is dated 10 July 1946, two days *before* the application date – and it appears clear that the procedure was hurried with the support of some high-ranking British official in the Mandate administration.

On 7 September 1946, Nassib Abcarius Bey died.[26] An obituary in the *Palestine Post* recounted his career and listed his accomplishments: "He was Commander of the Holy Sepulchre, Chevalier of the Crown of Italy, and Officer of the Imperial Order of Mejidieh, and held the Egyptian Nile Medal with seven clasps and the English Medal of the Sudan campaign."[27] Goitein described him as "head and shoulders above all other advocates practicing in Palestine until his retirement" and "very popular with all the judges, and perhaps his greatest asset was the skill with which he could persuade judges of the soundness of an argument that might otherwise have appeared unarguable."[28]

After a funeral service at the Latin Patriarchate Church inside the New Gate of the Old City, Nassib was buried in the Cimitero Nuovo of the Franciscans on Mount Zion (Jabal Sahyun) – later completely destroyed during the 1948 war. The astonishing fact that Nassib Abcarius, a Protestant all his life, died as a Catholic and even a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre suggests that his social status and wealth shielded him from criticism or ostracism. But one could also wonder about his relationship with the Catholic Church. Indeed, as a convert and as a Knight of the Holy Sepulchre, it is still perplexing how this man, a Freemason, who married and divorced a Jewish woman, was still highly regarded by the Catholic Church.

According to Caesar Abcarius, Michel's grandson, Michel went to live in Villa Leah after Nassib's death. However, after the departure of Michel, possibly following the war of 1948, Nassib's assets in Jerusalem and Abu Ghush were considered as "abandoned" by the new Israeli state and put under the auspices of its newly created Custodian of Absentee Properties. The famous professor of medicine Hermann Zondek and Jerusalem's first Jewish mayor Daniel Auster both lived in Villa Leah at some point. It was also the residence of Moshe Dayan when he was military commander of Jerusalem. His daughter Yael described the building, but she had no knowledge of its owner Nassib Abcarius Bey, or of Leah to whom the villa was dedicated. Today, Villa Leah is divided into four independent apartments. The late Josef Burg, who for many years was Israel's interior minister, purchased the additional apartment Nassib had built for Leah at the entrance to the villa, and his daughter Ada Burg and her husband Menahem Ben Sasson live there. Villa Leah is occasionally opened to visitors but a plaque at its entrance offers little about its storied history.[29]

Figure 10. Villa Leah in Rehavia, west Jerusalem.

History may have forgotten both Leah and Nassib, but Villa Leah is a physical reminder of their lives and legacy. In 2016, Sarit Yishai-Levi published the bestselling book *The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem* which was recently turned into a television series by Netflix.[30] The book follows the life of several women of the Armoza family in Jerusalem from Ottoman times to the 1948 war. Whether the beauty queen was Rochalim or Luna, these fictional characters have given Jerusalem a different aura, one not anointed by sanctity. While Yishai-Levi's book is not necessarily about Leah, there are some similarities between the various characters of the novel and the real-life characters of our story. Whether intentional or not, it seems possible that facets of Leah's story were picked up and came to shape the novel's characters.

Conclusion

This essay has recounted the unusual and convoluted life of Leah Tannenbaum in order to describe a side of Jerusalem largely unknown in the historical record. We still know very little about the details of her liaisons. Certainly, there are doubts that her relationship with the powerful Ottoman governor Cemal Pasha was freely determined. And while Nassib seems to have been a devoted husband who built a villa for his wife, Leah surely had her reasons for leaving him and Jerusalem for Egypt. As for Abdul Wahab, his pattern of numerous marriages suggests that he left Leah for a younger woman; indeed, Jarmila was seventeen or eighteen years younger than Leah. These missing nuances are important to remember when delving into what life might have been like for a divorced woman (and then a widow) with three children, uprooted (or unrooted, perhaps) in a period of wars, occupations, and massive upheaval in Jerusalem and all of Palestine.

Figures 11 and 12. At left, the grave of Nassib's mother Afifa Abcarius in the Protestant Cemetery, Mount Zion (Jabal Sahyun), Jerusalem; at right, the grave of Leah Tannenbaum Jaffe Abcarius Ermou (Eden) in Baron de Hirsch cemetery, Montreal, Canada.

Endnotes

1 Roberto Mazza, ed., *Jerusalem in World War I: The Palestine Diary of a European Consul* (I. B. Tauris: London, 2015), 67.

2 In the Montefiore's list of Hungarian Jews published in 1866, Avraham was recorded as born in Stropkov. The family tradition claims that Rabbi Hayim Elisha, Avraham's father, was the one who received the family name of Tannenbaum (Yiddish: Tenenboim), when Austrian authorities decreed that everyone must have a family name. Tenenboim served as the Yiddish translation of *erez* (cedar), a noble name for Jews, referring to a biblical text – "the righteous will grow like a cedar in Lebanon."

3 The lists of the military and civilian prisoners of World War I kept by the International Red Cross in Geneva, and publicly available online, provide an overview of the Tannenbaum family. The list mentions seven of the nine children of Israel (Mordechai) Tannenbaum and his wife Chaia (Haya, née Eisenberg). After Leah, born in 1899, Bella was born in 1902, though like her sister, she later changed the date, to 1913. Their brothers Albert (Abraham Elias) and Edgar are not mentioned in the records. Moses (Maurice) was born in 1906, Isaak (Issie) in 1909, and Joseph in 1912, while David was born in 1914 at the beginning of the war. Elkanan was born in 1918, a short time before the family was exiled.

4 In January 1915, Cemal Pasha moved his headquarters from Damascus to Jerusalem in order to be closer to the Sinai Front and, together with his staff, took up residence in the fortress-like Augusta Victoria complex. For details in relation to the Augusta Victoria Complex, see Kobi Peled, "'Germany in Jerusalem': The Inauguration of the Augusta Victoria Church and Hospice on the Mount of Olives in 1910," *Israel Studies* 21, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 69–98.

5 Abigail Jacobson, "Negotiating Ottomanism in Times of War: Jerusalem during World War I through the Eyes of a Local Muslim Resident," in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 1 (February 2008): 77; and Salim Tamari, *Year of the Locust: A Soldier's Diary and the Erasure of Palestine's Ottoman Past* (University of California Press, 2011), 45–46.

6 Mazza, *Jerusalem in World War I*, 77.

7 See note 50 in Jacobson, "Negotiating Ottomanism," 87.

8 It is unclear why they married in Lausanne; however, since it was around the time Jaffe was awarded the Legion of Honor Cross, the two events may be related. See *American Jewish World* 10, no. 10 (11 November 1921): 3.

9 A 25 October 1925 ship's passenger list from Southampton, England, to the United States recorded Israel Jaffe (then aged thirty-two), whose last permanent address was Jerusalem, Palestine, c/o Mrs. L. Jaffe, POB 468 Jerusalem, Palestine. An address like this was the address of the American-Palestine Real Estate Agency. Jaffe eventually married Carol Ann Bolton with whom he had three children. He died in 1978 and is buried in Salisbury, Zimbabwe.

10 The name Abkarian derives from Abgar, the legendary king of Edessa Abgar V, considered by Armenians the first Christian king. When using the Turkish language, he called himself Apikarios instead of the Armenian Abkarian; the "Westernized" version of Hagop became Jacob (or, in Arabic, Ya'qub) Abcarius.

11 Hagop died in Beirut on 29 October 1845, aged 64. He is buried in the Anglo-American cemetery of Beirut. A broken marble table calls him Abcarius Y. Bishop † 1845, and notes that his remains were transferred from the old Anglo-American cemetery.

12 Johannes (Yuhana) was married twice, the

first time in 1852 to Zubayda Turk. They had five children: Philipp, a small child whose first name is not recorded, Farida, Negib, and Henri, who also died as a small child. Farida (Fernande) (1859–1933) married a Swiss missionary, Armand Metzinger, in 1897. Their daughter Marie Henriette Metzinger married Alphonse Ernest Alexandre Boucherot. These are the ancestors of Carole Boucherot, who contributed much to this article.

13 Afifa, daughter of Raful and Helen Kanawati, was born in 1852 in Beirut.

14 In addition to Nassib, their children were: Amin Samuel (b. 1871); Ramsey Joseph John (b. 1872 in Beirut, d. 1950 in France), who later became a physician; Alfred (b. 1877 in Beirut, d. 1878); Michel, also called "Fred" or "Fritz" (b. 1884 in Beirut); Edna (b. 1879 in Beirut, d. 1884); Nelly (b. 1879, d. 1879); and Alice (b. 1886 in Beirut), a teacher and active proponent of the scouting movement. Nassib's birth certificate gives his date of birth as 1 May 1871 in Cairo, but this is unreliable based on the date of his parents' marriage and of Amin Samuel's and Ramsey Joseph John's dates of birth.

15 In December 1903, at the age of twenty-nine, Nassib joined the Sir Reginald Wingate Lodge in Khartoum. His profession is given as "Captain Egyptian army." In 1923, he was still in Khartoum, a member of the Anglo Colonial Lodge and a civil magistrate.

