



EDITORIAL

Palestinian Cultural Expression through Political Turmoil

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Guest Editor

Palestinians in Gaza walk past a sidewalk artist's dedication to Yasser Arafat.
Source: © Alyana Cazalet.

Culture, art, music, and literature of people under occupation are often sidelined by the more pressing and life-threatening issues of violence, survival, and politics. This volume of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* addresses Palestinian cultural productions from the 1930s to the present, which themselves employ the politics of their particular era. The essays address the power of poetry and music to engage the population and energize it, as well as to provide an outlet for individual expressions of emotion and the search for solace.

David McDonald writes about the contemporary cultural scene in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas through the festival productions of Yabous and the cultural and musical programs of the Popular Arts Centre and the Edward Said National Conservatory of Music. His essay asserts that music and musical production have long been a focal point of Palestinian national identity formation, as well as expressions of resistance to the British Mandate and Israeli occupations. He examines Palestinian cultural production post-1967

which codified and glorified the cultural production of the past within a rubric of an ‘authentic’ Palestinian folklore. He concludes that the first Intifada and the Oslo period pushed Palestinians out into the larger world and brought musicians from all over to Palestine in solidarity and in the hope for peace. These changes gave rise to the cultural non-governmental organizations described in the article which, with the rise of the second Intifada, formulated themselves as powerful institutions and cultural activists working for “peaceful non-violent resistance to state hegemonies.”

The early Palestinian culture of resistance is well-documented in Samih Shabeeb’s essay on the life and poetry of Nuh Ibrahim (1913-1938). This piece introduces the poet to an English-speaking audience for the first time and suggests the power of Nuh’s colloquial poetry among Palestinians as it addressed the larger political issues affecting them, such as the death of ‘Izz al-Din al-Qassam in 1935 and the Royal Commission plan of 1937 to partition Palestine (“Your Honour the Royal Committee” and “The Plan for Dividing Palestine”). As Shabeeb points out in the essay, Nuh Ibrahim’s credentials arose from his status as both fighter and poetic commentator. The essay contains extensive translations of his poetry, which focus on Palestinians’ resistance to the British Mandate and Zionism through everyday heroic acts of individuals (“God give us victory”), sailors (“We salute the sailors of Jaffa, Christian and Muslim”), prisoners in jail (“Mr. Bailey”), and the fighters of the 1936-39 Revolt (“Long Live Palestine and the valour of its resistance fighters”).

A more introspective reflection on Palestinian poetry comes from the pen of Ibrahim Nasrallah who writes about the poetry of the well-known politician and banker, Ahmad Hilmi Abdelbaqi (1882-1963). The essay prefaced the Arabic publication in 2004 of *Diwani*, the volume of Ahmad Hilmi’s previously unpublished poems. In stark contrast to the popular colloquial poetry of Nuh Ibrahim, which is easily understood through its everyday life topics and repeating chorus, the poetry of Ahmad Hilmi relies on complex ideas, emotions, and language with which to explore notions of longing, death, and the loss of Palestine. He wrote thousands of quatrains [*rubai ’yat*] of intensely beautiful language and hauntingly provocative topics that open new doors on the personality of the man as well as the corpus of Palestinian poetry from the twentieth century.

Cultural production and resistance form an important component in the continuing struggle for Palestinian political rights. As the essays in this volume show, poetry and music are inextricably tied to Palestinian identity as expressed through politics, communal movements, and individual actions and beliefs.

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