

EDITORIAL

Home and House

(Part 2)

Intimacies and Material Politics

At the top right of the cover photo of this second special issue of *JQ* on Palestinian homes and houses, a villager, posing on the upper ledge of a burly stone house, stares intently into the camera. One may be drawn in to speculate: The masculine performance of his posture is palpable: body slightly bent forward, and arms crossed over a raised knee as if surveying a field of victory. His confident half-smile sends a clear message, “This house and the family that calls it home are the great achievements of my life.” For most Palestinian men like him in the hill region of Palestine (and beyond), owning a stone house and raising a big family have long been the two most important measures of success.

At the top left of the photograph, the man’s mother also stares directly into the camera lens of the famous Palestinian vernacular photographer, Khalil Raad,¹ who took the picture in the early twentieth century. It is difficult to read her expression. Her left hand covers the bottom half of her face as if she is unsure whether she wants to be photographed, and her features are darkened by the shadow of the long white scarf shielding her from the intense sun. Nevertheless, her status as an equal to her son is made clear by the subtle, but no less commanding position she also holds on the second-floor ledge, albeit, sitting on the other side of the hefty stone stairs that bisect the house. Everyone, surely, must realize that her son’s success is owed, in no small measure, to her stubborn survival, hard labor, and dedication to his welfare during the most difficult

period in living memory: the horrors of massive death and starvation that devastated the Eastern Mediterranean in World War I. Hers is a generation of female rural inhabitants who are still mostly invisible to our eyes, but whose role in knitting a durable fabric of house and home proved foundational to the ability of Palestinians to challenge the onslaught of British colonialism and Zionist settlement in the first half of the twentieth century.



The wife, standing at the foot of the stairs, centers the bottom half of the photograph. With an animated smile that seems to draw energy from the eight children around her, she also stares directly at the camera with a natural confidence and strength. The youngest child is perched on the ledge of her shoulders and the oldest is already in teacher mode exercising authority over her younger siblings who stare intently back at her. Considering the high death rate of both mothers and infants during childbirth in early twentieth-century Palestine, her endurance and vitality are impressive, to say the least. With their house standing strong behind her, she had every reason to imagine a better future for her children.

The real star of the photograph, however, is the house itself. The silent keeper of generational memory and the visible manifestation of indigeneity as belonging, it fills the photographic space with its limestone muscles. Locally quarried, it is of the earth, by the family, and for the collectivity. The eye is slowly drawn to the people-free inverted triangle at the center of the image, bounded by the spatial arrangement of the wife, the husband, and the mother-in-law. Occupying this center point are the

elaborately carved door and window headstones featuring stars, crescent moons, and lattice lines. The aesthetic effects of chisel and hammer work which effaced the stone's unruly protrusions and exposed what was always hidden underneath, testify to the deeply intimate relationship between the lithic and the human, between house and home. The triangle is obviously a point of pride for the owners, as well as of keen interest to Mr. Raad, who painted this scene with his camera. Newer than the rest of the structure (note the vegetation emerging between the older stone work on the top right side of the frame), the room(s) behind the door and window are likely a more recent addition to an older and more massive extended family house. The addition projects a mobile rootedness that carries within it many potential futures driven by the apparent prosperity, dynamism, and fecundity of the family that lives in it. Anchored by the stone house, it is not surprising that the husband, wife, mother-in-law, and many of the children stare back at the camera lens without hesitation, dissipating the power relationship between the photographer and the photographed. It is as if they are saying: "We are here, right where we belong."

It is heartbreaking to imagine the fate of the house and the family; especially the children, who would be young men and women by the time of the 1936–39 revolt, and tragically destined to enter the abyss of 1948 precisely when they should have been celebrating new additions to the family house to accommodate their own offspring. Between 1921 when the British Mandate for Palestine officially began and 1948 when the Mandate ended, their homeland was violently transformed and then ethnically cleansed and dynamited. Some may not have survived the violence of British counterinsurgency campaigns or the Zionist military conquest, which were replete with indiscriminate killing and demolitions of the built environment. Some may have become refugees, never to return. Still others may have continued to live on their ancestral land, but under the suffocating weight of hostile states dedicated to their elimination as a rights-bearing political community.

The fact is, we do not know what happened to the people or the house in the photograph. We do not even know who they were, how they are related, whether this is a family house, or who built this structure.²

The preceding speculative reading of the image is not meant to romanticize, but to seed the imagination about the changing relationship between house and home in twentieth-century Palestine. This is by way of introducing the second set of peer-reviewed articles culled from the sixth annual workshop of New Directions in Palestinian Studies (NDPS), held in March 2019 at Brown University on the theme of "Palestinian Homes and Houses: Subjectivities and Materialities," and organized by Beshara Doumani and Alex Winder.