16 According to Moshe Hananel, Nassib Abcarius Bey was then living in the King David Hotel. He probably met the Negus there.

17 Guy (1909–74) claimed that he was Jewish, but there is no evidence other than his word. They had two children, Esme Sarah and Michael James. Guy later left Bella, without divorcing, and lived with her best friend.

18 Two customs declarations from 1950 mention him as member of an El Al crew, living at 33 Ruppin Street in Tel Aviv. His British passport was issued in London on 22 July 1949.

19 Ruth eventually moved to Florida, where she lived for more than twenty-five years before her death in 2009. Tina lived much of her adult life in Cuernavaca, near Mexico City, and died at ninety-two years old.

20 Leon was then twenty-nine years old. The marriage certificate suggests that his bride, Beryl Silansky, was divorced and had two daughters from her first marriage.

21 Beryl and Leon had one child together, Peter Alan Jaffe, born 27 August 1953 in Johannesburg. In 1974, he died in a car accident, and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Johannesburg.

22 Line D, Grave 181. Some three decades later, in 1999, Bella died and was buried in the same cemetery as Leah. Her family name is recorded as Tannenbaum.

23 In the citizenship application file, Israel Mordechai Tenenbaum is listed as a landowner. Three of his sons – Joseph (Joe), Isaac (Issie), and Abraham Elias (Albert) – seem to have lived in the same house in Karm al-Ruhban, along with Albert's wife Debora. Joe is listed as a journalist, and Issie and Albert appear as merchants, proprietors of Tenenbaum Brothers, Ltd. A fourth brother, David, also applied for Palestinian citizenship with his wife Bodana (b. 1914, Lithuania) and his son, Arie Samuel. David applied under the name Tene (a Hebraicized abbreviation of the German/Yiddish Tannenbaum); he, too, was a merchant, giving his address as "Carem el Rouhban c/o Abcarius Bey." Moses (Maurice), Elkanan (Elcana), and Edgar do not appear in the Israel State Archives. David was the only sibling who remained in Jerusalem until his death (Moses married a woman named Edith and died in Paris; Elkanan studied in England and remained there until his death; Edgar married an English woman named Sara Evens and it seems that he also remained there). Haya, the mother of the nine siblings, died in 1948 in Cairo, likely choosing to spend her final days with her two wealthy daughters there rather than in turbulent Jerusalem.

24 Frida was a recent widow herself; her husband Hanna Jiries Darouti had died in 1934.

25 Application for Palestinian citizenship, Israel State Archives 3234/067-מ.

26 The death register at the Franciscan parish of Jerusalem (Nr. 72) reads: "Anno Domini 1946 die 7 Septembris obiit Nassib f. Joannis Alcarius [sic], natus 1. Maji 1875 in Beyrouth, cujus corpus die sequenti sepultum est in Coemeterio Novo in loculo." The birthplace (Beirut) in this document seems more credible than that on the naturalization certificate (Cairo).

27 Obituary in the *Palestine Post*, September 1946.

28 Obituary in the *Palestine Post*, September 1946.

29 For image of the plaque, see online at (israelandyou.com) bit.ly/3O2DK7R (accessed 7 June 2023).

30 Sharit Yishai-Levi, *The Beauty Queen of Jerusalem: A Novel* (London: Thomas Dunne, 2016).

In Praise of Point-Blank

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Abstract

The Dignity (al-Karama) Uprising of May of 2021 broke many "rules of engagement" between Palestinians and the settler state of Israel, including that of sarcasm and humor. Spreading swiftly from Jerusalem to all of historic Palestine, the uprising defied co-optation by the Palestinian Authority, an entity that has long maintained a buffer between its people and the settler state. Hence, and throughout the confrontations, a point-blank range was created allowing for the usage of all sorts of "weapons" in the Palestinian people's humble arsenal, humor included. This essay, originally written during the uprising and in Arabic, records the Palestinians' ability to ridicule the Israeli settler violence to which it is subjected, through black comedy – "sprinkling sugar on their own death." By contextualizing the grand event of 2021 politically and culturally, and de-theorizing humor to its core, this article brings to the historical record the Jerusalemites' invention of "red humor," colored with their blood, that appeared in different performative acts targeting Israeli human power; military machinery; repressive policies; and modes of "negotiation." Tracing the "black" into the "red" in expressions of humor as a tool in the arsenal of this uprising offers a record of a powerful, and often used, means of empowerment and resistance for Palestinians.

Keywords

Al-Karama Uprising (2021); Palestine; Jerusalem; sarcasm; humor; resistance.

In Palestine, sarcasm is an act of revolutionary beauty. In Palestine, the saying "sprinkle sugar on death" is used for ridiculing settler violence through black comedy. In Palestine, the leadership has been made irrelevant and has actually turned itself into a joke. In Palestine, the masses have gone into battle with the enemy forces and made them a subject of mockery. Between the leadership and its Arab counterparts, on the one hand, and the people, on the other, there is a moral testing ground: Jerusalem. It is the space where falsehood is laid bare, where you can tell the sheep from the goats. Whoever today does not love Jerusalem's defenders, standing by them wholeheartedly, has no heart. This is an occasion to praise "red" humor performed by Palestinians through their intimacy with the enemy at point-blank range. This is an occasion, as well, to say – about the experience of the intifada; the rules of engagement; the performances of humor; and the observance of their goals – between aesthetics and agency, that derision achieves its noble mission.

In the cramped enclaves of the West Bank, which the enemy has called the "Areas of the Palestinian Authority," the bitter fruit of the Oslo accords ripened, resulting in the aborting of the intifada path – in thought, practice, and structure – by agents who blocked their oppressed people from confronting their aggressive arrogant enemy. They allowed the enemy safe entrances, by submitting and coordinating, to carry out its continuous violations: abuse, arrest, and demolition. They tried to impose the irrational logic of "pacifism" in confronting the enemy – the enemy of the people, not the enemy of the authority. By complying with the rules of soft confrontation, these agents became the obstacle that prevented the possibility of engagement with the enemy at point-blank range. They became its "Silk Wall" and its "Good Fence" at the same time, by promising the enemy – a promise that will be forever kept in their defeat registry – that a new intifada will not be allowed while they are "in office." Meanwhile, the enemy, satisfied with the performance of its agents, keeps its prized "Iron Wall."

In besieged Gaza, despite the valiant efforts of deterrence by the Palestinian resistance with iron and fire, the "wire" (*al-silk*) deprived the people of Gaza, too, of intimate engagement with the enemy at point-blank range, except in moments of military battle and in the Marches of Return, which have not yet achieved their goal. Despite all of this, resistance in these two geographies has not diminished. This is due to the conviction of the oppressed Palestinians that the Zionist settler-colonial state is an absolute evil, and is proceeding with its campaign of ethnic cleansing under the belief that "the 1948 war has not ended," meaning that it will not end until Palestine is cleansed of its original inhabitants.

Palestinians in Jerusalem, the city of the prophets, and in the rest of Palestine occupied in 1948 are more fortunate than others; they have maintained an intimate point-blank engagement with the enemy. Despite the centralization of the Zionist security apparatus (the army, the police, and various intelligence services), and its sub-units, the settler-colonial divisions of historic Palestine imposed some divergence

in the "application" of the rules of engagement. Put differently, "dealing" with the Palestinians depends on the contrived "legal status" of the Palestinians of Jerusalem and the areas of Palestine occupied in 1948, although it is certainly not related to different standards of fascism, or the range of Israeli brutality.

In Jerusalem – where there is no "Palestinian Authority-without-authority," no "Silk Walls," no "Good Fences" separating the oppressor from the oppressed, and no pledge from the "guardian" that a new intifada will not be allowed – the point-blank advantage has enabled crucial achievements to be made, not only at the level of protecting Jerusalem and Jerusalemites, but also at the level of demeaning and destroying the image of the enemy. This has raised Palestinians' morale in the face of one of the most powerful and brutal security structures in the world, as Palestinians resist with their bare chests and the power of justice. The fierce confrontations at Bab al-'Amud (Damascus Gate), Shaykh Jarrah, and al-Aqsa Mosque are now presenting a rare phenomenon: repetitious scenes of taunts and ridicule against enemy soldiers, officers, and its entire security regime. After achieving their minimum goal of recording swift victories at the moment of confrontation, Palestinians invested in these scenes. They documented these moments of triumph in audio and visual form, and worked to promote them to achieve their ultimate goal of raising morale and forging cohesion.

The investment did not stop at shattering the image of a soldier heavily armed with weapons and fascism, a monstrous bogeyman who commands and is to be obeyed, threatening violence that cannot be repelled. It went beyond that – toward making the soldier an object for instinctive mockery, and the resulting spectacle opened a literal floodgate to silence their waves of brutality. These two creations of mockery and spectacle, which the Palestinians have the right to record as a Jerusalemite invention, made into "red" humor by the color of their blood, appeared in four performative forms targeting: the enemy's human power; its military machinery; its repressive policies (movement restrictions, street brutality, and arrests); and the art of "negotiating" in a life that knows nothing but one-sided confrontation.

