

EDITORIAL

Who Owns Palestine?

At about 1:30 a.m. on Monday, 6 September, six Palestinians imprisoned in Israel's Gilboa prison emerged out of a tunnel, dug painstakingly with kitchen implements, into the night air of freedom. Of the six, Zakariya Zubaydi had the highest international profile, having risen to prominence as a leader of the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigade in Jenin refugee camp during the second intifada and, in 2006, as co-founder with Juliano Mer Khamis of the Freedom Theater in Jenin refugee camp. The other five, affiliated with Islamic Jihad, were Ya'qub Qadiri of Bir al-Basha, Munadil Nafay'at of Ya'bad, Iham Kamamji of Kafr Dan, and the cousins Muhammad and Mahmud al-'Arida of 'Arraba. The news of their "self-liberation" rippled across the news and social media, with Palestinians and their supporters marveling at the improbable – cinematic, even – feat.

Israel's recapture of the six men over the following two weeks put a damper on the initial enthusiasm that greeted their escape. But it remains a source of pride and energy, especially coming on the heels of the events of the past summer – the activism against Palestinian displacement that coalesced in and around Shaykh Jarrah; the eruption of protests throughout Palestine, including Lydda, Haifa, Jaffa, Acre, and elsewhere in the '48 territories, which were frequently met by violent Israeli vigilantism; another round of Israeli bombardment of Gaza, prompting global protests that brought thousands to the streets in Amman, Istanbul, Cape Town, Madrid, Paris, Berlin, and various cities in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Ireland; and the sustained resistance by the villagers of Bayta and

other volunteers to the imposition of Evyatar colony on Jabal Sbayh. The prisoners' escape returned focus to the condition of Palestinians in Israeli detention – many held indefinitely without charge – especially after Israeli authorities, embarrassed by the escape, intensified their maltreatment of prisoners, subjecting them to additional harassment, searches, and transfers, and denied access to the Red Cross. Palestinians imprisoned by Israel have responded by setting fire to their prison cells and launching a mass hunger strike.

Qadiri, Kamamji, and the al-‘Arida cousins were serving life sentences, confined to an Israeli prison cell for the remainder of their days (or until political negotiations might allow for a prisoner release); Zubaydi, who has spent multiple stints in Israeli and Palestinian prisons, had been charged in an Israeli military court, and was awaiting a verdict; Nafay‘at had been imprisoned without charge. In a sense, Israel’s prisons are the ultimate embodiment of its carceral temporal and spatial regime that seeks to immobilize Palestinians, freezing them indefinitely in confinement. Beyond the real physical freedom, however temporary, that the escape granted these six individuals, it resonated symbolically, suggesting that even in those spaces where Israel’s carceral regime is most stringent, resistance is not only possible, but can achieve liberation.

The prison may present this carceral logic in its most distilled form, but it can be found, too, in the blockade of Gaza or in the restriction of movement by walls and checkpoints in the West Bank. As Reem Shraydeh writes in “The Politics of Power around Qalandiya Checkpoint,” a notable submission to the 2021 Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem, Palestinian bodies at checkpoints are “humiliated, subjected, regulated, trained, made obedient in order to serve the colonial plan that turns them into occupied subjects.” Moreover, whereas Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish*, posited that modern states sought to make bodies docile in order to discipline them, thereby making them more compliant and thus more useful workers, soldiers, students, and citizens, for Palestinians the result is not usefulness but waste: wasted time that renders them a kind of disposable surplus population, justifying further confinement (or, potentially, elimination). Shraydeh’s essay, however, focuses not only on the carceral time-space of the checkpoint, but also on Palestinian efforts to manipulate and resist this regime using various tactics to manipulate events in order to turn them into opportunities of mobility, to turn “checkpoint time” into “survival time.”