The editorial in the previous issue (*JQ* 83) identified many of the intellectual and political stakes of this theme and introduced three articles that ranged from the late Ottoman period to the present, and from merchant homes in Bethlehem to planned neighborhoods and Airbnb in Ramallah. The four peer reviewed articles in this issue (*JQ* 84) – Nimrod Ben Zeev on newly-minted "Palestinian citizens of Israel" working in the Israeli construction industry after 1948; Lauren Banko on home-

making by regional migrants in Mandate Palestine; Heidi Morrison on the trauma of Palestinian children whose homes were invaded by Israeli military forces in the Second Intifada; and Sabrien Amrov on the representation of Palestinian domestic space in the Israel Museum – contribute to widening the range of this important line of inquiry. Although they draw on different disciplines and theoretical frames, they all touch on the intimacies and material politics generated by the relationship between house and home, specifically, the act of “home-making.”

The stories the authors tell are painful to contemplate, but they all contain glimmers of hope. Nimrod Ben Zeev’s article, “‘We Built This Country’: Palestinian Citizens in Israel’s Construction Industry, 1948–1973,” blends ethnographic, oral history, and archival research methods to follow the lives of Palestinian citizens of Israel in the Israeli construction industry, as well as the impact their experiences had on their lives and on those of their families and communities. The transformation of many (men), like the husband in the cover image, from native agriculturalists and artisans into racialized migrant workers without ever leaving the homeland, speaks to displacement in place and the gendered political economy of the construction industry. Of course, the building of settlers’ homes by indigenous people is a common irony in modern history. Yet, like all ironies, this process is filled with ambiguities, contingencies, heroic everyday struggles, and unintended consequences. Ben Zeev sensitively examines the gendered homemaking politics as embodied in the actual construction by construction workers of their own homes in an attempt to remake themselves, their families, and their communities after the Nakba.

This speculative reading of the cover photograph is not seduced by how its composition seems to flatten the notion of Palestine and the Palestinians to a depoliticized and sanitized form of authentic peasant utopia that is rudely interrupted, then erased, by a violent settler colonial process. Around the time the picture was taken, Palestine was indeed shaken up by riots against British occupation and Zionist encroachment. But the 1920s also heralded a period of rapid urbanization, intensive economic activity after the hiatus of the First World War, and the laying of the institutional infrastructure of a colonial state with borders, currency, and passports. Important but overlooked participants in the process are the thousands of economic migrants and refugees who entered Palestine from the surrounding region in search of livelihoods and a safe haven. They went on to strike roots through working as laborers and establishing businesses, as well as through owning homes and establishing families. At the same time, many had to contend with a British colonial state that cast them as illegal and sought to deport them. Lauren Banko’s “Migrants, Residents, and the Cost of Illegal Home-making in Mandate Palestine” shines a light on a diverse population completely elided by the national and settler colonial binaries that dominate knowledge production on Mandate Palestine. Through petitions, letters, and bureaucratic records, Banko constructs a series of intimate and moving microhistories of ordinary migrants and refugees – Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi, Greek, Armenian, and others – for whom Palestine became a home and a haven. The material and affective investments of home-making by those whom the

colonial state deemed as “non-citizens,” only deepened and made more poignant the efforts to resist deportation. Banko’s innovative line of inquiry requires scholars to think more deeply and openly about the nature of the colonial state, about the social history of Palestine, and about the meanings of home during the transition from empire to nation state.

These intimacies of the relationship between house and home, like the pitch-black spaces behind the three stone arches at the bottom of the cover image, are largely hidden behind a thick veil. But the next two authors found innovative ways of seeing. Heidi Morrison’s “Unchilding by Domicidal Assault: Narrating Experiences of Home during the Second Intifada” draws on multiple interviews with Palestinians who were children during the Second Intifada, as well as Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s concept of unchilding, to analyze the trauma left by Israeli military assaults during that uprising, which invaded and destroyed Palestinians’ home spaces. Poignantly written and creatively structured as an architectural walkthrough – from liminal spaces, like windows, doors, and rooftops that marked the boundaries between interior and exterior, to those like the bed, associated with home’s innermost sanctuary – the essay takes the reader deep into the memories, experiences, and feelings of Palestinians whose lives were scarred by Israel’s violence during the Second Intifada.

