



# JERUSALEM QUARTERLY

**73**  
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Spring 2018

## Narrating the Self

### Biographies I

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**Institutionalized Separation and Sumud in Jerusalem**  
*Oren Kroll-Zeldin*

**Um Hani: To Live and Work in Jerusalem**  
*Penny Johnson and Diala Shamas*

**Mechanisms of a Settler Colonial Architecture**  
*Carol Que*



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Cover photo: A woman and a man from the Domari Gypsies of Jerusalem, ca. 1935. Photo by Elia Kahvedjian, printed with permission.

## Editorial

# Of Memoirs, Miracles, and Sanctification

The current issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* returns to the themes of biography, autobiography, and memoir, celebrated in several previous issues. Contributions in this selection address their authors' personal coming of age in the city of Jerusalem or its environs (Silwan, Bayt Jala, Lydda). But these biographical vignettes address broader issues of biography's contribution to the social history of Palestine. Autobiographic literature – that is, the subjective narratives of actual people – can help trace changes in the texture of urban social consciousness in the Holy City. Thus it allows for the examination of the emergence of new mores, normative ethics, and the decline of old conventions and solidarities in, for example, the city's transition from Ottoman decentralism and the emergence of a separatist Palestinian nationalism, or in the aftermath of the momentous events of 1948, as well as in historical periods that are often overlooked because they are seen as mundane.

Jerusalemite autobiographies of the early twentieth century have been confined (mostly) to individuals who experienced the period from a relatively privileged position – it was mostly professional and upper-class men (and hardly any women) who left memoirs and diaries. Here, we include a broader cross section of Palestinians. These selections, and those in the forthcoming issue of *JQ*, nuance and even redefine the categories and boundaries that have so often been imposed upon the Holy City. Here Jerusalem characters, downtrodden or elevated, sacred or worldly, have bequeathed to us written narratives of their lives that illuminate the transformation of the city and its people over the last century and a half.

These lives, sometimes contemporaneous, reveal worlds of contrasting possibilities. In a town that can be crossed from one end to the other in less than three hours walking, or one hour by carriage, they shared a certain common life, while exhibiting different

ideologies, tastes, inclinations, and hopes that may now be unthinkable in a world of homogenizing globalization. They uncover a city that, despite its grim reputation and communal warfare, is surprisingly alive with intellectual, cultural, and political debates. Religion itself is not cloistered and inward looking, but ecstatic and miraculous.

Jacob Norris writes a biography of Saint Marie-Alphonsine Ghattas (1843–1927), founder of the Sisters of the Rosary in the nineteenth century and the third Palestinian woman canonized by the Catholic Church after Mary of Nazareth (28 BC–32 AD) and Saint Barbara of ‘Abbud (first century AD). Norris draws on magical realist and Arabic folkloric methods of storytelling to recount a widely attested miracle that occurred in Bethlehem in 1909 – the death and subsequent resurrection of a Bethlehem merchant named Jubra’il Dabdoub by St. Marie-Alphonsine – and the lives that unfolded around it. Magical realism serves as both a literary genre and an approach to history, capturing lives entwined in processes of rapid technological change, migration, and political belonging, but also in the worlds of piety, magic, and religiosity. Marie-Alphonsine’s interactions with the supernatural, central to her life narrative, come alive in Norris’s telling:

As Marie-Alphonsine was sifting wheat with the orphan children in the playground of the Sisters’ school, she instinctively began to pray the Rosary and make the sign of the cross. Getting up to fetch some water, she opened the well to find a strange snake writhing in the water, changing its size as it moved and flicking its enormous forked tongue. People gathered from all over the town, including a Salesian priest who poured holy water into the well. But none could remove the hideous beast from the water. In the morning Marie-Alphonsine opened the well to find the snake had disappeared. For the rest of that summer the Sisters drank from the well until the water had run dry. When they washed the base of the well they found no hole from which the snake might have escaped, and so were left with no option but to conclude they had been visited by the Devil. As Marie-Alphonsine recorded in her notebook, “We deduced al-Shaytan had been so enraged by our recitation of the Rosary that he was thrashing around inside the well. The experience brought no fear to us, but rather increased our veneration of Mariam our Mother.

As Norris weaves such popular religious beliefs and practices into his retelling of St. Marie-Alphonsine’s life and miracles, he also explores remarkable tales of Palestinian migration in the nineteenth century. Recent scholarship has offered rich and nuanced access to the experiences of nineteenth-century Palestinian migrants to North and South America, but Jubra’il Dabdoub, the man for whom Marie-Alphonsine performed her most famous miracle, had traveled different routes, embarking on merchant voyages first to Copenhagen and later to the Philippines.

Several decades later, a different kind of remarkable journey led George Rodenko from the town of Klinty in Russian Ukraine to the Palestinian city of Jaffa. One of the many uprooted by the twin forces of war and revolution, Rodenko – known to many in Palestine as al-duktur al-maskubi, the Muskobi Doctor – found himself studying medicine at the

American University of Beirut, from which he graduated in June 1927. After practicing medicine in Tripoli, Rodenko set out for Gaza and eventually settled down in Jaffa, where he married Frida Bahou, the head nurse of the clinic, and started a family. The Rodenko family fled Jaffa for Ramallah in 1948 and remained there after the Nakba. Dr. Rodenko passed away in 1974, before he was able to finish his memoirs, but his reminiscences of his early years are excerpted here, a testament to the great upheavals of the first half of the twentieth century, but also the resilience of those who survived them. Despite its many hardships and tensions, Dr. Rodenko recalls pre-Nakba Jaffa fondly: “In the afternoons, I used to go to a coffeehouse called Abu Shakush. I played pinochle and rummy with Dr. Burdkush and Mr. Saba, who was a pharmacist. In the evenings, we went to play cards at our neighbor Mrs. Halliway’s.” This is one of the characteristics of life narratives – how they reflect unabstracted lives, where distinctions between public and private, the social and the professional, are blurred to the point of obliteration.

This is also one of the contributions of “A Young Man of Promise,” Sarah Irving’s Ibrahim Dakkak Award-winning profile of Stephan Hanna Stephan, archaeologist, ethnographer, translator, broadcaster, and scholar of Jerusalem during the British Mandate period. Beyond an examination of the scholarly output of this polymath, Irving also foregrounds “the complexity of life under the Mandate, in which relations between Palestinian Arabs and Jews and members of the British administration overlapped on a daily basis, defying clear lines and easy ex post facto assumptions about personal and professional relations between the different communities.” At the same time, Irving performs an invaluable excavation and reassembling of Stephan’s largely forgotten, but remarkable and varied, career. “The breadth of his duties and knowledge is highlighted by the range of publications and projects which bear his mark,” Irving notes, “ranging from translations of Ottoman legal documents, to co-authorship of Dimitri Baramki’s report on excavations at a Nestorian hermitage in the Jordan Valley.” And these are just samples of Stephan’s scholarly pursuits. He also made accessible his wealth of knowledge via a number of guidebooks for travelers and tourists.

