

EDITORIAL

The Everyday and the Shadow Years

In the Palestinian imaginary, one is hard-pressed to find a figure more evocative of the centrality of everyday life to social reproduction, and of family relations to political sensibilities, than that of the grandmother. It is not surprising, therefore, that the news of ninety-year-old Muftiya Tlaib from the village of Bayt ‘Ur al-Fawqa defiantly rebuking U.S. president Donald Trump for calling on Israel to deny entry to her granddaughter, Rashida Tlaib, has unleashed a Twitter storm around the hashtag #MyPalestinianSitty.¹ In her Palestinian *thawb*, standing next to a limestone house, her face wrinkled like the surrounding hillside terraces of olive trees, the momentary grandmother of us all, *sitty* Muftiya, reminds us that the political is much more than politics, and that the agency of ordinary Palestinians is multifaceted, pervasive, and persistent, especially when it comes to the relationship to land and the meaning of “home.”

Sitty Muftiya’s fifteen minutes of fame also reminded the *Jerusalem Quarterly* editors of a special issue published in 2007 (*JQ* 30), with an introduction titled “My Grandmother and Other Stories: Histories of Palestinians as Social Biographies” by Beshara Doumani, the guest editor of that issue and current editor of *JQ*. The articles were culled from three workshops on “Silenced Histories: Toward an Agenda of Research on the Social and Cultural History of the Palestinians,” organized by the Institute for Jerusalem Studies in the summer of 2006.² The letter of invitation asked participants to write about their grandmothers or any other person from their generation in order to “expose a set of relationships normally hidden in the shadows of political history.” The idea

was that writing ordinary Palestinians into history is critical to contemporary political practice, for it is difficult to imagine how Palestinians can have agency as well as take responsibility for their own actions if their lives and memories are not central to narratives about the past.

The urge to shift the focus from the trials and tribulations of political elites to the everyday lives of “ordinary” Palestinians, including Palestinian women, is not new. It gained in momentum since the 1950s with the second wave of the Palestinian national movement which, as the pioneering work of anthropologist Rosemary Sayigh has shown, was built on the transformation of peasant refugees into freedom fighters. This populist phase opened a large space for thinking about Palestinians, not just Palestine. True, writings on the politics of the “Palestinian-Israeli conflict” still dominate bookshelves, but works that put ordinary Palestinians at the center of academic inquiry and that take seriously oral history, locally generated sources, and ethnographic work have grown rapidly, in quality and number, especially since the 1990s.

The lead articles in this issue – by Charles Anderson, Nimrod Ben Zeev, and Adel Manna – are cases in point. They were initially presented at the fifth annual workshop of New Directions in Palestinian Studies (NDPS), held at Brown University in March 2018 under the theme: “The Shadow Years: Material Histories of Everyday Life.”³ Organized by Alex Winder and Beshara Doumani, the workshop called for papers on Palestinian daily struggles for survival under conditions of settler colonialism, for these struggles constitute a rich archive of potential histories, hitherto obscured by the deep shadows cast by violent ruptures, such as 1917, 1948, and 1967. The goal was not to avoid the political, but to recast and contextualize moments of great trauma and violence within the larger dynamics of Palestinian society. Three other papers from the NDPS workshop were published in a special issue of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* in 2018 and others will appear in a forthcoming special issue of *JQ*.⁴

Charles Anderson’s “The Suppression of the Great Revolt and the Destruction of Everyday Life in Palestine” makes two claims. First, that the British government waged a war against the very foundations of Palestinian daily life, employing such tactics as large-scale demolitions and movement restrictions, in order to defeat the 1936–39 rebellion. And second, that these tactics of indiscriminate collective punishment were largely adopted by the Israeli government after 1948. Although not fleshed out in the article, these findings echo the systematic dismantling of indigenous communities in the United States and elsewhere under conditions of settler colonialism. This article is nicely complemented by Ahmed Alaqra’s piece on spatial practices in Qalandiya refugee camp near Jerusalem. Also drawing on the concept of the “everyday,” Alaqra argues that daily practices of space making produce new systems of meanings that allow for collective and individual forms of agency.

Nimrod Ben Zeev’s article on the social life of cement in Mandate Palestine – based on a wide range of Zionist, British, and Palestinian sources – makes a compelling argument about the fundamental importance of cement to power struggles for controlling the built environment, to contestations over the meanings of modernity, to Zionist practices of Hebrew Labor, and to the political aspirations of Palestinian

entrepreneurs. His original research on the failed pre-1948 attempt to establish a Palestinian cement company that could break the Zionist monopoly introduces a crucial line of inquiry about the racial logics of colonialism and capitalism as embodied in British legal governance in its colonies. His findings, moreover, are full of insights relevant to the current centrality of cement to the Palestinian condition whether in cement-starved Gaza or overbuilt Ramallah.

