Published each issue, this section strives to capture the tenor and content of popular conversations related to the Palestinians and the Arab-Israeli conflict, which are held on dynamic platforms unbound by traditional media. Therefore, items presented in this section are from a variety of sources and have been selected because they either have gone viral or represent a significant cultural moment or trend. A version of Palestine Unbound is also published on Palestine Square (palestinesquare.com), a blog of the Institute for Palestine Studies.

This Quarter’s Topics

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#MyPalestinianSitty

On 18 August, Twitter was bursting at the seams with sitty love in support of U.S. representative Rashida Tlaib (D-MI). In an unprecedented decision handed down from the Israeli government, the congressperson was denied access to the country and her family there. Tlaib and her fellow representative Ilhan Omar (D-MN) had long been planning a trip to the occupied West Bank. In mid-August, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that the two Muslim representatives would be denied entry, explaining in a tweet that “they listed the destination of their trip as Palestine and not Israel, and . . . did not request to meet any Israeli officials.” From there, he made the dubious leap to conclude that the representatives’ objective was to “strengthen the boycott against us and deny Israel’s legitimacy.”

Changing tack, Tlaib—whose nonagenarian grandmother (or sitty in Arabic), Muftiya Tlaib, lives in the West Bank village of Bayt Ur al-Fauqa—petitioned the Israeli Interior Ministry to be admitted into Israel on humanitarian grounds. Though her request was ultimately approved, the conditions of this approval stifled her so thoroughly that she canceled her travel plans. “When I won, it gave the Palestinian people hope that someone will finally speak the truth about the inhumane conditions,” Tlaib tweeted.
“I can’t allow the State of Israel to take away that light by humiliating me & use [sic] my love for my sit[t]y to bow down to their oppressive & racist policies.”

In typical fashion, U.S. president Donald Trump mocked Tlaib and her sitty, tweeting sarcastically that “the only real winner” was Tlaib’s grandmother. “She doesn’t have to see her now!”

A 16 August Washington Post article quotes Muftiya Tlaib as firing back: “May god ruin him.” She goes on to say she is proud of the Michigan representative and that she hopes, “inshallah, . . . she will come back.” It has been twelve years since Muftiya Tlaib has seen her granddaughter. “I’m waiting for her,” the old woman promises.

In response to Tlaib’s story, Palestinian Twitter users posted pictures or their own grandmothers and their incredible stories, accompanied by the heart-warming hashtag #MyPalestinianSitty. The story was picked up by domestic and international news and media outlets from Vogue to Gulf News to The Guardian.
#Kullna_Isra’ al-Ghrayyib (#We are all_Israa_Ghrayeb)

In September, the name Israa Ghrayeb became a rallying cry for Palestinian women seeking redress for and protection against gender-based violence. Women in Palestine and throughout the diaspora raised their joint voices through social media campaigns and widespread protests after Ghrayeb died on 22 August as a result of complications stemming from physical trauma, including a fractured spine.

Ghrayeb, a twenty-one-year-old makeup artist from the West Bank village of Beit Sahour, was a student at Bethlehem University with a significant Instagram platform (now closed), which she used to post popular beauty tutorials and life updates, like the one that allegedly incited her male relatives (whose names are protected) to fatal violence: a video of a public outing with a man to whom she was not formally engaged—that she had to be hospitalized.

The story went viral. The subsequent demonstrations in her name owe much credit to Do You Know Him?—a feminist Palestinian Facebook group that outs abusers—which posted a broadly circulated video that appears to capture Ghrayeb’s further abuse at the hands of her family inside the hospital where she was supposed to be recovering.

Grief and outrage over her abuse and death sparked the #Kullna_Isra’al-Ghrayyib (#WeAreAll_Israa_Ghrayeb) social media campaign and inspired protests outside the Ramallah office of

Palestinian political analyst Omar Baddar urges followers to examine systems of oppression. (4 September, Twitter)
Palestinian prime minister Mohammad Shtayyeh. Protestors demanded a thorough investigation into Ghrayeb’s death and stronger legal protections against abuse, especially for women and children. Similar protests took place in Beit Sahour and across many other West Bank towns and cities.