Of course, as Tarif Khalidi’s playful but eloquent life-narrative reveals, books are not just the product of an intellectual life, but its sustenance as well. It is perhaps not surprising that Khalidi, one of the leading intellectual historians of the Arab world, author of *Arabic Historical Thought in the Classical Period* and *The Muslim Jesus*, and translator into English of the Qur’an, has decided to structure an autobiography – *al-Kutub wa Ana* (Books and I), from which his article here is extracted – through his engagement with books. Books serve here as a source of delight, tension, solace, and intellectual inquiry. Khalidi’s adventures with books – and with history, for the two are intertwined – start at al-Umma School in Jerusalem, whose principal was Shukri Harami, “from whom one glare was enough to silence the rowdiest of classes.”

He taught history and perhaps at the time I sought his approval. Hence, from that distant time, history became my favorite subject. My passionate interest in history pushed me from Kamil Kilani to Jirji Zaydan, whose novels I devoured: *al-‘Abbasa*, *Sister of al-Rashid*, *al-Amin* and *al-Ma’mun*,

*The Conquest of al-Andalus, The Fugitive Mamluk, Salah al-Din and the Intrigues of the Assassins*, and many, many other tales that I cannot now recall. No doubt, a whole generation of Arab youths read these alluring stories that revived Arab history as vivid literature, full of lifelike characters that the reader could almost see, touch, and converse with, feeling happiness during their joyous occasions and crying for their losses. Zaydan's stories included fast action within precise timing and location. The scenes within his stories were cinematic, stealing the readers' breath and leaving them unable to put the book down, even during meals or at bedtime.

From these early childhood textual encounters, Khalidi proceeds to bring alive the important intellectual and political debates from his life in Jerusalem, Beirut, Oxford, and Chicago.

Any collection of modern Palestinian life narratives must also reckon with themes of loss. Of Reja-e Busailah's long-awaited memoirs, *In the Land of My Birth: A Palestinian Boyhood* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 2017) – appearing some forty years after his seminal recollection of the fall of Lydda in *Shu'un Filastiniyya* – and from which we are publishing an excerpt here, Elias Khoury writes:

In apprehending life through sound, through touch, and through the presence or absence of the echo of objects, the blind boy leads us to Palestine through his experience of loss. We accompany him to the blind schools of Jerusalem and Hebron and then back to Lydda and Yafa (Jaffa) to complete his secondary education. Along the way we are offered a rich account of Palestinian life and of the boy's world, a world largely dominated by family, teachers, comrades, and neighbors, of visits to relatives, of school boys' games and pranks and rivalries, of customs and rituals, folk remedies, and incantations and Qur'anic lessons. Increasingly, there is the growing boy's excitement about his studies and passion for literature. Locales are lovingly depicted, and throughout the memoir, the feel of objects and their contours become our guides to a place that is simultaneously lost and present. Loss affirms presence, imbuing it with a different flavor.

The intertwining of loss and presence are further explored in reflections that delve into the impact of two of the most notorious and tragic periods of Palestinian history: 1948 and 1967. In "From Bayt Jala to Jerusalem," the story of Um Hani as told to Diala Shamma, her granddaughter, and *JQ*'s own Penny Johnson, Um Hani describes how, in 1948, her family "fled the Musrara neighborhood after the Jewish forces demolished three houses in their neighborhood but not until Abu Hani had evacuated their neighbor, a Jewish lady – a widow – and her children, to safety."

The family first stayed in Bayt Jala for a few months and then, when bombs began to fall on that village, headed to Jericho, where they rented a small



room in a mud house and remained for nine months. “We stayed in one room with a family. We had no money,” says Um Hani, “but at least we had a car.” With so many Palestinians fleeing to Jordan, the young family reasoned that Abu Hani would be able to work as a taxi driver with his car, ferrying refugees to Amman. Abu Hani began to drive his taxi from Jericho to Amman, but there was still no school open for the children, and the conditions were difficult. Um Hani remembers the flies and the sweltering heat in that house most vividly.

Nazmi al-Jubeh, author of “Sheikh Hassan al-Labadi & Seven Acts of Lost Memory,” one of the memorable biographical pieces published in *JQ 30* (Spring 2007), returns now with his own autobiographical reflections on growing up in Jerusalem’s Old City before and after the 1967 war, including the traumatic events surrounding the destruction of Harat al-Maghariba (Moroccan quarter):

What we saw upon reaching Zawiyat Abu Madyan al-Ghawth, facing east, was indescribably horrific. Right there, at the bottom of the stairs, we saw soldiers, so many of them, heavily armed from head to toe, dancing and singing in a language that we did not understand, and behind them - emptiness. The Moroccan quarter no longer existed. The fig and pomegranate trees were gone, and so were the alleys I used to walk and play in. Muhammad, Sa’id, Si Yusif, Masluhi and his fig tree were not there, the only thing visible under June’s hot sun was a cloud of dust hovering over a heap of rubble. Bulldozers, which I had never seen before in my life, were roaring along their metal chains to the tunes of victory music, completing a job as yet unfinished. That day I saw Ashkenazi rabbis for the first time; they were there in their black attire and strange hats (shtreimel), dancing over the rubble ... dancing over my memories, over the homes of my friends and the paths that I so often frequented. For the first time in my life, I saw the Buraq Wall so huge. It looked unfamiliar, because it had been small, and difficult to see without going down an alley and through a gate first. But now the wall was in the center of the scene, and it was even possible to see al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock from that point, which had never been possible before, blocked by the crowded buildings in the Moroccan quarter.

Thus, the loss of the Moroccan quarter affirms the presence of Jerusalem’s holy sites, while al-Aqsa, the Dome of the Rock, and the Buraq Wall bear witness to the loss of the Moroccan quarter. As these life-narratives indicate, however, Jerusalem is not merely a place – even if it is a space of rich history and symbolic significance – but a lived terrain, in which people read and write, move and interact, heal and even perform miracles. And just as no two individuals live Jerusalem in the same way, the narratives of these lives express their variety, whether it is a life structured around books, a life narrated to a granddaughter, a life experienced through sound and touch and smell, or a life whose

subject is conjured through magical realism and Palestinian folklore.

In addition to its biographic and autobiographic content, this issue of *JQ* also features material that addresses the current dynamics shaping Palestinian lives. In “Institutionalized Separation and Sumud in Jerusalem’s Periphery,” anthropologist Oren Kroll-Zeldin examines the implications of the construction of the separation wall on the community of Shaykh Sa’d, which technically falls outside of the Jerusalem municipality but which is intimately linked – socially, economically, and geographically – with Jabal al-Mukabir, located within the municipal boundary. In fact, a checkpoint in the separation barrier now blocks “the only way in and out of Shaykh Sa’d – except for an unpaved road from the village down to Wadi Nar/Kidron Valley and up a treacherous slope that connects to the West Bank,” stifling the local economy and putting intense pressure on local residents. Kroll-Zeldin explores the impact on holders of Jerusalem residency and West Bank identification papers and production of hierarchy and tension as a result. He also addresses the resilience of Shaykh Sa’d residents, focusing in particular on the establishment of a taxi drivers collective to organize and regulate transportation equitably in the face of a dwindling customer base eroded by Israel’s chokehold. It is not a picture of triumphant victory that the taxi drivers paint, but the grim reality of survival under unbearable pressure. As Ziyad, one of the drivers in the collective, says: “If the world isn’t going your way, you go its way.”

