

an archive for historical purposes. On the other hand, the Egyptians in Gaza had made no such preparations. Thus, the 1967 Israeli invasion meant that their files, most of which were meticulously collected into Israeli state archives, are like a snapshot of government frozen in time, with its own filing system still in place. This method of maintaining the files reveals the intentions of the Israeli authorities who captured them, and who then, as Feldman notes, closed them off to researchers while she was working on them, neither declassifying nor classifying them, largely because they did not know their contents.

The richness of this study is in the mundane, in its reflections on, and deep understanding of, people's lives and work as government employees. It presents Gaza as a normal, everyday place, where civil service retirees receive pensions and attend a club for retired civil servants, and where the population does not want to install water meters that would charge them for usage. Despite this normalcy, Feldman also shows how Gaza was made to be a place apart by historical circumstances, borders, and policies that continue until today. Considered a backwater during British Mandate rule, Gaza between 1948 and 1967 was more closely connected to Cairo than the other Palestinian cities. This isolation continued after 1967 and is even more obvious today, with the unprecedented lockdown of the Gaza Strip. By making Gaza seem normal, Feldman enables us to see beyond the current headlines and fearful murmurings. She allows us to understand the way in which Gaza has been administered from 1917 to the present by tactical governments that continue to maintain authority, but lack legitimacy.

#### NEGLECTED NARRATIVES

**The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries**, by Rosemary Sayigh. London: Zed Books, 2007. xxviii + 210 pages. Notes to p. 228. \$25.95 paper.

*Reviewed by Marcy Jane Knopf-Newman*

As the reconstruction of Nahr al-Barid refugee camp in northern Lebanon is halted

once again, this time due to the discovery of an archaeological site, twelve thousand Palestinians from the camp have taken to the streets in protest. The remaining nineteen thousand refugees continue to reside in eleven other camps in Lebanon, unable to return two years after the Lebanese army destroyed it. The struggle for these refugees has shifted, albeit temporarily, from the right of return to Palestine to that of return to the camp.

The reprint of Rosemary Sayigh's *The Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries*, originally published in 1979, could not have come at a more opportune time. Its combination of oral history of ordinary Palestinian refugees and Sayigh's astute analysis of their anticolonial, anti-imperial struggle reminds us of the voices that must be amplified. Sayigh's research was conducted between 1975 and 1978, during the Lebanese Civil War, when the Lebanese Forces militia destroyed the Palestinian refugee camp of Tal al-Za'atar and many refugees fled to Nahr al-Barid. But the significance of *The Palestinians*, like Nafez Nazzal's groundbreaking *Palestinian Exodus from the Galilee* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1978), is that the time period during which Sayigh interviewed her subjects allowed her to extract memories from people who could not only narrate the contemporaneous Palestinian Resistance Movement (PRM) but also recall life before the Nakba.

The book is structured chronologically and broken down into chapters that correspond to various phases of Palestinian life. It begins with "The Peasant Past," which documents life in Palestine before the Nakba, using oral history to compare different forms of colonialism affecting fellahin lives from the Ottomans to the British and the Zionists. The interviews also give readers a window into Palestinian village life: from agricultural production to weddings, education, and a collective way of life. Village collectivity was significant given the need to resist the layers of colonialism that substantially increased peasant poverty and eventually led to landlessness. Sayigh's analysis thwarts a romanticized view of the fellahin by addressing various conflicts within villages, and between villages and urban dwellers, Druze, and Bedouins. Sayigh maintains focus on the class consciousness that shaped resistance to the Zionist takeover of Palestine, in the form of labor organizing in cities like Haifa and Yaffa and armed rebellion among the fellahin. Her characterization of

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the resistance is instructive; she portrays the 1936–39 rebellion as “the most sustained phase of militant anti-imperialist struggle in the Arab world before the Algerian War of Independence” (p. 43).

The second chapter, “The Uprooting,” takes readers through eyewitness accounts of the Nakba. Although a number of historical texts published since 1979 have covered much of the terrain Sayigh tackles—from Zionist terrorism, to Plan Dalet, to the failure of Arab resistance—there are a number of insights to be gleaned from her account. Palestinian voices at times give readers a complex sense of the futility of the Arab Liberation Army (ALA) with stories illustrating its collaboration with the enemy. At other times, narratives highlight the effectiveness of the ALA when it joined forces with Palestinian villagers to drive out the Haganah. Sayigh also dedicates a good deal of space to covering the myriad narratives of Palestinians who fled their villages little by little, repeatedly returning to their homes. This aspect of their oral history is essential as it demonstrates how determined Palestinians were to remain on their land before their final expulsion.

Displacement did not end once Palestinians became refugees. The chapter “The New Reality” recounts how Palestinian refugees in Lebanon initially lived close to the southern border. But as Sayigh’s interviewees reveal, officials in Lebanon forced multiple relocations until some refugees were moved as far north as Nahr al-Barid (an early photograph of which graces the book’s cover). Sayigh gives an overview of this new reality of Palestinian fellahin living as landless, often urban, dwellers and compares the various nuances of Palestinian lives under repressive regimes in Jordan, Syria, and Lebanon. She also chronicles the ways in which the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, in its early years, thwarted the Palestinian fight for a right of return by encouraging emigration to the West and keeping families busy working to feed their own rather than fighting for their rights.

Sayigh grounds her final chapter, “Revolution,” in the PRM’s work in the region prior to entering Lebanon in 1969. Toward the end of this chapter, readers are privy to some narratives about the Tal al-Za’atar massacre, related in a slightly anachronistic fashion as if the civil war had ended in 1976. Yet, those moments offer readers a glimpse of what such events felt like as they unfolded. Further, it gives a sense of how

many forces Palestinians were up against in Lebanon, something Sayigh’s later work, *Too Many Enemies: The Palestinian Experience in Lebanon* (Zed Books, 1994), exposed. In *The Palestinians* too, Sayigh’s discussion of the Deuxième Bureau’s (the Lebanese intelligence service) tight grip on Palestinian camps helps readers understand the internal forces Palestinians rose up against in the late 1960s by way of the first fedayeen bases in south Lebanon. Moments of unity and friction recorded by Sayigh include interviews with Lebanese who joined in street demonstrations—despite brutal repression by Lebanese internal security—and became fighters with the fedayeen. Likewise, although the book contains a discussion of various Palestinian factions—Fatah, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine—Sayigh’s focus stays pointedly on the lives of ordinary fighters in the PRM rather than on the leaders, reflecting the sentiments of camp populations at the time: “The photos of *shubada*’ are much more visible on the street walls of camps than those of the Resistance leaders, and people praise the latter sparingly, saying, ‘They live the lives of the people.’ If one falls, another will take his place” (p. 190).

One of the PRM’s important moments of internal success included in the book is the fight to remove the Lebanese army from the camps. The first camp to liberate itself was Nahr al-Barid, an exploit narrated in detail by one of its liberators. Sayigh also chronicles a number of defeats, one of which is the up-and-coming idea of a state in the West Bank, which, according to one of her interviewees, would sell out these refugees from coastal cities and northern Palestine. At the time of Sayigh’s writing, no one imagined that such a proposal would come to fruition. Instead, it was seen merely as an attempt to divide the PRM. This overall historical context, as well as the people’s voices distributed throughout Sayigh’s book, makes it essential reading for anyone interested in remembering the roots of the conflict, its reverberations, and the justifications for the right of return.

## COMPETING LEGAL ORDERS

**Law, Violence and Sovereignty among West Bank Palestinians**, by Tobias Kelly. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xviii + 181 pages. References to p. 193. Index to p. 199. \$85.00 cloth.