Shraydeh also observes that one of the insidious ways in which Israel has erected its system of walls and checkpoints in the West Bank, as with its siege of Gaza, is through a claim of temporariness. These are all justified as responses to immediate “security” necessities, and thus temporary. The experience of the indefinite temporary also informs Kjersti Berg’s article “Mu‘askar and Shu‘fat: Retracing the Histories of Two Palestinian Refugee Camps in Jerusalem.” As Berg notes, Palestinian refugee camps, especially those in Lebanon, have been the sites of research for anthropologists, geographers, and architects, “but historians have largely stayed out of the camps The refugee camp is a blind spot of historians – invisible to or invisibilized by them!” Their supposed temporary nature has perhaps given the impression that they exist

in the present, with no important past or future. In her article, Berg traces the 1966 removal of Palestinian refugees from Mu‘askar camp in the Old City of Jerusalem to Shu‘fat refugee camp, which was planned by UNRWA in the 1960s with hopes to avoid some of the problems of crowding and physical deterioration that characterized camps established in the immediate wake of the Nakba. Yet Berg shows how UNRWA officials abandoned these plans, ultimately building Shu‘fat camp to low standards and predicting “that it, too, would soon deteriorate into an urban slum.”

Palestinians living in Mu‘askar were unsurprisingly resistant to leaving Jerusalem’s Old City for such a destination. Yet, once they did, they set about making Shu‘fat their own: adding new rooms and floors to existing structures in defiance of UNRWA regulations. As the population of the camp grew and time elapsed, questions of property rights in the camp became increasingly important. Officially, neither the refugees nor UNRWA owned the land in the camp, and thus land was not alienable; however, “refugees have attempted to define ownership by practice.” Berg thus not only makes visible a history of Mu‘askar camp, largely forgotten, but raises questions about the durable yet precarious forms of ownership that have evolved in Shu‘fat camp – a system that has become all the more crucial as Israeli impositions on Palestinians with Jerusalem residency have made Shu‘fat a “desirable” location. Further, as Berg notes, refugees’ claims to rights within the camp do not entail an acceptance of dispossession but rather, because the land in the camps also represents a link to historic Palestine, an articulation of the right of return.

“Mu‘askar and Shu‘fat” evolved out of Berg’s presentation at the 2020 New Directions in Palestinian Studies (NDPS) workshop at Brown University, organized by Beshara Doumani and Paul Kohlbry, which took as its theme “Who Owns Palestine?” and invited papers on the past, present, and future of ownership and on what it means to “own” Palestine.¹ Elizabeth Bentley, another participant in the 2020 NDPS workshop, takes a more unusual approach to the question of ownership, asking readers to consider the crocodile. More specifically, Bentley conducts a rhetorical historiography of the “last Palestinian crocodile” and the desire by colonial zoologists to acquire this singular figure – several of which can be found today in British, German, and Israeli collections. By analyzing the rhetoric of extinction, Bentley attends to pernicious forms of “slow violence” that are often absent from headlines following political developments. Bentley connects colonial publics’ interest in the “last Palestinian crocodile” to “violent histories of colonial resource extraction, racialized labor exploitation, and indigenous human dispossession” – and especially the drainage of the Zor al-Zarqa/Kabbara marshlands and the displacement of and confinement of the Ghawarna community that lived in these lands. By contrast, Bentley shows how the community-based research by Ghawarna individuals today “opens analytical pathways for recognizing – even mourning – the loss of nonhuman animal life in Palestine without valuing it over indigenous human life.” In an era of intensified attention to the impact of climate change on human and nonhuman animal life, and of Israeli greenwashing, such approaches feel necessary and urgent.

Two further pieces in this issue of *JQ* shed light on the kinds of lives, careers,