The collective struggle for dignity and survival that the taxi drivers of Shaykh Sa’d exemplify is under attack not only by Israeli policies, but by the insidious individualization encouraged by global neoliberalism. This is one of the dynamics addressed by the noted Birzeit University economist Samia al-Botmeh in her review of Toufic Haddad’s *Palestine Ltd.: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* for this issue of *JQ*. Botmeh notes that Haddad’s title has a double meaning, pointing to Western donor development/peace-building/state-building interventions on the post-Oslo Palestinian economy and institutions as producing a “Palestine Limited,” not only in terms of a Palestinian Authority with limited political sovereignty, but also “with this entity functioning as a variant of a limited shareholding company (Ltd.) with international, regional, and local investors of one type or another. While the dividend to this investment is both direct and indirect financial gain, the primary motivation is to reap political, administrative, and security returns for its investors.”

The economic structures that are the subject of Haddad’s book are made architectural structures in Larissa Sansour’s *Nation Estate*, a “dystopian scenario” in the form of a video installation and film series analyzed by Carol Que in “Mechanisms of a Settler Colonial Architecture.” As Que writes, Sansour “extends Palestine’s one-state reality through an architectural and spatial optic, to shed light on the slow violence of militarization and capitalist production that is built into the settler-colonial environment.” Yet despite the violence to which they are subjected – be it slow or swift, structural or personal, symbolic or corporal, mundane or spectacular – Palestinians continue to craft lives of dignity and meaning. It is this fact that lies at the heart of our focus on biography, autobiography, and memoir in this issue and the next.

Announcing the Winner of  
Ibrahim Dakkak Award  
for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem  
for 2018  
**Sarah Irving**

Teaching Fellow in International History of the Modern Middle East  
King's College London

*for her essay*  
**“A Young Man of Promise”:  
Finding a Place for Stephan Hanna Stephan in the  
History of Mandate Palestine**

The award is U.S. \$1000, and the winning essay is published on page 42

**Jury:** The Editors of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*

**Announcing the 2019 Round**  
Ibrahim Dakkak Award  
for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem

Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem will be awarded to an outstanding essay that addresses either contemporary or historical issues relating to Jerusalem. The winning submission will receive a prize of U.S. \$1000 and will be published in the *Jerusalem Quarterly*.

Essays submitted for consideration should be 4000 to 5000 words in length (including footnotes), should be based on original research, and must not have been previously published elsewhere. Preference will be given to young/junior/aspiring/emerging/early career researchers and students.

Please submit essays and a short bio (including current or previous affiliation with a recognized university, research institution, or non-governmental organization that conducts research) via email to

[jq@palestine-studies.org](mailto:jq@palestine-studies.org)

Any images should be submitted as separate files with resolution of at least 600 dpi if possible. Submitted images must have copyright clearance from owners.

The deadline for submissions is 31 October 2018. A committee selected by *Jerusalem Quarterly* will determine the winning essay.

# Saint Marie-Alphonsine and the Resurrection of Jubra'il Dabdoub

Jacob Norris

*In 1909 two worlds collided in Bethlehem. A successful and cosmopolitan merchant from the town was brought back from the dead by a local nun who had never left Palestine. This article presents an experiment in biographical writing by reconstructing the miracle and the lives that unfolded around it.*

*At first glance, the two protagonists could not appear more different. The merchant, Jubra'il Dabdoub (1860–1931), was among Bethlehem's 'pioneer' generation of merchant migrants – young men who boarded steamships setting sail from Jaffa in the 1870s and 1880s, to travel all over the world in a bid to make their fortunes. The nun, Marie-Alphonsine (1843–1927), born in Jerusalem, was a fiercely devout woman who embraced a life of poverty and founded a religious order, the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters (still active today), devoted to serving local Arab girls and women. In 2015 she and Mariam Bawardi were canonized by Pope Francis as the first Catholic Palestinian female saints.*

*Despite the apparently divergent biographies of these characters, they were both products of the same local society. The article below attempts to place the reader within the world views of Jubra'il Dabdoub and Marie Alphonsine, rather than argue through a detached, analytical style of writing. More specifically, it employs a magical realist mode of storytelling to create a mood in which supernatural occurrences are experienced as routine events while the manifestations of global capitalism are looked upon with wonder and trepidation.*

*As a literary genre, magical realism constantly seeks to destabilize the reader's sense of the mundane and the extraordinary, the illusory and the real. As such it has much to offer historians interested in adapting their writing to mirror subjects who seem unfazed*

by supernatural events while simultaneously living through great social, political or economic upheaval. In the case of Bethlehem, as with Palestine more broadly, profoundly unsettling changes were occurring at the turn of the twentieth century. The article seeks to capture these upheavals through the eyes of the local inhabitants, especially in terms of migration, technology, and the pull of Arab identity, while asserting the sense of magic and piety that underpinned people's experiences of these changes. To achieve consistency in style, I have at times embellished historical sources by drawing on wider research to imagine how a person might have experienced a given event. This is particularly the case with Jubra'il Dabdoub who left behind no written reflections on his life, but only fragments of sources relating to his activities as an itinerant merchant. I have indicated clearly in the endnotes where I have gone beyond the empirically available evidence. Jubra'il Dabdoub is also the subject of a monograph I am currently writing that will explore in more depth the potential of fictional and folkloric narrative techniques to capture the lives of these types of historical actors.



Marie-Alphonsine reviving Jubra'il Dabdoub (painting commissioned for centenary of foundation of Congregation of the Rosary Sisters, Bayt Hanina convent, Jerusalem).

Many years later, as he lay on his second death bed, Jubra'il Dabdoub was to remember his first encounter with 'Izra'il, Angel of Death and transporter of souls to their ultimate destiny.<sup>1</sup> He had contracted the most malicious and lethal form of typhoid fever, known for its certainty to bring death after six days.<sup>2</sup> In those days the disease was rampant in Palestine, especially during the summer months when the bacteria could spread more freely from flies feasting on contaminated water that passed through the open sewage pipes.<sup>3</sup> On the first day, Jubra'il had felt weak and refused his food, immediately raising the suspicions of his wife Mariam. The next day the fever had set in, initially resembling a bout of common flu but quickly developing into something altogether more terrible.

*Franji*<sup>4</sup> doctors from Jerusalem came and went, administering their strange potions but all leaving with an apologetic shrug of the shoulders. By the end of the sixth day the fever was so wild he had to be tied to the bed to prevent him causing further injury to himself.

As he lay thrashing from side to side, gripped by the *jinn* (spirit) of death,<sup>5</sup> he heard the priest, Abuna Francis, begin reciting the last rites: “This is the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. . . .”<sup>6</sup>

As the priest spoke the words of the Eucharist, Jubra’il felt the room and the people in it become ever more distant. He looked upwards and saw the cloaked, winged figure of ‘Izra’il beckoning him to follow.<sup>7</sup> Jubra’il struggled to offer words of protest but ‘Izra’il immediately silenced him. “It is not you or I who decides,” he explained, “only Allah.”<sup>8</sup> As Jubra’il rose into the air he glanced down to see his family gathered around his now lifeless body, burst into shrieks of grief. He was calm now, watching the scene as a curious observer. There was his wife Mariam, still clutching his limp hand, wailing uncontrollably. His son Yusef stood with his head buried in the shoulder of Jubra’il’s brother Mikhail. And there was his sister Sara, frantically tearing her dress to the girdle, later to be sown up with wide stitches as evidence of her mourning.<sup>9</sup> The only one missing was his eldest son Bishara who had been called the day before to attend to important business in Haiti.