At the level of human power, Jerusalemites deliberately clashed with Israeli occupation forces and settlers from a point-blank distance, and delivered direct blows to the enemy's faces and heads. This street fighting style breaks the "power" of the military uniform and the "integrity" of the weapon, which becomes useless when he falls in the dirt.

Recordings of particular incidents spread: of a young Palestinian boy slapping an extremist settler on the train that cuts through Jerusalem; of others kicking a settler whose legs couldn't help him after he dared to come to al-Musrara neighborhood; of a boy who hits a soldier from the "Border Police" directly in the face with a stone, leaving him writhing in pain and bleeding amid the cheers of those at the top of the Bab al-'Amud stairs; of a young man who jumps on the heads of occupation forces at the bottom of the Bab al-'Amud stairs after Israeli soldiers erected barriers to prevent people from reaching al-Aqsa Mosque to pray; of a group of youth smashing the faces of two Zionist soldiers in al-'Isawiyya after they tried to arrest one of their comrades; of members of an entire Israeli police unit who were unable to force a physically fit

Palestinian youth into the car during his arrest; of another young man confronting the occupation soldiers at one of the gates of al-Aqsa Mosque, challenging one of them to lay down his weapon, and threatening that he will "split him in half"; and of a young woman who literally wiped the floor by dragging an Israeli policewoman by her hair when she attacked a group of Jerusalemite women sitting on a bench inside the Old City in a previous confrontation.

As for military machinery, Jerusalemites have turned it into a mobile theater of spontaneous spectacles: youth have mocked the sewage water cannons by inventing an air freshener; a young man raised the Palestinian flag on top of an Israeli police car in Bab al-Wad entrance to Jerusalem after Jerusalemites succeeded in *faz'a* (rescuing) their compatriots coming from the Galilee, the Northern Triangle, and Bir al-Saba' on their way toward al-Aqsa Mosque after the occupation forces blocked the road to prevent their buses from passing. Not only did the youth carry their comrades into the heart of Jerusalem in their cars, they also closed the Jaffa–Jerusalem Road at Bab al-Wad, the main road leading to "Tel Aviv," for four hours; and a young man tore the Israeli flag off a settler's car on the Lifta–Bayt Hanina Road ("Begin Road"), and defied another settler who expressed his displeasure. Another young man broke the windows of an Israeli police car with a kick in streetfight style near Salah al-Din Street. Prior to the Bab al-'Amud uprising, a sarcastic Jerusalemite tried to climb into the front seat of a police car during his arrest along with a group of his companions; and others looted tools of oppression, including sticks and helmets used during the confrontation inside the walls of al-Aqsa Mosque.

As for the enemy's repressive policies, the iconic images of smiling Palestinians during moments of arrest astonished the world, while expressions of fear, confusion, and panic appeared on the faces of heavily armed soldiers. Those arrested hear the calm expressions of nonchalance from their comrades: "It will be easy," while the detainee shouts, "al-Quds 'Arabiyya" (Jerusalem is Arab). Along with these revolutionary smiles, news spread of the arrest of a young man from the Old City during which his daughter asks him about her "white toy." He smiles as he exits the door of his house facing his child and family, while the unit officer asks him, in Hebrew: "Your child?" He responds: "Yes." The officer says, "She's grown up!" The father replies: "Thank God." The officer then comments: "Your child should not see your arrest," and asks the parents to close the door! This incident was preceded by scenes of a boy giving his comrade one last "drag on the *argila*," as the soldiers arrested him in an Old City alley. A child "storms" the enemy's makeshift police bunker located to the left of the Bab al-'Amud stairs. This provokes the unit's members, one of whom tries to catch the boy, who jumps away with a sarcastic acrobatic movement. The children and all of those present laugh heartily, and the policeman returns disappointed.

In another scene at the same police bunker, a child points his plastic toy machine gun at the soldiers. The officer is provoked, and he asks the boy's father why he is teaching his son such actions. The father replies that the child knows by himself and no one taught him. The officer tries to shake hands with the child, but the child refuses, and raises his plastic gun again, so the officer withdraws, disappointed. Dozens of soldiers

barricaded in a metal barrier under the arch of Bab al-ʿAmud begrudgingly allowed a child under the age of seven to pass during a night of confrontation. The most foolish of them slaps the child on his neck, after which the child distances himself about two meters, secures his lollipop in his mouth, and hits the soldier directly in the face with his shoe. The children conclude another scene by collecting remnants of gas and stun grenades inside the courtyards of al-Aqsa Mosque, use them to draw a map of their country, Palestine, and the Dome of the Rock, and write: "You will not pass."

As for the art of "negotiation" in a life that does not allow negotiating, the scene of a conversation spread between a Jerusalemite boy and a Zionist officer who tried to persuade a group of youth, in the middle of the uprising, to leave the stairs of Bab al-ʿAmud and enjoy the atmosphere of Ramadan in the square. The boy replies: "We can only enjoy Ramadan on the stairs." Another soldier negotiates with an elderly Jerusalemite to leave the stairs on a Ramadan evening, and he replies that he needs a quarter of an hour to drink his coffee in the "proper place – Bab al-ʿAmud." In another scene, an elderly man prays to God and invites the enemy soldiers to chant "Amen." Another old man, Nabil al-Kurd, frightens a settler at the entrance to the occupied Ghawi house in Shaykh Jarrah by play-acting a nonsense reaction, driving the young settler to retreat with fearful trembling. A Hebronite-Jerusalemite tries to convince a soldier not to arrest a young man from the neighborhood, warning him that the young man would beat him. He warns him very seriously, but in a comical manner using the distinctive Hebronite-Jerusalem dialectic of elongated vowels: "I am saying this for youuuu! He will beat you up, I swear to God, he is crazy, man, I swear he'll beat you up! I'm saying this for youuuu! Listen, I swear to God, the people of Jerusalem are nuts, man! I swear to God, you will never figure them out! This means that he'll hit you and get locked up, he doesn't give a damn!" A lawyer from Umm al-Fahm embodied street justice against an overweight settler who came with a group of his friends to storm the police roadblock installed at the entrance of Shaykh Jarrah. The settler had used pepper spray in the eyes of the protesters the day before. The lawyer recognized him, challenged the police to let him enter, continued to record him on the cell phone, exposing him, and then taunted him in Hebrew: "Raise your hand if you are a man!" And youth respond to the text messages from the enemy's intelligence services threatening to prosecute those who have been identified as having participated in "violence at al-Aqsa Mosque," by saying: "You have been recognized as having participated in acts of repression of worshipers in al-Aqsa Mosque. We will charge you. The youth of Jerusalem" … and so on, and so forth.

These incidents are not only events, but constitute historical evidence that write history while it is being lived. I am not writing here to analyze, but rather to raise the banner of confrontation and contemplate its abundant spaces. It is not wrong to say that the theoretical frameworks that explain social and political humor, white or black, and that have taken shape since the 1940s in a historical framework, may not be enough to explain the red revolutionary humor produced by the Jerusalem uprising. Cultural studies have been preoccupied with: analyzing the impact of humor on individuals and groups; monitoring its function in shaping and consolidating political

and national consciousness; analyzing the rhetorical grammar of satire, specifically in the audio-visual fields; and investigating the thematic content in terms of political messages, through examining the image of reality, the moral message, and the means of metaphorical imagination.

Theories of humor, which are necessarily heterogeneous, are based on three general categories that govern the relationship between two parties in a state of dissonance: collision, superiority, and catharsis. Where the two parties "communicate," verbally or physically, the expected collides with the unexpected, whereby the comic situation begins to take shape and the succession of details breaks the monotony of the persistent "normative principle" in the mind of the viewer about the usual outcomes in similar circumstances. With the end of the event, the "paradoxical principle" is established. Here, the viewer sees that the "ordinary" sequence led to an "unusual" result through what was caused by the textual contradiction between the normative and the paradoxical, which releases the trigger of astonishment. As a result, the contradiction turns into humor, humor turns into laughter, and laughter turns into a productive revolutionary spectacle.

"Facing" is only called "facing" when faces are against each other, literally butting foreheads, staring into your enemy's eye, with an intense gaze that penetrates his pupils. This confrontation, from point-blank range, never ceases to raise the morale of Jerusalemites. It strips the Zionist of the aura of the beast-machine-anonymity that has so far succeeded in evading accountability, while acting as a cog in the machine of the savage enemy state. But "revolutionary intimacy" reveals the cowardly person inside the cowardly Zionist, rendering them susceptible to confrontation, capable of defeat, subject to harassment, and subject to revenge. Within this confrontation, the lesson that philosophy teaches us is that the human and the inhuman are inseparable or rather they overlap at the moment of engagement. They are closely fused in battle, neither morally intersecting, nor equivalent.