Sabrien Amrov, in “Virtual Reality Encounters at the Israel Museum: Palestinian Homes and Heartland,” uses the Israeli artist Daniel Landau’s virtual reality (VR) installation *Visitors* as an entry point to explore the relationship between intimacy, scale, and the domestic. In *Visitors*, museumgoers are able to “enter” (via VR technology) two homes, one belonging to an Israeli family in Modi’in settlement and the other belonging to a Palestinian family in Husan village. Not only does the installation produce a sense of symmetry between the homes that belies the asymmetrical relationship between the colonizer and the colonized, but, Amrov argues, it seeks in the domestic sphere a “cultural” rather than “political” space within which intimacy is possible. Amrov draws on a feminist tradition to delink intimacy and domesticity and reintroduce politics into the home – especially in Palestinian homes that are subject to persistent campaigns of de-development, destruction, invasion, and other forms of settler-colonial violence.

By contrast, Nadim Bawalsa reflects in “Teta Nabiha’s” on the kind of intimate encounters, primarily those with his mother, that emerge as he attempts to visit the home of his great-grandmother Nabiha (the grandmother of Edward Said) in the Talbiyya neighborhood of Jerusalem. Bawalsa enlists his family in this project and, in the end, seeks to “reimagine Palestinian narratives of return,” to go beyond loss and sorrow and to account for humor, love, and sentimentality. Bawalsa’s reflection was originally a notable submission to the Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem. He is joined in that regard by Hadeel Salameh whose “And They Go on Learning” examines the impact of military rule on children and youth attaining early education.

A different kind of military impact on education is examined by Jihad Suleiman Al Masri in “Maqdisi Ulema Displaced during the Crusades and Their Influence on Intellectual Life in Damascus,” another notable submission to the Dakkak Award in 2020. One effect of the Crusader conquest of Jerusalem, and the atrocities that accompanied it, was the diminution of Jerusalem as an Islamic intellectual and educational center. Yet Jerusalem’s loss was, in a sense, Damascus’s gain, as Maqdisi families – literally “Jerusalemmites,” but with an expansive enough sense of the word to include the Qudama family from the town of Jamma‘il, now known as Jamma‘in, outside Nablus – migrated to Damascus and established themselves as pillars of the intellectual world there. Al Masri indicates the particular impact that the Qudama had as key figures within the Hanbali *madhhab* in Damascus, but also in establishing the Salihyya neighborhood perched to the north of the Old City, on the slopes of Mount Qasiyun.

Meanwhile, in “An Honest Broker?” Roberto Mazza revisits the life and career of Otis Glazebrook, the U.S. consul to Jerusalem during World War I, to address similar kinds of tectonic shifts shaping the region and the Holy City nearly a millennium later. Whereas Glazebrook has in recent years been portrayed by Zionists as an “anti-Zionist,” in this article Mazza shows how the kind of relief and aid projects that developed during the war, and in which Glazebrook played a key role, reconfigured the U.S. role in Jerusalem and, in particular, the U.S. relationship with the city’s Jewish community. Mazza, also the editor of the diary of Antonio de la Cierva y Lewita Conde de Ballobar, the Spanish consul to Jerusalem during World War I, thus provides a nuanced account of the life and career of Glazebrook himself, while also shedding light on the crucial role that World War I played in forging links between U.S. humanitarianism in the Middle East and the growing Zionist movement.

This issue also contains documentation from the Jerusalem Statistical Yearbook of 2020, published annually by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics indicating trends and patterns in demography, health, labor force, living standards, education, culture, construction, agriculture and land use, and environment. It includes riveting material on such unrecognized issues as domestic violence against married and unmarried women and prevalence of violence against children within the family. Data from the census of 2017 released recently by the PCBS contains significant detailed information on regional differentiations in the occupied territories. Here, we provide main indicators on household composition for the greater Jerusalem localities. The main limitation of these statistical collections, however, is their limited ability to produce data for the whole of Jerusalem, including the localities of the city that came under Israeli control in 1967.

As this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* goes to press, the COVID-19 pandemic has been ravaging the city, and the region, at unprecedented rates. The recent death of our colleague, artist Muhammad Joulani, from cancer complicated by COVID-19, at the age of thirty-seven, reminded us of the reality of shortened mortality for so many others during this time. Joulani became well known and admired for his provocative

paintings of Jerusalem daily life exhibited throughout the public spaces of the city in 2016. Overnight he was dubbed “Banksy of Palestine.” His premature departure is lamented here by Rana Anani in “A Death Foretold.” The obituary is accompanied by Joulani’s last prescient and oracular painting containing his faded image leaving a crowded old city room into a foggy unknown.

Endnotes

- 1 Raad used the spelling “Chalil Raad” professionally, seen here on the sign of his Jaffa Road shop in Jerusalem, online at (paljourneys.org) bit.ly/3jBmjc3 (accessed 28 October 2020).
- 2 The catalogue entry for the photograph has no date and identifies the house (apparently by mistake) as the “Bethany [al-‘Ayzariya]: Tomb of Lazarus,” Raad Catalogue No. R-1921, Institute for Palestine Studies archives.