From his vantage point on the ceiling, Jubra’il turned sideways and perceived a dark tunnel opening before him. As he glided into it, a series of bizarre images flashed before him, seemingly in no logical order. He saw a church with the words San Lorenzo Ruiz written above it, standing at the end of a street called Calle del Rosario where the cobblestones were made of giant rosary beads. He thought he recognized the scene, possibly from the time he had lived in a great city called Manila at the very edge of the earth. He reached out to touch one of the rosary beads but instead found himself riding on an enormous wheel spinning high above a white city where miniature people and places from every country had been squeezed into just a few dunums of land. Looking down at his unclasped hand he found he had indeed grasped the rosary beads, but they were small now and he was standing on the Boulevard de Strasbourg in Paris, offering the beads to a man in a black frock coat and top hat. He leaned closer to make out the man’s face, finding to his surprise it was his brother Morcos and somehow he had been transported back to the old family home in Bethlehem.<sup>10</sup> He was a young boy now, sobbing as he looked down at this same brother’s dead body. Increasingly bewildered, he glanced ahead down the tunnel to see a brilliant white light approaching. The outline of a woman emerged from the light, her hand outstretched towards him. Instinctively he handed her the rosary beads that were still in his hand and she dipped them into a cup of water. “It is not your time yet,” she whispered softly, and sprinkled some drops onto his forehead.

\* \* \* \* \*

When Sultana Mariam Danil Ghattas died on the twenty-fifth day of March in the year of Our Lord 1927, nobody knew she was a saint.<sup>11</sup> It was clear she was a pious woman, feverishly devoted to “is-Sideh the Virgin Queen and lactator of divine milk.”<sup>12</sup> During a lifetime of service to Allah, she had cured many people from intractable disease and extracted numerous children from the bottom of wells, all through the use of her treasured prayer beads. But such occurrences were common in those days and could not be seen as

proof of sainthood. Sultana, or Marie-Alphonsine as she became known after taking the habit, had not rescued these people by herself. Rather she had used the beads to invoke the intercession of is-Sideh, her heavenly mother and ever-present guiding force.

It was only after Marie-Alphonsine died that the full extent of her heavenly communications became apparent. For over fifty years she had kept her wondrous visions to herself, confiding only in her spiritual mentor and confessor-priest Abuna Yusef Tannus, and in her secret notebooks where she diligently recorded the apparitions. Upon her death a bitter war broke out among the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters – the order Abuna Yusef established upon Marie-Alphonsine’s request. One faction of the sisters was so violently opposed to any suggestion Abuna Yusef was not the sole instigator of the order, they decided to destroy the notebooks that had been discovered after Marie-Alphonsine’s death. Driven by a fierce parochialism that pitted their Nazarene faction (from where Abuna Yusef himself hailed) against Marie-Alphonsine and her fellow Jerusalemites, they burned the manuscripts that had been written with such painstaking care.<sup>13</sup> Luckily for the sake of historical accuracy, the charred notebooks had already been faithfully transcribed by a group of Marie-Alphonsine’s followers, led by her sister Hannah. And so proof of those divine visions was preserved and knowledge of Marie-Alphonsine’s saintly status revealed to the world.

*Bethlehem, 6 January in the year of Our Lord 1874:*

I was reciting the Rosary alone in the Parish School in Bethlehem, in a place decorated for the celebration of the birth of Our Lord Yasua’ the Messiah (adoration be upon him). When I reached the tenth mystery, I was deep in meditation and felt my heart burning with the love of my mother the Virgin Mariam. Suddenly a glorious light appeared to me, beautiful beyond description, and in it the beloved mother, Lady of the Rosary, suddenly appeared as I later depicted her in the picture. She was standing in the midst of glittering clouds, her hand outstretched, her color a kind of luminous white which I cannot explain and whose beauty could not be captured by any description. A rosary was fixed to a cross on her breast, from where it hung down over her hand and all around her in a circle. The beads [*byut*, literally “houses”] separating the decades of the Rosary were the light of stars and in the middle of each star appeared the corresponding mystery, so that the fifteen mysteries of the Rosary appeared all at the same time as the appearance of my sweet mother. Above her head was a crown consisting of fifteen stars, under her feet in the clouds were seven stars containing the Joyful Mysteries of Mariam the Virgin, and under those stars in the clouds were seven other stars containing the Sorrowful Mysteries of my mother Mariam. I looked at all these sights together and oh what a happy moment it was – such passion of the heart which I cannot describe. Oh, what a beautiful mother whom I cannot describe and no picture could come close to resembling the radiance of her beauty. When my eyes saw her for the first time I was in floods of

tears and intoxicated with her love.<sup>14</sup>

Such was the strength of Marie-Alphonsine's first vision that it sent her into a trance from which she did not emerge for several hours. As she returned to consciousness, she was left pondering a series of questions. Why had is-Sideh chosen to visit a lowly servant (*'abdah haqirah*)<sup>15</sup> like her? Did she want something from her? And was it by mere coincidence that she had made her appearance on Eid al-Ghttas, the feast of the Epiphany, from which Marie-Alphonsine's family took their name?

Over the course of the next five years Marie-Alphonsine was visited by is-Sideh on numerous occasions, each time reaching new heights of ecstasy.<sup>16</sup> Is-Sideh chose her moments carefully, making sure to reveal herself only when Marie-Alphonsine was reciting the Rosary with particular fervor and always in the places closest to is-Sideh's heart. All the visitations occurred in



Marie-Alphonsine's drawing of her first vision of the Virgin (reproduced in Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra*).

Bethlehem, the site of is-Sideh's most heavenly act and a town where she remained ever present. It was true that every town and village in Palestine contained shrines to is-Sideh frequented by Christians and Muslims alike. Many Muslim villages still paraded effigies of her mounted on a wooden cross as a way to persuade the annual rains to come.<sup>17</sup> In Jerusalem every year on the fifteenth day of August, pilgrims came from far and wide to take part in Eid Intiqal al-'Adhra, the great celebration of is-Sideh's assumption to heaven. Hundreds of tents were erected around the shrine where is-Sideh's empty tomb lay at the foot of the Mount of Olives. In the daytime, Muslim and Christian pilgrims alike circumambulated the shrine together, as if it were the Ka'ba of Mecca, and in the evening the chapel shone brightly with dozens of gold and silver lamps lit as votive offerings to is-Sideh. The worshippers brought with them the sick, young babies, and anyone else in need of is-Sideh's attention, as they shuffled in chaotic procession around the tomb, the Christians praying the Rosary and the Muslims thumbing their own prayer beads and amulets.<sup>18</sup>

But in Bethlehem is-Sideh enjoyed a special relationship with the local residents. Every street, well and shrine in the area had some legend or other associated with her.<sup>19</sup> Usually she played the role of protector of the town and its people, such as the time she unleashed a vast swarm of wasps onto an invading army that was attempting to breach the Church of the Nativity. Or when she halted an earthquake by grasping the columns of that same church, leaving holes in the columns still visible today. But when the people



became too proud or treated her with disrespect she was quick to turn her wits against them. One time she was passing a pea field on the northern outskirts of Bethlehem and asked the peasants if they would give her some peas to eat. When they tried to trick her by claiming they were stones, not peas, is-Sideh replied, “Then let it be so,” and the peas were instantly transformed into stones. In their fury the peasants set chase, but she again outwitted them by commanding a great rock to split open and hid inside. This rock was preserved by local families for many years as an example of is-Sideh’s powers and later placed in the Church of the Virgin in the village of Bayt Jala.