With their smiles and red humor facing the fascist enemy's policies and practices, Jerusalemites transcend the confrontation production of Palestinian culture: from Ibrahim Tuqan's melody in which he states: "When danger loomed, he smiled/ and when the battle raged, he attacked," to Mahmud Darwish's words of those who "ascend to their death smiling." The only poetry that can capture Jerusalemites's bravery might be the song of Ibrahim al-Salih (Abu 'Arab): "as much as death was in awe of us as fearless heroes, he swore unto God's throne that he must befriend us." Neither fear nor danger, then, hold the poetics of Palestine. Rather we sprinkle sugar on death.

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House Hunting in Kafr 'Aqab

Chris Whitman-Abdelkarim

Abstract

Kafr 'Aqab is an annexed neighborhood at the northern end of East Jerusalem, squeezed between Ramallah and the Wall. Many observers and journalists wrongly assume it is simply a congested suburb of Ramallah, usually regarded by passersby as a concrete jungle. The reality of Kafr 'Aqab is far more interesting and diverse. Upwards of 125,000 Palestinians of varying statuses and situations, call the neighborhood home. This essay explores some of the challenges faced by Kafr 'Aqab residents, through a story of a newlywed couple's search for an apartment to buy.

Keywords

Jerusalem; occupation; demolition; Palestine; Wall; Israeli permanent residency; dispossession; land politics; home ownership.

The first time I met my future in-laws, beyond the obvious reservations they had about their daughter marrying a foreigner, they stressed repeatedly that we would need to live in Kafr 'Aqab, in northern Jerusalem. They lived in Kafr 'Aqab and they expected us to as well, to keep the whole family in close proximity and for bureaucratic reasons.

Most Palestinians, when they hear I live in Kafr 'Aqab, assume I did something wrong in life to warrant such a fate. But for many East Jerusalem Palestinians, Kafr 'Aqab is not only home, but the only place they can live.

Even if you are unfamiliar with Kafr 'Aqab, you likely passed by it when traveling between Jerusalem and Ramallah. Traveling north from

Jerusalem, you drive along the Wall to Qalandiya checkpoint, and then pass Qalandiya village and refugee camp. After that is Kafr ʿAqab – notorious to commuters for having the worst traffic between the river and the sea. A congested tangle of high-rise buildings of ten or more floors, haphazardly placed about three meters apart, Kafr ʿAqab has been part of the Jerusalem municipality since 1967, when Israel conquered and occupied the West Bank, including East Jerusalem. In doing so, it redrew the Jerusalem municipal boundaries to include the land of surrounding neighborhoods and villages. Kafr ʿAqab is its weird fist-shaped extension to the north. Looking at a map, one wonders why Israel would bother to include Kafr ʿAqab, at the time a small village. But Israel wanted to ensure effective control and potential future use of what was formerly Jordan's Jerusalem Airport, located in Qalandiya, and this necessitated control of its surroundings, including Kafr ʿAqab.[1]

Today, Kafr ʿAqab is the largest neighborhood in Jerusalem, with 61,500 residents in 2018, according to Israeli statistics, although in reality the number is closer to 100,000 or even 125,000 people in an area of around 3.2 square kilometers.[2] Since the early 2000s, its population has increased by more than 600 percent.[3] Tens of thousands of Palestinians have found themselves in the neighborhood due to the lack of affordable housing to accommodate a fast-growing population and the ever-increasing cost of living in Jerusalem. Though Palestinians make up 40 percent of the population of "expanded Jerusalem," they are allowed to build on only 13 percent of the land.[4] The overwhelming majority of this land has already been built on, forcing Palestinians to come up with new solutions to deal with their population growth.

Since 2003, Kafr ʿAqab has found itself, along with the Shuʿfat refugee camp, relegated to a kind of no man's land beyond Israel's infamous Wall. In addition to geographic isolation, this configuration also meant that municipal services in Kafr ʿAqab, already few and far between, diminished even further. Water is provided only twice a week by the Jerusalem Water Undertaking, based in Ramallah.[5] Municipal trash collection is infrequent, complemented inadequately by private services, leaving overfilled trashcans as a common feature of Kafr ʿAqab. Police are non-existent in the neighborhood. Israeli police refuse to patrol or respond to calls, and Palestinian police are not allowed due to the Oslo accords. Hence Kafr ʿAqab has a reputation as being a lawless haven for car thieves, drug dealers, and other petty crime. Kafr ʿAqab is also a preferred spot for gun-shooting wedding convoys (and sometimes for rival gangs). Every resident of Kafr ʿAqab quickly becomes an expert in being able to ascertain not only what weapon is being fired, but for what occasion.

So why would I choose to live in such a place? Well, as I mentioned, my wife's family has called Kafr ʿAqab home for some time, and residing there allows them to maintain their Jerusalem residency status. Since the 1967 occupation, but especially since the mid-1990s, Israeli policy has sought to keep the demographic ratio in the city at 70:30 Israeli Jews to Palestinians. One of its main policy tools is the vague and nefarious "center of life" standard, which demands that Jerusalemite Palestinians must constantly document that Jerusalem is their center of life. In anticipation of this demand, every Jerusalemite Palestinian has a folder in their house of receipts for

payments in Jerusalem for electricity, water, internet, health care, and rent (or a house deed), as well as any paystubs (if the employer meets Israel's definition of Israeli), and photos of family members. Without such evidence, residents face investigation from the Ministry of Interior and potential revocation of their blue Jerusalem IDs. Residents of Kafr 'Aqab, like all Palestinian neighborhoods, are used to the regular knock at their door of a Ministry of Interior employee (typically a Palestinian citizen of Israel) to ascertain that they do in fact live there. Since 1967, Israel has revoked the Jerusalem residency of over 14,500 Palestinians, in effect deporting them, under this center of life ordinance.[6]

Another factor driving Palestinians to live in Kafr 'Aqab is Israel's refusal since the early 2000s to grant family reunification (*lam al-shaml*) – a bureaucratic necessity for any non-Jerusalemite who is married to a Jerusalemite (and for the children of such "mixed" residencies) to live in Jerusalem as a family.[7] Many thousands of applications for family reunification lie pending, some waiting up to twenty years for even a short-term permit or temporary residency to live as a family in Jerusalem.[8] Without such approval, Kafr 'Aqab is one of the few neighborhoods where such families can reside as a unit. It is estimated that up to thirty thousand applicants reside in Kafr 'Aqab, hoping one day to have their family status approved and to eventually move to a more desirable Jerusalem neighborhood on the other side of the Wall.[9]

The fact that over 95 percent of Kafr 'Aqab's buildings are deemed illegal by Israeli law requires some explanation. For new construction elsewhere, for example, in Givat Shaul (an Israeli urban settlement in West Jerusalem built over the ruins of Dayr Yasin village), the landowner would hire an architect, a land surveyor, and others to review the plot, develop a plan according to Israeli codes, and submit it for municipal review. Assuming the municipality approves it, the plan would receive formal recognition and move forward. During construction, the site would be visited by municipal employees to monitor that everything was according to the approved plan. Upon completion, the new building would receive an address and its inhabitants would have legal protection in cases of fraud, mismanagement, or other issues. In Kafr 'Aqab, no such framework exists.

The Israeli government has long refused to review or approve more than a token number of new buildings in Palestinian neighborhoods, and Kafr 'Aqab is no different. Thus, Palestinians must find solutions to Israeli-made problems, which means proceeding with construction without permits. Illegal construction is not unique to Kafr 'Aqab, but the sheer magnitude of it is. East Jerusalem Palestinians experience more than a hundred demolitions a year (around 80 percent of all Jerusalem demolitions, despite the fact that over 80 percent of building violations are in West Jerusalem).[10] The Kafr 'Aqab neighborhood, like urban refugee camps in Nablus or Ramallah, is marked by inadequate infrastructure and dense subpar construction by developers ready to take advantage of vulnerable families desperate for housing.

When my wife and I began our hunt for an apartment, I asked many friends in the area for estimates on prices, availability, and conditions. Most told me old prices, outdated by years, unaware of the Jerusalem housing market's current shape. We also

consulted at length with my wife's father, who himself has purchased a home and helped others. The first thing we did was determine the parts of Kafr 'Aqab where we were willing to live. My wife's family lives on the main road, north of the *mafraq* or main intersection, so we limited ourselves to this area. On the numerous Facebook pages dedicated to Kafr 'Aqab apartments, we began posting, trying to avoid the more obviously inflated prices. We included numerous details about our desired apartment: the size, location, condition, the necessity of a parking spot, and the fact we wanted to buy and not rent. Despite our best efforts, the overwhelming majority of responses were useless: some simply posted the response *mawjud* (available) without a phone number; others wrote "following." We wrote to everyone who posted "available" to inquire further: 99 percent of them did not match more than one of our qualifications. Apartments far from our desired location, or not yet built were the norm.

