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INTRODUCTION

JPS “Hidden Gems” and “Greatest Hits”: Fifty Years of Narrating Palestine

Maia Tabet

Associate Editor

IN 1971, the *Journal of Palestine Studies* (*JPS*) came into being. Published by the Beirut-based Institute for Palestine Studies, it soon became the organization’s flagship English-language publication, a forum for the study of Palestine and the Palestinians, as well as a repository of documentation on Palestinian life, both past and present. Over the half century that has since elapsed, *JPS* has been a driver of knowledge production on the Palestinian condition and a crucible of learning.

The arc of my own Palestinian trajectory began in late-’70s Beirut. I came of age as a rookie reporter during the multiple conflicts in Lebanon, widely shorthanded by the moniker civil war. Although aware of what people in my milieu called the Palestinian problem, and of Israel’s existence as a usurper of Palestinian land and an aggressive territorial neighbor, I knew little about the history that led to the eruption of war in April 1975. That month, Phalangist militiamen in the Beirut suburb of ‘Ayn al-Rummana opened fire on a bus, killing its Palestinian passengers. The atrocity marked the official start of a multilayered conflict that lasted sixteen years. My own stint as a journalist began weeks before the June 1976 siege of the Palestinian refugee camp of Tal al-Za’atar, which I covered for a French-language Lebanese weekly; it ended with the September 1982 Sabra and Shatila massacre, which I reported on for the French daily *Libération*. The horrors I witnessed and a thirst for knowledge and understanding led me to the pages of *JPS*’s sister publication, the *Revue d’études palestiniennes*, alas no longer in print, which launched in 1981 and was available in my neighborhood bookstore, Librairie Antoine. (There, you can still buy *JPS*’s Arabic-language sister publication, *Majallat al-dīrasat al-filastiniyya*, which began publishing in 1990.) The articles I read were rigorous and accessible, and the interviews compelling. Grounded in thorough research, they provided a fine-grained analysis of the question of Palestine: as an artifact of Palestinian knowledge production, the *Revue* helped me acquire an intellectual foundation for my own experiential understanding.

Today, fifty years since the launch of *JPS*, the Palestinian landscape looks bleak. It features the de facto and seemingly imminent de jure annexation of the occupied West Bank. Intensifying dispossession and displacement—with their attendant and constant renewal of the original loss—continue to disrupt lives, destroy livelihoods, and uproot entire communities as the Israeli war machine rips at the fabric of society and separates Palestinians from one another at every turn. The most mundane acts of life—playing on a beach, fishing in the sea, tending farmland, providing medical care, crossing a street, or attending a university class—can be fraught with danger, and sometimes lethal. And after transforming from a structure for revolutionary armed struggle to a parastatal entity during the Lebanon years, and later in Tunis, the Palestinian political leadership has become a handmaiden of the occupation. As the Palestinian people

are incrementally immiserated and erased, and notwithstanding widespread popular solidarity with their cause, the “official” international community watches over, largely indifferent. Yet, these fifty years have also witnessed the unabated resistance of Palestinians from every walk of life, in quotidian acts of planting trees; building museums; rebuilding homes; nurturing their young; making music and films; writing poetry, novels, plays, and dissertations; building institutions of learning; organizing; and imagining other futures. It has been a half century of tenacious endurance, with the propagation of the Palestinian cause across the globe, the reclamation of dignity, the blossoming of art and culture, and the continued pursuit and dissemination of knowledge across the lands of historic Palestine and its diaspora.

In the anglophone world, there is today a plethora of English-language resources and academic initiatives dedicated to the Palestinian question, including Palestine study centers at both SOAS University of London and Columbia University, Brown University’s yearly academic workshop *New Directions in Palestinian Studies*, and the University of California Press’s eponymous book series, as well as *Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network*, and the Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU). Directed in equal measure at academics and scholars, and what we loosely refer to as a general readership—allies, political comrades, and intellectuals vested in the question of Palestine and the quest for justice—*JPS* prides itself on being the English-language journal of record on Palestinian affairs. And as the *Journal’s* associate editor, responsible for shepherding each issue through a process of rigorous review to offer readers innovative and engaging scholarship and analysis, my daily work is enlivened by that vision. But as we approached *JPS’s* fiftieth year, it seemed apposite to ask what the journal of record on Palestinian affairs should/might look like going forward.

It was with that question that I approached the 2019 meeting of the *Journal’s* Editorial Board (EB). How would we mark this important milestone, I asked? How could we speak to a half century of publication and to the field of Palestine studies as a blossoming epistemic category today? After an initial brainstorming, we refined our vision and agreed to use this milestone as an opportunity for both commemoration and critique, with EB members Beshara Doumani and Sa’ed Atshan, and coeditors Sherene Seikaly and Rashid Khalidi each reflecting on and reframing the *Journal* in a series of peer-reviewed articles staggered across the fiftieth-anniversary-year volume. We also decided to publish a virtual issue of eight short essays to highlight some “hidden gems” and “greatest hits” from among the hundreds of articles in our fifty-year archive from 1971 through 2019. A greatest hit would be a piece like Edward Said’s now universally cited and known “Permission to Narrate” that appeared in these pages in 1984. A “hidden gem” would be a piece that received less attention in its time but speaks to us now in crucial ways. In addition to appearing as a virtual issue of *JPS*, these eight essays would also run in two clusters of four, the first of which appears here (*JPS* 197), with the other four appearing in the next issue (*JPS* 198).

We are therefore pleased to offer readers of this issue essays by: Alex Winder on Palestinian history writ large, Leila Farsakh on Palestinian economic development, Noura Erakat on the law and its (mis)uses, and Yousef Munayyer on contentious politics. Another four essays, by Sreemati Mitter on capitalism in Palestine, Salim Tamari on Ottoman Palestinian history, Gadi Algazi on Israel, and Nadine Naber on activism, will appear in the pages of *JPS* 198. We are delighted and honored to feature each of these voices.