Naturally it was in is-Sideh’s most favored places that Marie-Alphonsine encountered her. In one of the early visitations, she appeared high in the sky as Marie-Alphonsine said her Hail Marys on her way to the Milk Grotto – the caves where is-Sideh had spilled a drop of her heavenly milk while nursing the infant Jesus, turning the stone walls white. As Marie-Alphonsine’s visions progressed, is-Sideh began to appear much closer and even talk to her directly. She showed her visions of the future (in this way Marie-Alphonsine was able to foresee the First World War forty years in advance), she introduced her to Jesus and various saints, and she conjured scenes from the Holy Bible before her very eyes. In the midst of these visions and dreams Marie-Alphonsine took on a new aura. To those who looked closely enough, she seemed perpetually bathed in a heavenly light and everywhere she went is-Sideh accompanied her in the form of a beautiful star. She walked around in a state of constant bliss, taking particular delight in earthly suffering which she actively sought to increase by indulging in self-mortification.<sup>20</sup> She dreamed of flying hand in hand with is-Sideh across the desert hills to the east of Bethlehem, over the River Jordan and on to the land of Moab where the Bedouin tribes dwelt. In this dream that would later prove prophetic, she and is-Sideh lived for many years among the Bedouin, serving Allah in the blissful hardship of poverty.

Gradually Marie-Alphonsine learned from is-Sideh that she had a special calling. She was to found a new religious order formed exclusively of local Arab girls. This order, proclaimed is-Sideh, would be called the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters and would devote itself to Marian prayer as a way to educate and alleviate the suffering of Arab women and girls. At first Marie-Alphonsine did not understand why is-Sideh had chosen her to perform this role and why the heavenly queen should devote her attention to the poor people of Palestine. Is-Sideh became increasingly irritated at these questions, commanding her with ever more urgency to form the congregation.

“But how, oh Mother, do you choose us poor and despised people?” Marie-Alphonsine asked is-Sideh one day. “Why don’t you do this in the land of the rich in Europe?”

“Remember, my daughter, that out of the thorns roses grow. It was in this country that I was filled with joy, sorrow, and glory, and so it is from you and in you that I reveal the power of my hand.”<sup>21</sup>

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Being brought back from the dead was not the first time Jubra’il Dabdoub had benefited from is-Sideh’s assistance. In the year of Our Lord 1888 he had just returned from his latest journey to the edges of the known world, this time in the most northern

reaches of the land of the afaranja, to a strange and magical city they called Kobenhafn.<sup>22</sup> Everything in that city was an illusion; every building a mere facade, designed to appear monumental but in fact constructed in the blink of an eye, only to disappear again the next day. He had gone there to sell Bethlehem mother-of-pearl carvings at the great exhibition taking place in the city's central square. Here a vast hall topped by a dome bigger than any he had seen in Jerusalem had been built to house the exhibition. No sooner had the last visitors left the exhibition than this mighty structure was raised to the ground, just as quickly as it had been erected. Even more fantastical was the park located across the street from the exhibition.<sup>23</sup> When Jubra'il tried to describe this garden to people in Bethlehem, they laughed and called him a *khurafa* (storyteller).<sup>24</sup> He spoke of people riding on brightly painted mechanical horses that rotated endlessly in the midst of brightly painted castles, of larger-than-life pictures of animals and birds made from thousands of flowers, of colored lamps that never stopped burning, and of a theater whose curtain was a giant peacock's tail. Jubra'il had wondered around this park in a state of great confusion, unsure if he was in a dream.

In this bizarre, make-believe city, Jubra'il had managed to sell a great deal of the crosses, rosaries and miniature nativity scenes he carried in his suitcase, even though the exhibition had been billed as "a celebration of Nordic design and industry." Returning home after ten months with the handsome sum of 1,500 French lira,<sup>25</sup> Jubra'il's already considerable reputation as an audacious and skillful merchant was further increased.

This reputation had been firmly established some seven years previously when he had been the first merchant from Bethlehem to reach those distant islands they called the *Filibin* (Philippines). He had heard from the Franciscan friars of a group of islands at the eastern ends of the earth where the people had become Catholic through the hard work of franji missionaries. People in Bethlehem at that time were journeying in their hundreds across the great Atlantic Ocean in search of riches in the Americas. But why not try travelling in the other direction, Jubra'il asked himself. So he set out one day on a donkey, accompanied by his friend Anton Sa'di, reassuring his mother Rosa he would remember to pray the Rosary each day. In Rosa's eyes he was still a boy when he left – twenty-one years old, carrying only a suitcase of crosses, rosaries, and little boxes carved in his father's workshop.<sup>26</sup> When he came back nine months later he was a man of the world and that suitcase was now stuffed full of money. As the old men of Bethlehem gathered round Jubra'il in the Nativity Square to hear his fabulous tales of adventure, they realized he had now joined the ranks of the town's *khawajat* – the title bestowed on merchants who enjoyed success trading overseas – and consequently had become a highly eligible bachelor for their daughters or granddaughters. It did not take long for Jubra'il's parents to capitalize on the moment. Within a month of his return he was engaged to Mariam Handal, daughter of 'Isa Handal, one of the foremost *khawaja* of Bethlehem.<sup>27</sup>

But after six years of marriage, Jubra'il and Mariam were still without child – an unacceptable situation in a town where continuing the family blood line was paramount. So it was that Jubra'il and Mariam took the short walk around the back of the church to the caves of the Milk Grotto where is-Sideh had once nurtured her baby.<sup>28</sup> It was here the

holy family had taken refuge while fleeing the wrath of King Herod. As they took shelter is-Sideh had stopped to feed the hungry child, spilling a drop of her heavenly milk and turning the entire cave walls white as she did so. It was well known in Bethlehem that a piece of those chalky walls mixed with water could form a potion so potent it would cure even the most barren of women, not to mention bring forth fountains of gushing milk from the breasts of those struggling to lactate.<sup>29</sup> By the time Mariam and Jabra'il visited the shrine, the Franciscan friars had erected a gleaming white chapel over the caves.<sup>30</sup> Many years later in the 1930s some of Bethlehem's wealthiest merchants would add their own mother-of-pearl carvings and inscriptions, writing their legacy into the shrine's facade as a greeting to generations of pious pilgrims to come.<sup>31</sup> But Jabra'il could still remember accompanying his mother Rosa as a young child when it was just a network of musty caverns and anyone could walk in and slice off their own piece of the cave wall. Now the friars had imposed their orderly system of handing out pre-wrapped parcels of powder, stamped with the franji Cross of Jerusalem,<sup>32</sup> to those who proffered a Catholic prayer to the Holy Virgin.