Occasionally, someone would directly message us or respond with their phone number and some minor promising information. Many turned out to be part-time salesmen, working on commission for a relative or friend, and knew very little about the apartment they were selling. After confirming some details, location being most paramount, we would arrange a visit to the apartment the same day or the next. On sight, the apartments rarely met any of our conditions. On the phone, prospective sellers or their agents would say anything and everything to get us to visit their apartment (or in many cases, multiple apartments) in hopes that we would be impressed. Many apartments were in an area called Tal al-Nusba, on the hill overlooking the heart of Kafr 'Aqab and the epitome of a concrete jungle of poorly planned and fast-tracked high-rise buildings. Many apartments were in poor condition, even by Kafr 'Aqab standards, and had likely been on the market for years, suffering from massive neglect while awaiting a buyer.

In every post we insisted that we wanted a "ready-to-move-in" apartment and not what is locally called *'azm* (skeleton) apartment. 'Azm apartments usually have a minimum structure, meaning the foundation, outside, and supporting walls are built, but nothing inside. They often come with pie-in-the-sky projections about their finish date. "*Wallahi*, three to six months," was the normal response – usually off by about two to three years. Many apartment projects start with an initial influx of capital and are built as more money comes in from sales of prospective units. This whole system banks on continuous sales in a hot market. Unfortunately, many projects stall for years due to insufficient capital or increased prices in raw materials. People can be waiting five years or more to finally move into their purchased apartment. Still, *'azm* apartments are a popular option for people with time, because it allows them to customize floor plans, tile choices, windows, and paint jobs according to their budgets, and because developers tend to choose cheaper options to save money.

One night, as my wife and I were waiting on responses to a post we had published on a popular Kafr 'Aqab page, we received a direct message from a man named Mu'tasim. He said that he had exactly what we were looking for (we had heard that before), and even sent us a video and geographic location. His video was typical, showing him entering the elevator and taking it to the floor on which the apartment

is located (to show the lobby and that the elevator is in working condition, important in Kafr 'Aqab), and then entering each room to show the decor and furniture. His apartment looked fantastic and even featured stylish furniture and design. It was late in the day, but we were so excited to have a good lead that we immediately asked for a tour. He said he was in 'Anata but would make his way over and be there in an hour. We called my father-in-law and told him to put his negotiating shoes on.

We arrived at the apartment, only a two-minute walk from the in-laws, and met with Mu'tasim. He showed us his brand new, never-lived-in apartment. Everything was as he said, and it looked perfect for us. My father-in-law and Mu'tasim began their negotiations. If you are not sure how this goes, it is something of a fun experience. First, the gentlemen give a brief (or sometimes long-winded) background of their family, including important figures or stories, and the circumstances that bring them here today. Next, they explain why they think the apartment should cost a certain amount, and, after much back-and-forth, proceed to hash out the final price, terms, and conditions. This is all done over numerous cups of coffee and cigarettes, and side stories that have nothing specifically to do with the apartment.

There are no bank mortgages in Kafr 'Aqab, and all negotiations and payments are arranged directly between the buyer and the seller. The total price, down payment, and monthly payments are all negotiable. Typically, the down payment is around 15–25 percent of the total price, and monthly payments are expected to finish within five to eight years. But in the hot and simultaneously unchecked market of Kafr 'Aqab, the seller has the ability (and uses it) to make the conditions favorable to him. Mu'tasim demanded a down payment of 40 percent, with monthly payments to finish within five years. My wife and I were elated. The price and first payment were higher than we had budgeted, but factoring in that the apartment was furnished, we figured it would all balance out. I called my mother that night begging her to borrow some money to make that first payment.

Although we had agreed to his terms, Mu'tasim ghosted us. When we asked to meet to have a lawyer draw up the terms and conditions, he quickly stopped answering his phone, and even blocked our numbers. After a week without contact, he wrote us on Facebook, informing us that he wanted a 60 percent down payment and the remaining amount within two years. From our side, this was an impossible ask, and despite my father-in-law's attempts to reason with him, our dream apartment was out of reach.

A couple weeks later, my father-in-law got the number of a developer who said that he had a building on the quiet side of Kafr 'Aqab (abutting the neighborhood of Umm al-Sharayit). It was almost completed and had two units left. We visited the building and while it had many positives – it was in fact in one of Kafr 'Aqab's only quiet areas and had a view that was unlikely to be boxed in by other high rises – one huge downside was that the building was still 'azm, and not close to being finished. At best, seven of the projected twelve floors were completed. It seems they had run out of capital and needed some more sales to get construction moving again. Details were discussed and the terms and conditions of payment were very favorable, but the 'azm circumstances spooked me and we decided to pass. Ultimately, it was the right

decision: even though we were told the usual "three to six months we will be done, promise," eighteen months later, the building has not even reached its planned twelve floors.

After viewing sixty apartments, many of which were in decrepit shape or not remotely near where we wanted to live, we were reaching the end of our line in terms of time: we needed to get an apartment and soon. We were both relaxing in the living room, trying to figure out what to do, when we got a message on Facebook from a woman named Ashwaq about a potential apartment. Out of hundreds of people who reached out to us, only two had been women. Ashwaq was very straightforward about the apartment, its price, and the terms and conditions. She sent us some photos and videos and invited us for a tour. The next day, once her husband Muhammad got home from work, we received an invitation to view the apartment.

When they gave us the directions, we realized the apartment was located in the same building as the one that Mu'tasim had shown us, so we were at least confident that the building itself was good. We met them at the door and they showed us around. Muhammad was the original owner of the apartment and impressed us with a history of every aspect of the building and apartment. He showed us all the additions he had made, from the over-the-top decor choices to the upgraded shades and the seemingly innumerable light installations he had installed himself (no joke, it feels like there are 160 lights in this apartment, of which we only use twenty). He invited us to the sitting room to begin the negotiations. I kept my mouth shut and let my father-in-law take charge. He tried every angle to get Muhammad to lower the price, but to no avail. Muhammad was proud of his upgrades and stated, matter-of-factly, that he was simply looking to get the price of the apartment, plus the price of the upgrades, and not trying to squeeze us further. After some back and forth, it was decided: this was to be our home. Again I begged my mother (thanks, mom) for money to meet the down payment, Muhammad never ghosted us, and in short order we sat down with a lawyer to get everything formalized and finished.

Since then, we have been living in our Kafr 'Aqab apartment, trying our best to enjoy the circumstances of living in an overgrown slum, unregulated and unwanted, while simultaneously documenting every step we take to meet the ever-changing Israeli requirements to prove that our center of life is in Jerusalem. Like many of Israel's occupation policies, its policy toward East Jerusalem and Kafr 'Aqab seems short-sighted. For decades, it has been pushing Palestinians in Kafr 'Aqab to engage in illegal, unplanned, and congested construction, producing an enclave that it seems difficult to believe Israel's Jerusalem municipality wants to maintain. But the chances of Kafr 'Aqab actually being excluded from the municipality seem low. First, it would produce a migration of some 120,000 Palestinians or more to areas within the Wall in an effort to maintain their Jerusalem residency status, an influx that is undesirable from Israel's perspective. Second, Kafr 'Aqab's proximity to the airport (the original reason for including it within the municipal borders) has not changed. In the short term, more Palestinians will squeeze into Kafr 'Aqab, prices will continue to rise, and conditions for buyers will become worse. In the past five years, housing prices in Kafr

'Aqab have already risen 40 percent. All the while, buildings are going up on every square inch of potential available land, including two high-rises of eighteen or more floors just in front of us, separated by less than four meters.

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BOOK REVIEW

Managing Contested Holy Sites

Reviewed by Michael Dumper

Governing the Sacred: Political Toleration in Five Contested Sacred Sites, Yuval Jobani and Nahshon Perez (Oxford University Press, 2020), 210 pages; $120 hardcover and ebook.
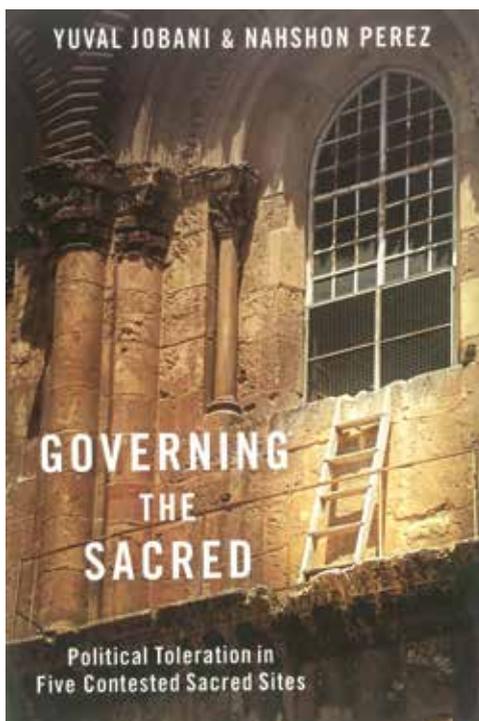
Abstract

Holy sites in cities present particular difficulties for negotiators seeking compromise and consent. All cities are sites of contestation and occupied cities, where the legitimacy of the occupation is repudiated by a significant part of the population, have special dynamics. Nowhere is this more clearly manifested than in the city of Jerusalem. In occupied Jerusalem, negotiations over the governance of the holy sites of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity involve many more parties than just the Palestinians and Israelis. In this review, Michael Dumper examines the authors' aim of establishing both a typology and a policy toolbox for managing conflict over these holy sites.