In spite of the stark and irreversible reality of Ghrayeb’s death, there is reason to think that her memory is infused with some hope. In addition to the international attention Ghrayeb’s story has received, hours after the Ramallah protests, three male members of Ghrayeb’s family were detained for questioning; the Palestinian Authority opened an investigation into the conditions of her death; and on 12 September, the three men detained were charged with murder.

Protesters carried signs reading “There is no honor in honor killing,” but Attorney-General Akram Khatib rejected the label. Ghrayeb’s family, meanwhile, continues to deny all allegations of culpability.

The UN Commission on Palestinian Women reports twenty-seven so-called honor killings in 2018, and at the time Ghrayeb’s story broke the Women’s Centre for Legal Aid and Counselling, a Palestinian NGO documenting domestic violence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, was reporting eighteen such killings thus far in 2019.

Women suffering and dying at the hands of men isn’t a phenomenon unique to Palestine, or any Arab country. As activist-founder of BabyFist (see Photos from the Quarter in JPS 191) Yasmeen Mjalli wrote in a post on the website of the Palestinian feminist clothing line, “This is a universal phenomenon which takes places [sic] in nearly all corners of the globe.” Toxic masculinity, and its resulting violence, is a worldwide epidemic, Mjalli pointed out; “Patriarchy exists everywhere.”

#Tal3at

What is #Tal3at?

“[#Tal3at] is a scream from Palestinian women that starts today in different places across the country and abroad to demand an end to all forms of gender oppression and to stop postponing the issue of the violence against women until after national liberation,” Hala Marshhood, a researcher and activist in the movement, told Arab 48.

The campaign’s first organized event, a march coordinated across several locations on 26 September, fulfilled its namesake. #Tal3at means women going out onto the streets in colloquial Levantine Arabic, and the campaign mobilized feminists from twelve cities spanning Gaza and the West Bank, as well as inside the the Green Line in Israel, along with Beirut and Berlin. Marchers
gathered under the slogan “No liberated homeland without liberated women” to illustrate the paradox of fighting for a decolonized homeland while considering the control of women’s bodies a “personal” problem. Lema Nazeeh, a #Tal3at organizer in Ramallah, told Mondoweiss that the goal of the action was “a homeland” devoid of “all kinds of oppression.”

Although the movement emerged in direct response to the 22 August death of Israa Ghrayeb (read about Ghrayeb in the story above), the campaign extends beyond Ghrayeb to the rights and freedoms of all Arab women—including political prisoners who “are subjected to the most brutal forms of violence and repression,” according to a #Tal3at Facebook event promoting a 31 October march in Berlin. There, activists marched especially for Hiba al-Labadi, a twenty-four-year-old Jordanian citizen of Palestinian descent detained without charge by Israeli authorities on 20 August. Al-Labadi (who has since been released) was on her thirty-eighth day of hunger strike at the time of the scheduled Berlin demonstration.

The #Tal3at movement utilized a grassroots press campaign that included coordinated events promoted via its Facebook page (followed by over thirteen thousand people) and its Twitter account (@tal3at_sept26) as well as a series of
videos posted in advance of the first march that dramatize real stories of domestic violence enacted against Palestinian women in different rooms of the home. The vision of #Tal3at’s organizers was the creation of an “[un]-fragmented action that included many parts of the diaspora and historic Palestine.” Marshood told JPS. She hopes “to be part of a feminist space that redefines liberation and feminism” according to a “holistic vision of the world” with “justice at its core.”

This quarter’s Palestine Unbound stories deliver the unequivocal message that Palestinian women are bound and determined to forge a just future—one that is inseparable from their own liberation.