Once back in the Dabdoub family home on Star Street, Mariam and Jabra'il eagerly unwrapped the package and emptied the contents into a cup of water. As they took turns drinking the potion, they took out their rosary beads and dutifully prayed a third of the joyful mysteries, recalling the birth of Yasua' the Messiah, followed by a quick Our Father and ten Hail Marys.<sup>33</sup> Having dispensed with the formalities, they proceeded to make their own appeals to the Holy Virgin, beseeching her to bring them a child.<sup>34</sup> This ritual was repeated every day for three months until one day Mariam awoke to a violent sickness and announced she had not bled that month. Such was Jabra'il's joy, he sank to his knees and heaped lavish praise on the Blessed Virgin, pledging to her his eternal debt of gratitude. Eight months later on the twenty-fourth day of August in the year of Our Lord 1889, his first son Bishara was born thanks to is-Sideh's generous intervention.

Twenty years later, as he lay surrounded by his family in the clasp of a burning fever, Jabra'il was in no state to summon is-Sideh himself. Those gathered around the bed detected a change in his demeanor as he seemed to enter a series of wild hallucinations. Sensing the urgency of the situation, the priest Abuna Francis began to read the last rites but Jabra'il could give no coherent response at the required moments. Instead he now began speaking in a jumbled mixture of different languages, calling out the names of strange people and places they had never heard before. "*Nasaan ako?*" he exclaimed, adding, "*Es la iglesia de San Lorenzo Ruiz verdad?*" And then, "*Je le vous donne pour seulement cinque francs, monsieur,*" before finally whispering in Arabic, "Is that really you, Morcos?" Suddenly he stopped talking and a look of calm descended on his ashen face as his eyes closed. As the assembled spectators burst into shrieks of grief and Sara tore into her dress, nobody noticed a new delegation that had slipped quietly into the room. Three nuns dressed in their blue habits with long veils covering tightly fitted coifs now stood by the bed fingering their rosary beads as they offered prayers to is-Sideh, the Virgin Queen. "It is good so many people are gathered here," one of them muttered to her companion. "Yes," she replied, "perhaps the sickness that the jinn have brought upon this man can be cast out and diffused among the onlookers in small doses."<sup>35</sup> The

third nun now stepped forward having previously been kneeling in intense prayer. She placed her hand on the dead man's forehead. "It is not your time yet," she whispered in his ear and dipped her rosary beads into a cup of water.

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"A girl is born in the home of the carpenter!" whispered the women who had crowded into high mass in the Church of San Salvatore in Jerusalem. It was the fourth day of al-Awwal (October) in the year of Our Lord 1843 and the women's faces were a mixture of excitement and trepidation. "May she at least make it to her baptism," one of them muttered.

Her name at birth was Sultana Danil Ghattas. At her baptism a month later, her parents added the name Mariam in thanks to as-Saydeh who had kept her safe during the perilous early weeks of life. Making it to her baptism was indeed a great achievement for little Sultana. Her mother Kattun (Katherine)<sup>36</sup> gave birth a total of nineteen times, but Allah had reasoned no family could afford to educate such large numbers and so permitted only eight of them to live beyond infancy. The first of those eight was Sultana. The precise reason 'Izra'il did not come for her was not known. Maybe it was because, when obtaining salt in which to rub the new-born baby, Kattun had taken care not to buy it but to beg for it from a nearby house that faced east, without uttering a word as she did so.<sup>37</sup> This had helped distract 'Izra'il's attentions onto the other house, as had Kattun's insistence on dressing the babe with clothes begged from neighbors. Or perhaps it was because the day of her birth had coincided with the feast day of Saint Francis, that most heavenly of Catholic saints who had visited the Holy City and founded the community of friars who still lived there.

Saint Francis and his friars had a special connection to the Ghattas family. Originally from Bethlehem, where the missionary zeal of the Catholic Church had found its most fertile ground, the Ghattas family had been among the Franciscans' early converts in the seventeenth century. Marie-Alphonsine's father Danil worked in the service of the friars as a carpenter and he lived with his family in the house opposite the Franciscan monastery in the western quarter of Jerusalem's Old City where a string of new Catholic churches and hospices was emerging. Danil was known to everybody for his fierce devotion to the cult of is-Sideh and would invite friends and neighbors to his house every evening to pray the Rosary with him. Kneeling before his impressive collection of statuettes and icons of is-Sideh, and enveloped in clouds of incense, he would beseech in loud tones the Virgin Queen to deliver lost souls from purgatory, thumbing his treasured prayer beads as he did so.<sup>38</sup> There was no doubt among those who knew Danil that his statuettes and icons were capable of repaying him for his unswerving devotion, such as the day one of his daughters was cured from a grave illness by a mysterious oil emitted by an icon of is-Sideh that hung above her bed.<sup>39</sup>

Danil's fierce devotion to the Virgin Mariam was matched only by the ferocity of his opposition to his daughter entering the religious life. From a young age little Sultana had displayed an unusual level of piety and quickly became fixated on the idea of joining one of

Jerusalem's Catholic convents. Danil, however, had other ideas. To complete the necessary religious training she would have to travel to Europe – something no respectable father could permit his daughter. Besides, insisted Danil, it was imperative Sultana be married to an eligible young man to improve further the family's status in Jerusalemite society. As she watched the young men of her generation setting out on daring merchant adventures to the furthest corners of the world, Sultana was thus sentenced to a life of domesticity. But she would not be discouraged so easily. Praying incessantly to is-Sideh, she was eventually rewarded when Danil suffered a terrible accident caused by an exploding bottle of methylated spirits. Confined to a long and painful period of recuperation from the severe burns he had sustained, Danil was forced to reflect on the meaning of this episode as his daughter lovingly cared for him. What other conclusion could he reach except to view the accident as a sign of heavenly displeasure at his refusal to grant his daughter's wishes? Upon his recovery Danil duly summoned young Sultana to his room and explained he would no longer stand in the way of her destiny. Overcome with elation, Sultana embraced her father and profusely thanked is-Sideh for her intercession. "But there is one condition," added Danil solemnly. "You will never leave Palestine."<sup>40</sup>

In the year 1877, fourteen years after taking the habit with the Sisters of St. Joseph, Marie-Alphonsine's visions began. As it became clear that is-Sideh was not merely calling for a visit but had a special task in mind, her position with the Sisters of St. Joseph grew increasingly untenable. Although devoted to serving Allah, the Sisters of St. Joseph was a foreign order, populated mainly by *afaranja* who spoke no word of Arabic. Marie-Alphonsine's special calling, by contrast, was to bring the word of Allah to her own people. It was in the terraced valleys and rocky hills of these lands that is-Sideh herself had lived and nurtured the infant Jesus. And it would require one of is-Sideh's own people to spread further the word of Allah and educate those who had strayed from the true path. Above all, it was Marie-Alphonsine's special calling to reach women and girls in the most remote parts of Palestine whose husbands and fathers would never allow them to speak to a *franji*, let alone be able to understand one. As is-Sideh had patiently explained, and later spelled out in more forceful tones, only a lowly Jerusalemite handmaiden like Marie-Alphonsine could perform this holy duty, and it was through devoted recital of the Rosary that she would teach her fellow Arab women to lead a true Catholic life.