Keywords

Holy sites; Jerusalem; Arab-Israeli conflict; negotiations; governance; ethno-nationalism; religion.

In the 2000s, I carried out a series of interviews with senior religious figures in Jerusalem and was knocked sideways by a particular remark. Referring to confidential negotiations taking place over how the holy sites of Jerusalem could be managed following a peace agreement between the PLO and the Israeli government, I was urgently instructed to "keep the clerics out of it …." What surprised me was that my interlocutor was not a hard-bitten security advisor but a very high-ranking cleric in one of the religious hierarchies responsible for some of the holy sites in the Old City.

His despair at reaching accommodation with his opposite numbers and his conclusion – that in the management of holy sites in a contested city like Jerusalem, clerical input was an obstacle – pointed clearly to the critical issue at the heart of this topic. Holy sites are not the same as other assets in a conflict. They are not like areas of mineral deposits, or productive agricultural land, or industrial infrastructure that can be exchanged, divided, or compensated. They are, in the words of political scientist Ron Hassner, "non-fungible," that is, a mosque, synagogue, church, or cemetery, for example, cannot be traded in the same way as those tangible assets.[1] Holy sites have a non-tangible superstructure that support liturgy, theology, tradition, and other cultural associations, which make them almost impossible to be negotiated over without huge loss to one party or the other. Such difficulties also spill over into the hinterland of the sites so that the land and property around such sites are also impacted by attempts to change their status and governance.

Holy sites in cities present particular difficulties for negotiators where compromise and consent for such changes are sought. Nowhere is this more clearly manifested than in the city of Jerusalem. In fact, it is probably more difficult in Jerusalem than in many other cities with holy sites due to the ethno-nationalist ideology of the controlling authorities, the Israeli government, which seeks to privilege one community over others.

All cities, it should be remembered, are sites of contestation. Nevertheless, they thrive and prosper as a result of a mixed or heterogeneous population, through economic and cultural exchange and the opportunity to specialize due to their size and their wider links. Most cities contain extreme conflicts and inter-communal breakdown through some kind of formal or informal representation where the priorities and concerns of communities are mediated by community leaders in various ways. In occupied cities, where the legitimacy of the occupation is repudiated by a significant part of the population, these avenues are not appropriate or not used. The subordinate communities, in this case the Palestinian East Jerusalemites, seek support from parties outside of the controlling Israel state structures with the result that a paradox is created: the ethno-nationalist ideology of control triggers the mobilization of resistance that threatens to frustrate the very purpose of the ideology. That is, it sets out to achieve one thing – community dominance – but creates also conditions which undermine those objectives. In Jerusalem, the holy sites of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity have become more than just places of worship but mobilizers of the wider diaspora of these respective communities. Negotiations over their governance, therefore, include many more parties than just the Palestinians and Israelis.

The study of the management of holy or sacred sites has emerged in recent years as a subgenre in peace and conflict studies. The book under review – *Governing the Sacred: Political Toleration in Five Contested Sacred Sites* – is a welcome and stimulating addition to this subgenre, although it contains some puzzling flaws. I read it with great interest as it covers much of the same ground as my own study on sacred sites, *Power, Piety, and People: Holy Cities in the Twenty-first Century*. In some ways, it is a better book than mine as it engages with the academic literature and debates more rigorously and is ambitious in its attempt to construct a framework of analysis

which is then systematically applied to the cases it covers. In addition to a U.S. case known as Devil's Tower/ Bear Lodge in Wyoming, and the Babri Masjid controversy in Ayodhya in India, the case studies include three in Jerusalem – the Israeli Jewish controversy concerning women praying at the Western (Wailing) Wall, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and the Haram al-Sharif/ al-Aqsa Mosque compound, referred to as the Temple Mount by Jews.

The main aim of the authors is to establish both a typology and a policy toolbox for managing conflict over these holy sites. The discussion and the sifting through the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches is very robust and useful. They narrow down their typology to five main models: Non-interference (Wyoming), Separation and Division (Ayodhya), Preference (Women at the Wall, Jerusalem), Status Quo (Holy Sepulchre, Jerusalem), and Closure (Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount, Jerusalem). What is helpful, but ultimately frustrating, about this work is the authors' notion of toleration, which is central to this task. They are clear that while a narrow definition is not feasible, as it will not lead to compromise and accommodation, too wide a definition may lead to syncretism, which would not be an acceptable outcome of a negotiation process.

Their own definition locates toleration in the political sphere, which makes sense given the cases examined. However, with the exception of the Women of the Wall case in which the authors have a special interest, the political analysis in the case studies turns out to be the weakest part of the study. In particular, the understanding of how the Status Quo in the Holy Sepulchre and tripartite governance of the Haram al-Sharif/ Temple Mount (Jordan, Israel, and the PLO/Palestinian Authority) works is quite superficial. It is noteworthy that not a single Palestinian author is cited in these chapters.

In this context, it is also surprising that no reference is made to international law around religious and cultural buildings and artifacts. The omission, for example, of any consideration of the work of UNESCO in Jerusalem is striking. It is true that UNESCO's position on Jerusalem in relation to Israeli encroachments upon Palestinian land and property has been, ultimately, disappointing. Nevertheless, its role in monitoring and challenging Israeli policies is based on a wealth of experience drawn from its engagement with many other international cases of political conflict concerning culturally significant sites. It is hard to understand why such experience has been overlooked. As a result of these weaknesses, the book merely offers a series of models that are thought-provoking but which, in the end, remain unconvincing.

Michael Dumper, professor emeritus at Exeter University, *is author of several works on Jerusalem including* Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History and the Future of the Holy City *(Columbia University Press, 2014). His latest book is* Power, Piety, and People: Holy Cities in the Twenty-first Century *(Columbia University Press, 2020).*

Endnotes
1   Ron Hassner, "To Halve and to Hold: Conflicts over Sacred Space and the Problem of Indivisibility," *Security Studies* 12, no. 4 (Summer 2003): 1–33.

Exploring Migrations in Jordan: Insights from a Recent Symposium

Amal Khaleefa and Valentina Napolitano (symposium coordinators)

Abstract

This is a summary of a two-day symposium on migrations in Jordan, by the symposium coordinators Amal Khaleefa and Valentina Napolitano. The event, held in May 2023 at the French Institute for the Near East (IFPO) in Amman, aimed to challenge prevailing political narratives on migration in Jordan and deconstruct stereotypes, while exploring the role of archives in the production of these narratives. It featured four panels and a Policy Council, bringing together researchers, humanitarian workers, and migrants. Presentations focused on the role of humanitarian actors in producing narratives on migrations, highlighting UNRWA's history, archiving projects involving Palestinian youth, and reconstructing familiar and village histories. Participants also explored narratives and archives produced by other non-conventional and marginal actors, including Circassian accounts and the Melkite Church involved in assistance to Palestinian refugees. Lived experiences and representations were discussed with a focus on Rohingya migrants, the racialization of Black refugees, and solidarity practices among Syrians settled in Jordan during the 1980s. The symposium also addressed the production of spaces and norms, including narratives of Syrian refugees in Palestinian camps in Amman, an experience put in perspective with that of Syrians in the Biqa' Valley in Lebanon.

Keywords

Archives; bottom-up approach; documentation; IFPO-ITHACA project; Jordan; migrations; Policy Council; representations; (counter)narrative.

A two-day symposium on migrations in Jordan that we coordinated was held on 2–3 May 2023, at the French Institute for the Near East (IFPO) in Amman within the framework of the Horizon 2020 project ITHACA (Interconnecting Histories and Archives for Migrant Agency). The symposium gathered researchers, humanitarian workers and representatives of migrant communities with an aim to challenge the dominant political narratives on migrations in Jordan and explore alternative (counter) narratives that emphasize the active role of migrants in shaping Jordan's social fabric. Adopting a bottom-up approach, participants addressed the issue of who produces narratives on migrations and with what aim. They investigated the impact of power dynamics on narratives, and the importance of archives in documenting migrant histories, and in dismantling victimization and security-oriented perspectives on migrants, while challenging the dichotomy between host communities and migrants.

The symposium opened with a keynote speech by Lex Takkenberg, senior advisor at Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD), and former UNRWA chief ethics officer. Takkenberg discussed the ongoing Nakba, the UN's role in documenting, protecting, and "containing" Palestinian refugees, and the importance of UNRWA archives in asserting Palestinian rights. He highlighted the role of humanitarianism as containment of the "Palestinian refugee question, not so much in the sense of preventing the refugees from moving to the West – which at the time was not feasible for the vast majority of them – but rather as taking the pressure away from refugee return." Takkenberg also pointed out the depoliticization of the question within UNRWA's discourse and hypothesized that the agency's ongoing financial crisis hinders its ability to fulfil its mandate, thereby perpetuating the suffering of Palestinian refugees and preventing them from claiming their rights.