Adel Manna's "Resistance and Survival in Central Galilee, July 1948–July 1951," looks at a period, a region, and a social group (rural inhabitants) that lie in the darkest shadows of 1948. The question he poses is a counterintuitive one: what explains the fact that most inhabitants of the Galilee were able to stay on their land despite several massacres and at a time when so many villages in other areas of Palestine were ethnically cleansed and then destroyed? Based on oral history, personal biography, family papers, and Israeli archives, Manna tells stories of struggle and survival largely unknown to most Palestinians. It is quite striking, in fact, how little we know about the everyday lives of Palestinians in the years immediately following the Nakba, not to mention in the pre-colonial era.

In this regard, we are pleased to include in this issue of *JQ* a rare letter, written in 1905 by Siddiq al-Khalidi to her son Ruhi about another son, Thurayya. The letter sheds light on one of the most important station stops in the life cycle of the everyday: marriage. Transcribed, annotated, and analyzed by Khader Salameh, the letter describes the three major components of the marriage process: the engagement, the contract, and the wedding ceremony. There is much to learn here about a leading Jerusalem family. Salameh's biographies of the main personalities featured in the letter, culled from other sources in the Khalidi Library, provide, along with the letter itself, a rare insider's view of the social and political dimensions of marriage strategies, and the pivotal role that women – grandmothers and mothers alike – played in material and affective relations that inform the everyday of Palestinian life.

A dozen years after Siddiq's letter to Ruhi, World War I and Britain's conquest of Jerusalem and declaration of support for Zionism brought about the first major rupture in the twentieth-century history of the Palestinians. As Walid Habbas illuminates in his review of Stanley Weintraub's *The Recovery of Jerusalem, 1917: Jerusalem for Christmas*, the war cast a shadow not only over the everyday lives of Palestinians, but also over the British soldiers who, in December 1917, "advanced without stopping from Gaza toward Jerusalem, with the goal of presenting the holy city to the British nation as a Christmas gift." Habbas examines these biographic details frequently obscured by the fog of biblical framing and Orientalizing of what was essentially a strategic campaign to link British interests in the Mediterranean with those in the Indian Ocean.

Now, more than a century later, everyday life for Jerusalemites continues to become ever harder and more complicated, as Israel advances new policies to entrench its de facto annexation of most of occupied East Jerusalem. The impact of Israeli policies was elaborated upon in a report published by the International Crisis Group in June 2019, titled *Reversing Israel's Deepening Annexation of Occupied East Jerusalem*.

In it, the ICG details the excision of Palestinian-inhabited areas according to Israeli plans, but also cogently argues why and, most importantly, how to reverse this process. *JQ* is pleased to publish excerpts of this timely report, especially as the next Israeli government will almost certainly seek to further Israel's hitherto incomplete annexation of parts of the city by moving forward with its five-year plan, now in its second year.

Finally, this issue goes to press with the sad news of the passing of Kamal Boullata, the notable painter, poet, and leading art historian from Jerusalem. In addition to his groundbreaking works on the development of Palestinian art, Boullata had contributed a valuable historical article on "Daoud Zalatimo and Jerusalem Painting during the Mandate" to *JQ* 70. He also designed the distinctive *Journal of Palestine Studies* bird logo as well as several of the journal's covers. *Jerusalem Quarterly* editors participated in his moving funeral at Jabal Sihyun, where his mortal remains arrived via airplane from Berlin. In tribute to Boullata, we are printing one of his recent works on the back cover of this issue.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for example, the headline of an article in *HuffPost*: "Twitter Bursts with 'Sitty' Love for Palestinian Grandmas after Israel Bans Rashida Tlaib." Mary Papenfuss, "Twitter Bursts with 'Sitty' Love for Palestinian Grandmas after Israel Bans Rashida Tlaib," *HuffPost*, 18 August 2019, online at www.huffpost.com/entry/rashida-tlaib-muftiyah-tlaib-israel-palestine-sitty-twitter_n_5d58c3a9e4b056fafd0d0731 (accessed 27 August 2019).
- 2 See Beshara Doumani, "My Grandmother and Other Stories: Histories of the Palestinians as Social Biographies," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 30 (Spring 2007): 3–10.
- 3 NDPS provides a platform for rigorous theoretical and methodological discussion of research agendas about Palestine and the Palestinians, and on the spaces of political mobilization they open and foreclose. An initiative of the Middle East Studies Program at Brown University, NDPS is dedicated to decolonizing the field of Palestinian studies and promoting its integration into larger streams of critical intellectual inquiry, especially by supporting the work of emerging scholars. For further details on the 2018 workshop, see online at palestinianstudies.org/workshops/2018 (accessed 29 August 2019).
- 4 See Beshara Doumani and Alex Winder, "1948 and Its Shadows," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 48, no. 1 (Autumn 2018): 7–15.

Corrigenda:

In *Jerusalem Quarterly* 78, the review of *Ordinary Jerusalem, 1840–1940* mistakenly defines *citadinité* as "urban citizenry" (page 135, paragraph 2, line 5). The sentence should have defined *citadinité* as "urbanity." The online version is corrected accordingly.