*Bethlehem, October (Feast of the Rosary), 1877:*

After taking communion, I saw the divine Yasua' in a great light, and he consoled me a great deal. Then something changed in this light and I saw a round convent in the shape of a rosary. The Lady of the Rosary was standing on its roof and inside it were fifteen rooms. In each window I saw a nun from the Rosary Sisters, on each of their heads was her name as one of the mysteries of the Rosary. For example, Mariam of the Annunciation, Mariam of the Visitation, Mariam of the Nativity, etc., and I saw myself in the tenth room with the name: Mariam of the Cross. Above the door of the convent was is-Sideh. She looked at me with compassion and kindness and filled

me with joy and light. When I realized what had happened to me, my heart melted with love.<sup>41</sup>

In this vision, and many others that followed, is-Sideh provided Marie-Alphonsine with a precise set of instructions for establishing a new order of Arab nuns who would assist Marie-Alphonsine in carrying out the divine mission assigned to her. They would be called the Congregation of the Rosary Sisters and is-Sideh spared no detail in her directives. The style and color of the sisters' habits (monastic blue and white), how they should pray the Rosary (kneeling in prostration in front of the altar), the exact mysteries of the Rosary to be prayed at fixed times of day, when they should hold special fast days for the sake of the Rosary (Mondays and Wednesdays), the design of their future convent (a round temple in the form of the Rosary that would be constructed in Jerusalem in 15 years' time), and the new names to be given to each of the founding sisters.

Listening intently, Marie-Alphonsine realized this would be a sisterhood like no other before it. No longer would she and her sisters take orders from afaranja who flocked to their country to teach them about the religion that originated in those lands. Eager to ensure that this future community of nuns would serve the needs of the Arab nation, she prayed for is-Sideh to appoint an Arab mentor to watch over their progress and protect the sisters from outside interference.<sup>42</sup> Is-Sideh, herself a local woman, was only too happy to oblige, informing Marie-Alphonsine in one of her visitations that the local priest Abuna Yusef Tannus would be their guide and point of contact with the Catholic clergy.<sup>43</sup> When is-Sideh shared this decision with Abuna Yusef himself, he immediately set about establishing the order by informing the Patriarch and recruiting seven local girls as the founders of the order. They were Afifa Suwwan, Regina al-Karmi, Jalila Obays, Amina Habash, and Katerina Suwwan. Each one burned with love for is-Sideh and each one had expressed to Abuna Yusef the same desire to establish an Arab religious community.

The rest of Marie-Alphonsine's life was devoted to converting is-Sideh's instructions into earthly reality.<sup>44</sup> In 1887 her prophetic dream of living with the Virgin among the Bedouin of Transjordan became a reality when she and her Sisters travelled east across the Jordan to the hillside market town of Salt. At that time wealthy merchants from Nablus and Damascus were flooding into Salt, building their opulent mansions with profits gleaned from the lucrative trade routes that passed through the town on the way to Damascus, Jerusalem, and Mecca.<sup>45</sup> But Marie-Alphonsine and the Sisters shunned this world of material pleasure that was also seducing the town's Catholic community, and headed instead to the desert plains surrounding Salt where some Catholic Bedouin tribes lived. These nomadic people had long since forgotten how to live as the laws of Rome commanded, adapted as they were to the practicalities of life in the desert and many centuries of intimate relations with the neighboring Muslim tribes. Entering one of the dozens of shrines dotted around the craggy hills that claimed to hold the tombs of ancient prophets such as Yushua', Shu'ayb, and Ayub,<sup>46</sup> it was impossible to discern which of the worshippers were Christian and which were Muslim.

The women and girls from the Latin families in these communities lived in such isolation from any Catholic teaching that they came to the parish church only once a year

to participate in the Easter celebrations. They would enter the church and immediately head straight to the Holy Table to take communion, having neither fasted nor confessed. Unaware of the correct procedures, they would proceed to perform this ritual several times in the same day, the priest helplessly unable to discern who was who among this once-yearly crowd of worshippers.

Outside the church Marie-Alphonsine tried to teach them the correct way to take communion and the importance of confession as a means of absolution from sin. They listened intently as they puffed on their long clay pipes and sipped their Bedouin coffee, but declared defiantly they would never divulge their secrets to a man. Nevertheless, they were more than willing to confess all to the nuns. Despite Marie-Alphonsine's best efforts to explain that confession could only be heard by a priest, they insisted on using the nuns as their confidants, leaving nothing to the imagination. For these nomadic, desert-dwelling women, Marie-Alphonsine and her fellow Rosary Sisters offered the only direct contact with religious authority, as well as a means to vent their hopes and frustrations. Increasingly, as the nuns entered the church for mass each day, a small crowd of women and girls could be seen tugging at their habits confessing the most unspeakable of sins they had committed. When mass finished and the Sisters prepared to say their prayers to the Virgin, the women would gather round exclaiming, "*Yalla!* The nuns are starting mass and we'll understand it because it's in Arabic!"<sup>47</sup>

In the space of a few months the Sisters had attracted 146 young girls to study in their school and 86 women enrolled in the Confraternity of Christian Mothers they founded in Salt. Following the nuns back to their humble abode in the basement of the parish church after mass each day, the women and girls were given breakfast and taught how to take the sacraments. Above all they were taught how to venerate is-Sideh by thumbing the prayer beads the Sisters had given them as a way of remembering and reciting the 15 mysteries of the Rosary. Most of the women saw no difference between these prayer beads and the many forms of talismans and lucky charms they had always employed to summon their ancestors or local saints who were worshipped by Christians and Muslims alike. Marie-Alphonsine had witnessed these habits shortly after first arriving in the district when she had found Catholic women trying to heal their sick by bringing soil from the grotto of a local dervish. Mixing this soil with water, they would make the patient drink the mixture while clothing them in tree leaves and burning a strange and pungent form of incense. The women swore this ritual had many times cured people on the verge of death, declaring such events to be miracles. Recalling her training with the French nuns in Jerusalem, Marie-Alphonsine tried to persuade them this was mere superstition and could not possibly produce a miracle as only Allah Himself was capable of bending the laws of nature.

It was easier to summon is-Sideh's intervention at locations where the spirit world collided with the human domains, but these locations had to be treated with extreme care as they were also used by jinn and ghouls to cross into the land of the living. Places where water from the interior of the world made its way to the earth's surface were especially known to be such crossing points. All over the countryside there were deep-rooted trees, caves, grottos, cracks in the ground, and especially springs and wells where a particular

jinni might be found. Saints too frequented these sites, stationing themselves there to protect the local population from any unpleasant creature that might emerge from the underworld, including the Devil himself, al-Shaytan. Not wishing to be excluded from this aquatic battleground, is-Sideh herself kept guard over two specific wells in the Bethlehem district – Bir Ona in Bayt Jala and Bir is-Sideh in Bayt Sahur – and had a favorite spring at ‘Ayn Karim where she had once drunk while still in her earthly form. But she could also make unexpected appearances at any number of other wells and springs dotted around the Palestinian landscape.

In total, Marie-Alphonsine performed eight miracles in and around wells, nearly all of them involving the intercession of is-Sideh in some form or another. Most pleasing of all these miracles was the one occurring in 1886 in the Galilean village of Yafet al-Nasra, where a young girl had fallen to the depth of a well and was assumed to have drowned under the water. Undeterred by the pronouncements of the local population that she was dead, Marie-Alphonsine arrived on the scene and cast her rosary into the well, praying to is-Sideh to guide the girl to safety. When she miraculously emerged, the girl described how, as she entered a dream-like state under the water, she had seen the beads light up like a beacon, fall over neck and then pull her up to the surface. This episode brought the Rosary Sisters particular satisfaction as it served to reduce the influence of Protestant missionaries in the village who had been gaining a growing following at the expense of the Catholics. Having witnessed the wonder at the well,<sup>48</sup> the teacher at the Protestant girls’ school promptly converted to the Catholic faith, bringing several of her students with her into the sisterhood of the Rosary, as well as donating Protestant lands to the Rosary Sisters.