UNRWA was also at the heart of the symposium's first panel, moderated by Falestin Naïli, on the role of humanitarian actors in the production of narratives on migrants. Maria Chiara Rioli and Francesca Biancani discussed the social history and visual culture of Palestinian mobilities and humanitarianism using UNRWA archives. Their presentation emphasized the importance of retracing UNRWA's social and archival histories in order to keep track and understand their impact on the humanitarian history of the Middle East and beyond. Confirming this perspective, Valeria Cetorelli presented a project of digitalization of UNRWA archives of Palestine refugee family files, which capture up to five generations of significant life events of registered Palestine refugees since 1950. The presentation also addressed ongoing digitization efforts to retrace family trees and histories for individual access and research purposes. Jalal Al Husseini delved deeper into the representations of refugees in UNRWA's archives. He emphasized the significance of critically engaging with narratives about the "good" or "bad" refugee, shedding light on diplomatic and operational objectives that underpin these representations. He also highlighted the important fact that assistance programs are designed "for" refugees, rather than developed in collaboration with them.

The second panel, led by Valentina Napolitano, delved into the significance of narratives and archives produced by migrants themselves, independent of major humanitarian actors. Falestin Naïli's presentation explored how migrant narratives

challenge traditional archival work and the marginalization of individuals and groups within those archives. By examining two projects in Jordan's Circassian communities, Naïli highlighted the intentional messages left by these marginalized voices. Adnan Bazadogh's archive and museum in Zarqa transcend territorial boundaries and contain diverse materials from Jordan and the Near East, while the oral history project in the Muhajirin quarter in Amman collects and shares residents' stories in various formats. By analyzing these unconventional approaches, the paper emphasized the importance in giving voice to people who are often silenced or overlooked in conventional archival systems.

On a different note, Norig Neveu explored the narratives surrounding Palestinian refugees and the role of faith-based humanitarianism in shaping and preserving these stories. The presentation focused on the archives of the Melkite Church in Jordan and their contribution to humanitarian efforts for Palestinian refugees, with the support of the Jordanian government and UNRWA, especially in the education and health fields. The narrative about refugees, which was disseminated by these actors with the aim of obtaining international support, was put into perspective with letters from refugees themselves asking for services and providing a (counter)narrative.

The conclusion of the symposium's first day was marked by the noteworthy organization of a Policy Council Event (PCE) titled "Voices of Migrants in Jordan: The Role of Archiving and Narrating for Enhancing Political and Humanitarian Actions." Moderated by Amal Khaleefa, Valentina Napolitano, and Maria Chiara Rioli, the PCE had two main objectives: First, it examined prevailing representations and stereotypes of migrants in Jordan, exploring strategies to promote alternative narratives and influence practitioners and policymakers. Second, it explored the impact of archives and documentation on shaping migration policies. The event brought together ten stakeholders, including humanitarian workers, researchers, and migrant social actors from various backgrounds. The narratives shared by Circassian, Palestinian, Sudanese, and Rohingya participants underscored the importance of active listening, recognizing commonalities, and embracing diversity to find a shared understanding. The discussions highlighted the important role of migrants' active participation in archiving and storytelling, which strengthens both political and humanitarian efforts.

On the second day of the symposium, Jalal Al Husseini moderated panel discussions that focused on representations and lived experiences of migrants. Amal Khaleefa's presentation shed light on the invisible lives and unheard narratives of Rohingya migrants in Hayy al-Pakistan in Zarqa. Through ethnographic research, the study explored its historical background, living conditions, and the migrants' struggles for recognition without official status. It highlighted the impact of lack of documentation on access to services, providing a broader insight into Jordan's migration policies. Solenn Al Majali focused on the racialization of Black refugees in Jordan, challenging racial prejudices and stereotypes. By collecting narratives from African-origin forced migrants, her study uncovered the systemic racializing approach toward African refugees and examined associated stereotypes and stigmas. It also explored how these narratives contributed to the creation of ethnic borders and avoidance strategies

in interactions with local populations, questioning dominant discourses on ethnic minorities and inter-ethnic relations.

Valentina Napolitano discussed the experiences of Syrians who settled in Jordan in the 1980s, exploring their representations, social status, and forms of solidarity. The study examined their narratives and the impact of the Syrian refugee influx after 2011 on their social status and representations within the host society. It highlighted the downward social mobility experienced by these "ancient" Syrian migrants due to Jordanian authorities' restrictions put in place in the frame of the crisis response, portraying the shift from being "guests" to being "refugees."

The panel then concluded with Hanna Josefine Berg, who offered valuable insights into the bureaucratic nature of humanitarianism in Jordan. Her study focused on the role of paperwork in daily humanitarian work, specifically in the Azraq Syrian refugee camp, analyzing the production of information and data about the refugees, as well as the regulations and evaluations that shape their involvement in humanitarian bureaucracy. By challenging victimization and security-based approaches and deconstructing the master narrative, Berg's study aimed to dismantle the exceptionalization of displacement and questioned the temporary nature of humanitarian responses.

In the fourth and final panel, moderated by Amal Khaleefa, the focus shifted to the production of spaces and norms within the context of migration. Ruba al-Akash discussed the role of digital technologies in marriage and divorce among Syrian refugees in Jordan. The research highlighted how young Syrian women use the internet as a private space for emotional expression and engagement in intimate and marital practices. It emphasized the dual nature of digital technologies, empowering refugees while also shaping gendered discourses and practices. Online connectivity was found to be crucial for maintaining relationships, accessing information, and improving livelihoods. Another presentation by Jake Cassani delved into the narratives and social dynamics of Syrian refugee workers by providing a comparative perspective with the Lebanese field. Through extensive fieldwork, the research examined how these narratives challenge social hierarchies, with a focus on forced migration, labor, gender, and ideology. The findings revealed how Syrian laborers navigate exploitation in Lebanon, reshaping social relations while grappling with the challenges brought about by displacement. Continuing the panel discussions, Ayham Dalal presented on the narratives of Syrian refugees in Amman. The study highlighted the role of urbanized Palestinian camps within the city as transitional zones for the poorest segments of the Syrian refugee population. Settlement patterns were influenced by traditions and pre-war transnational networks, emphasizing that camps, cities, and displaced populations are part of a larger urban system offering opportunities for new urban ecologies.

The symposium concluded with a visit guided by Saleem Ayoub Quna, a Circassian journalist, to Amman's al-Muhajirin neighborhood, which served as an initial settlement for Circassian migrants in the city. The visit engaged participants in the captivating "Tales of Amman" project, exploring the narratives of one of the city's historic migrant neighborhoods.

Amal Khaleefa is a postdoctoral researcher at the Centre national de la recherche scientifique–French Institute for the Near East (CNRS–IFPO) Amman, working on the Interconnecting Histories and Archives for Migrant Agency Project (ITHACA). Her research focuses on representations, language practices, and the transmission of culture in migratory contexts, specifically in Jordan, in the Syrian refugee camp of Za'tari, in the city of Zarqa among Palestinian refugees, and in al-Pakistan neighborhood for Rohingya. She is the author of the forthcoming book Les langues au cœur de l'exil: les Syriens du camp de Zaatari*, based on her award-winning thesis, to be published by Presses Sorbonne Nouvelle.*

Valentina Napolitano is a sociologist and researcher at the French National Research Institute for Sustainable Development (IRD), and at Laboratoire Population Environnement et Développement (LPED) in Marseille. Her research deals with forced migrations, political violence, and family transformations in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Jordan. Among her recent publications: with Falestin Naïli and Pauline Piraud-Fournet, "Introduction: Charity, Relief and Humanitarianism as a Means of Maintaining Social and Political Stability in the Middle East – A Longue Durée Analysis of Actors, Categories, and Practices," Endowment Studies *6, no. 1–2 (2022); and "Les émotions d'ex-militaires syriens. Donner un sens et une cohérence à la désertion en contexte de guerre,"* Critique internationale *9.*

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, 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.

Submissions General Guidlines
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. <u>Authors may also specifically request that their article be peer-reviewed</u>. 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.
- **Resolution**: Any figure should be in camera-ready format, and should be saved as JPEG, with a minimum resolution of 600 dpi (or 700 KB). Please do <u>not</u> send the high-resolution figures by email, which can degrade the quality. Instead, upload figures to WeTransfer, Google Drive, or the like, and provide a link. It is also advisable to embed a low-resolution copy at the chosen place in the Word file, as guidance to editors and the designer.
- **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. <u>If this is not acceptable</u> in the case of a specific figure, we kindly ask authors to notify us in writing.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

A special issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*
Write-Minded: Jerusalem in Literature
Guest Editor: Carol Khoury

Join us in exploring the literary legacy of Jerusalem and unravelling the city's manifold narratives through the lenses of literature. Submit a proposal abstract by 15 September 2023.