networks, and politics that (human) Palestinians forged in the early twentieth century. Mitri Raheb provides an account of the pioneering Palestinian photographer Karimeh Abbud, born in the late nineteenth century to a Protestant family from al-Khiyam, in what is now Lebanon. As Raheb notes, Abbud is in many ways exceptional, standing out as a woman in the male-dominated worlds of photography and entrepreneurship. Yet, her life is also reflective of the massive transformations taking place in late Ottoman and Mandate Palestine, and in particular the shifting gender norms in a middle-class, educated Protestant family. Salim Tamari, in “Rebel at Night, Colonial Official by Day,” reviews the recently published diaries of another Palestinian witness to these massive changes, the journalist, historian, and government official ‘Arif al-‘Arif. Though limited to the period of ‘Arif’s secondment to the Jordanian government in the late 1920s, these diaries illuminate the afterlives of the Ottoman era – as Tamari writes, “a striking feature of these memoirs is the persistence of an Ottoman presence in the lives and politics of the Arab East” – and the birth pangs of the new post-World War I order. ‘Arif’s internal conflicts as a nationalist by inclination, but a servant to British colonial power by occupation, led him to engage with opposition groups and restive tribes, while maintaining a “love-hate relationship” with Jordan’s ruler, Emir ‘Abdallah. Despite its tensions and contradictions, this relationship would eventually lead to ‘Arif’s appointment as mayor of Jerusalem under Jordanian rule post-1948.

Rounding out the issue, contributions from Philip Farah and Nadim Bawalsa emphasize ongoing Israeli efforts to erase Palestinians from Jerusalem – and Palestinians’ resistance to them, on full display this past summer. Farah writes of his parents who, after fleeing the Jerusalem neighborhood of Musrara as refugees in 1948, finally found housing in the nearby neighborhood of Shaykh Jarrah. As their family grew, they hired a teenage girl, Rasmiya, to help raise the children. Rasmiya, herself a survivor of the Dayr Yasin massacre, had after 1948 made her home in Silwan. Some seven decades later, Shaykh Jarrah and Silwan are at the center of the Palestinian struggle to maintain their lives and livelihoods in Jerusalem, as Israel seeks to force them out to “Judaize” the city. And, as in the case of Mu‘askar, Palestinians resist such attempts to turn these places of refuge into sites of displacement, turning them into foci of solidarity and mobilization. Similar dynamics play out in the memoir of Mona Hajjar Halaby, *In My Mother’s Footsteps*, reviewed in this issue by Nadim Bawalsa. Born in Egypt to a Palestinian mother and a Syrian father, Halaby moved to Switzerland with her family before settling in California, where she worked for three decades as an educator. Inspired by her mother’s stories, she was drawn to Palestine and moved to Ramallah to teach at the Friends School. As Bawalsa writes, Halaby’s “thoughtful interventions into educating under occupation are punctuated by gripping memories and photos of Palestinian life in Jerusalem before 1948, as recounted in letters her mother Zakia wrote to her.” Refusing to accept the loss of this pre-Nakba Palestine, Halaby organizes a peaceful march through the Jerusalem neighborhood of Talbiyya on the sixtieth anniversary of the Nakba, which she culminated by entering her family home in Baq‘a. Bawalsa, whose own efforts to return, with his mother, to a family home in Jerusalem are recounted in *JQ* 84, notes both the uniqueness and

the familiarity of Halaby's narrative, "at once a tribute to her mother, to Jerusalem, to Ramallah, and to historic Palestine."

Finally, we would like to announce the two new co-editors of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* – Lisa Taraki and Alex Winder – who will serve for three years beginning in January 2022. Both editors bring with them outstanding credentials and a rich career of academic and scholarly work. Lisa Taraki is a sociologist and was a founding member and director of the PhD program in the social sciences at Birzeit University, and Alex Winder is a professor of history at Brown University. They succeed current editors Salim Tamari and Beshara Doumani who will continue with *JQ* as editorial committee members during the next year of transition.

Endnotes

- 1 For further details on the 2020 workshop, see palestinianstudies.org/workshops/2020/who-owns-palestine. Articles developed from NDPS workshops in 2018 and 2019 appeared in *JQ* 79, *JQ* 80, *JQ* 83, and *JQ* 84; the next issue of *JQ* will include additional articles from the 2020 workshop.

Corrigendum:

The name of the translator for two articles that appeared in *JQ* 87 – Ahmad Heneiti's "Jerusalem's Villages: Grey Development and Annexation Plans" and Nazmi Jubeh's "Tariq Bab al-Silsila: A Portrait of an Old City Suq" – was inadvertently omitted from the printed text. Samira Jabaly translated both articles from the original Arabic.