Introduction

The *Jerusalem Quarterly*, a leading journal dedicated to the historical, cultural, and social dimensions of Jerusalem, is pleased to announce a call for contributions for a special issue titled "Write-Minded: Jerusalem in Literature."

A city of immense historical, cultural, and religious significance, Jerusalem has inspired countless literary works, spanning various genres, periods, and perspectives. *JQ* invites academic contributions that illuminate the multifaceted representations of Jerusalem in literature, fostering an understanding of the city's evolving identity as portrayed by writers worldwide.

By exploring the intersections of literature and Jerusalem, this issue aims to delve into the profound literary tapestry woven around Jerusalem, offering a platform for scholarly examination of how literary minds have shaped, challenged, and reimagined the city's essence, reshaping its symbolism and significance through the power of the written word.

Scope

We encourage authors to delve into the themes, motifs, and symbols through which writers, poets, and intellectuals have represented the city, capturing its complexity and spiritual significance.

"Write-Minded" is seeking to:

1. foster an understanding of how Palestinian and Arab writers have engaged with the city, its heritage, and its struggles, enriching our comprehension of Jerusalem's central role in Palestinian identity; and

2. highlight the complexities of Jerusalem as experienced, imagined, and documented through the lens of writers, poets, storytellers, and intellectuals, across time and borders.

We invite innovative and thought-provoking essays that analyse the significance of Jerusalem as a site of and metaphor for human experiences, both collective and individual. Submissions may also explore literary figures associated with the city.

The scope of this special issue is open in terms of historic era, genre, and language of the literary works being studied.

Potential Topics include (but are not limited to):

• Homeland: Examining how Palestinian literature portrays Jerusalem as a symbolic homeland, capturing the city's emotional and cultural significance for Palestinians.

• Resilience and Resistance: Examining how literature reflects the resilience and resistance of Palestinians in the face of historical and ongoing challenges to Jerusalem's integrity.

• Memoryscapes and Nostalgia: Reflecting on the city's influence on personal and collective consciousness, by examining literary representations that preserve and reclaim the collective memory and cultural heritage and how literature reflects the transformation of Jerusalem's physical and symbolic landscape over the years.

• Personal Journeys: Investigating individual experiences and emotions related to Jerusalem, as depicted in autobiographical or fictional accounts.

• Diaspora: Investigating how writers in the diaspora have connected with and depicted Jerusalem in their works, exploring themes of longing, belonging, and displacement.

- Poetry, Songs, and Chants: Unravelling the poetic expressions that encapsulate the essence of Jerusalem in Palestinian poetry, songs, and chants, reflecting on the city's beauty, pain, and hope.

- Myth and Legend: Unravelling the mythical and legendary dimensions of Jerusalem's representation in literature, examining how stories have transcended time and space.

- Sacredness: Examining the portrayal of Jerusalem's religious and spiritual significance in literary texts from various traditions.

- Fictional and Historical Characters of Jerusalem: Analysing iconic literary characters related to Jerusalem and their impact on shaping the city's image, and the role the city played in shaping their works.

- Jerusalem and National Identity: Understanding how literature contributes to shaping Palestinian national identity through Jerusalem's historical and political context.

- Jerusalem as a Character: Analysing the portrayal of Jerusalem as a character in literature, observing its impact on plot development and thematic exploration.

Submission Guidelines

Authors are invited to submit original articles, essays, or pieces for *JQ*'s permanent sections that align with the theme of the special issue.

JQ is particularly interested in submissions that address Jerusalem in non-Anglophone literature.

The editors encourage collaborative proposals.

The digital format of *JQ* has the advantage of allowing published articles to include audio and video sources, as well.

Research articles will undergo a double-blind peer-review process, ensuring academic rigor and originality.

Authors are requested to adhere to *JQ*'s Submission Guidelines, available at: www.palestine-studies.org/en/journals/jq/how-to-submit

Important Dates

Please send a proposal abstract of 300–500 words to the managing editor: jq@palestine-studies.org; and to the guest editor: ckhoury@palestine-studies.org. The abstract should give a clear sense of the scope and argument of the proposed manuscript, and its connection to the issue's themes.

Abstract submission deadline: 15 September 2023

Accepted proposals will be asked to submit a full manuscript draft by: 12 November 2023

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* plans to publish the "Write-Minded: Jerusalem in Literature" special issue in 2024.

For inquiries or further information, please contact the Guest Editor of the special issue, Carol Khoury, at ckhoury@palestine-studies.org.

About the *Jerusalem Quarterly*

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* (JQ) is the leading journal on the past, present, and future of Jerusalem. It documents the current status of the city and its predicaments. It is also dedicated to new and rigorous lines of inquiry by emerging scholars on Palestinian society and culture. Published since 1998 by the Institute for Palestine Studies through its affiliate, the Institute of Jerusalem Studies, the *Jerusalem Quarterly* is available online in its entirety at www.palestine-studies.org/en/journals/jq/about.

CALL FOR CONTRIBUTIONS

A special issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*
Palestinian Food and Foodways
Guest Editor: Christiane Dabdoub Nasser

The *Jerusalem Quarterly*, a leading journal dedicated to the past, present, and future of Jerusalem and its environs, and to Palestinian society and culture within and beyond Palestine's borders, is pleased to announce a call for contributions for a special issue dedicated to food and foodways. Please submit proposal abstracts by **15 September 2023** (see below for details).

Food is a core element of Palestinian culture, linked to individual memories of people and places and central to communal gatherings and collective identity. Food reflects both material and psychological or imaginative dimensions of Palestinian life—from local food production to the trade routes and economic networks that bring ingredients to and from Palestine, from the preservation of traditions to the innovation of new culinary trends. Food plays a central role in practices associated with hospitality, charity, ritual, and celebration. It is associated with local and regional identities, with particular places (regions, cities, neighborhoods, restaurants) and times (times of the day, festivals or holidays, seasons), and thus illuminates the diversity and texture of Palestinianness.

We encourage contributors to explore the variety of cultural, historical, political, and economic dimensions of food and foodways of Palestine and Palestinians, though special consideration will be given to topics related to Jerusalem and its environs.

Potential topics include (but are not limited to):

- Palestinian cuisine within Greater Syria, including the impact of trade routes and regional and imperial influences from the Ottoman era to the present.

- Urban versus rural practices in the evolution of Palestinian cuisine

- The impact of the Nakba on Palestinian food, including the rupture of displacement and dispossession and the recreating of Palestinian cuisine in "refugeedom."

- Food as a way of storing the past and Palestinian diaspora cuisine as an avenue for creating food memories, recreating home, preserving identity, and asserting Palestinianness.

- Palestinian food practices within the dialectic of immigration and assimilation, whether as a means of narrative construction or a search for identification, self-understanding, and commonality.

- The role of gender in Palestinian cuisine and changes in foodways, in which women serve as primary carriers of culinary traditions, and men as claimants to the title of chef.

- The emergence of Palestinian cuisine on the world scene, as a cultural phenomenon or a form of resistance.

- Processes of claiming and reclaiming Palestinian cuisine, including transformations and processes of inclusion/exclusion or re-imagining ethnic identity/integration.

- Israel's appropriation of Palestinian cuisine as a material manifestation of a form of regional acculturation and indigeneity (sabra culture) or a form of erasing the Palestinian past.

Submission Guidelines

Authors are invited to submit proposals for original articles, essays, or pieces for *JQ*'s permanent sections that align with the theme of the special issue. The editors encourage collaborative proposals as well as proposals that take advantage of *JQ*'s digital format to include audio or video sources.

Authors are requested to adhere to JQ's Submission Guidelines, available at: www.palestine-studies.org/en/journals/jq/how-to-submit. Research articles will undergo a double-blind peer-review process, ensuring academic rigor and originality.

Process and Deadlines

Please send a proposal abstract of 300–500 words to the managing editor: jq@palestine-studies.org; and to the guest editor: chriae@gmail.com. The abstract should give a clear sense of the scope and/or argument of the proposed manuscript and its connection to the issue's themes.

Abstract submission deadline: **15 September 2023**

Accepted proposals will be asked to submit a full manuscript draft by: **15 January 2024**

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* plans to publish the special issue in 2024.

For inquiries or further information, please contact the guest editor of the special issue, Christiane Dabdoub Nasser, at chriae@gmail.com.

About the *Jerusalem Quarterly*

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* (JQ) is the leading journal on the past, present, and future of Jerusalem. It documents the current status of the city and its predicaments. It is also dedicated to new and rigorous lines of inquiry by emerging scholars on Palestinian society and culture. Published since 1998 by the Institute for Palestine Studies through its affiliate, the Institute of Jerusalem Studies, the *Jerusalem Quarterly* is available online in its entirety at www.palestine-studies.org/en/journals/jq/about.

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Lives

Stories from Palestinian Exile

Nadia Fahed | Intisar Hajaj | Yafa Talal El-Masri
Youssef Naanaa | Ruba Rahme | Hanin Mohammad Rashid
Mira Sidawi | Wedad Taha | Salem Yassin
Taha Younis | Mahmoud Mohammad Zeidan

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