The malign spirits who inhabited these wells and caves often took the form of animals. In Bayt Sahur Marie-Alphonsine was hounded by hyenas, known to be evil jinn and ghouls in disguise who could hypnotize people and lure them back to their caves where they would devour them.<sup>49</sup> In Bethlehem, meanwhile, al-Shaytan himself appeared to Marie-Alphonsine one day in the form of a fearsome serpent. Unsurprisingly, he chose the waters of a well to make his entry to the realm of the living. As Marie-Alphonsine was sifting wheat with the orphan children in the playground of the Sisters’ school, she instinctively began to pray the Rosary and make the sign of the cross. Getting up to fetch some water, she opened the well to find a strange snake writhing in the water, changing its size as it moved and flicking its enormous forked tongue. People gathered from all over the town, including a Salesian priest who poured holy water into the well. But none could remove the hideous beast from the water. In the morning Marie-Alphonsine opened the well to find the snake had disappeared. For the rest of that summer the Sisters drank from the well until the water had run dry. When they washed the base of the well they found no hole from which the snake might have escaped, and so were left with no option but to conclude they had been visited by the Devil. As Marie-Alphonsine recorded in her notebook, “We deduced al-Shaytan had been so enraged by our recitation of the Rosary that he was thrashing around inside the well. The experience brought no fear to us, but rather increased our veneration of Mariam our Mother.”<sup>50</sup>

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By 1909, the year of his resurrection, Jubra'il Dabdoub had moved back to Bethlehem, bringing to an end a period of several years in which he had shuttled incessantly between Europe and the Americas serving the family business. Upon his return, he found new religious orders were appearing all over town, thanks to money flooding in from foreigners and locals alike. But he would soon have reason to notice a particular community of nuns who called themselves the Rosary Sisters and took in some of the town's poorest young girls. It was not only that this order consisted entirely of local women, unlike the other convents who always included afaranja among their senior ranks, nor was it their feverish devotion to the Rosary that made them stand out. What really grabbed Jubra'il's attention was his merchant friends' talk of their miraculous powers. One of the Sisters in particular, a nun named Marie-Alphonsine, had developed a reputation for being able to summon the Virgin Queen when she was most needed.

Many of the town's khawajat who, like Jubra'il, were now moving back to Bethlehem and building lavish villas on the outskirts of town, began to court the favor of Sister Marie-Alphonsine, eager as they were to support local initiatives in the town, as well as to secure their own safety. The Rosary Sisters had been induced to establish themselves in Bethlehem back in 1893 thanks to donations from franji benefactors who had close connections with the Bethlehem merchants in Paris and now wished to see a girls orphanage opened in the town of the Nativity. But these donations were never enough to provide the Sisters with a permanent abode and it was left to the khawajat to put them up in their own homes. They also provided them with leftover raw materials from their artisans' workshops which the Sisters used to teach the orphans bead-making and wood carving.

There could be no denying that the khawajat were rewarded for their generosity. In one episode that would be remembered for many years to come: Marie-Alphonsine cured Mariam Jiryis Kattan, wife of the wealthy merchant Hanna 'Issa Kattan, from blindness after all hope had been abandoned by their franji physician, a man named Doctor Baker. Undeterred by the pronouncements of modern science, Marie-Alphonsine visited the poor woman and proceeded to dip her rosary beads into a cup of water in her customary fashion. Sprinkling some drops from the cup into Mariam's eyes, she invited the assembled family members to pray fifteen Hail Marys with her, and then promptly left. The next day the family asked for the Holy Rosary water again, saying Mariam's sight had shown signs of improvement. After a few days of this treatment she began attending church again and was soon putting her renewed vision to good use in the Sisters' sewing and embroidery classes.

The khawajat and Marie-Alphonsine could not have been further apart in their life experiences – the one accustomed to material wealth and a life of fluid movement around the globe, the other living in self-imposed poverty having sworn to her father she would never leave the country. But their lives collided during those years she spent in Bethlehem in ways that proved mutually beneficial. By the time it was Jubra'il's turn to experience Marie-Alphonsine's restorative powers, the Rosary Sisters were living next door to him in the house of Yusef Lulos, one of Jubra'il's associates from an old Jerusalem family

that had taken up residence in Bethlehem. In their wanderings these khawajat had seen many fantastical places, people and beasts, but they had not forgotten the sanctity of their hometown as the place where is-Sideh had performed her most wondrous act. Nobody knew it at the time, but as Marie-Alphonsine entered the Dabdoub house, her head bowed in modesty, and set about bringing Jubra'il back from the dead, she was performing the last of her miracles in Bethlehem. Like a modern-day Lazarus, Jubra'il was restored to full health and would live another twenty-two healthy years. So too would Marie-Alphonsine continue her work for many years to come. But her time in Bethlehem was at an end. Just a few weeks later she was recalled by her superiors to Jerusalem after fifteen years of service in the town of Christ's birth.

Marie-Alphonsine lived out the rest of her days quietly in Jerusalem before finally moving back to the old Ghattas family summer house in 'Ayn Karim, where the presence of is-Sideh's favorite spring meant she was never far from her Holy Mother. She died there in a state of sublime peace on the twenty-fifth of Adhar (March) in the year of Our Lord 1927, still reciting the Rosary with her last breath, having fittingly reached the mystery of is-Sideh's assumption at the moment of her departure.<sup>51</sup> It was the day of Eid al-Bishara, the feast celebrating the announcement made by another Jubra'il that is-Sideh would give birth to Yasua' the Messiah. It was only when Marie-Alphonsine's notebooks were discovered upon her death that her fellow Rosary Sisters came to realize that she too had been ordained with a divine mission. Throughout her entire life Marie-Alphonsine had kept her heavenly visions to herself, preferring instead a life of quiet poverty and service to Allah and is-Sideh. In Bethlehem, town of is-Sideh's most heavenly act, she had not secured a permanent shelter for the Rosary Sisters in all her fifteen years of service there, relying instead on the goodwill and acute common sense of the local khawajat. But as with all things, Marie-Alphonsine saw her misfortune as a blessing that had brought her closer to is-Sideh. "Thank you to our beloved mother who descended and allowed us to partake in her suffering and her presence in that town in a humble manger as her abode," read the closing words of her secret notebooks. "Oh, how sweet our life of suffering and poverty. How sweet to partake in the poverty of the Holy Family."<sup>52</sup>

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## Endnotes

- 1 This first sentence echoes deliberately the opening line of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's seminal magical realist novel, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: "Many years later, as he faced the firing squad, Colonel Aureliano Buendia was to remember that distant afternoon when his father took him to discover ice."
- 2 Benedict Stolz, *A Handmaid of the Holy Rosary: Mother Mary Alphonsus of the Rosary, First Foundress of an Arab Congregation, 1843–1927*, trans. Natalie Bevenot (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1938), 97.
- 3 S. Peller, "Typhoid Fever in Palestine," *Epidemiology and Infection* 28, no. 3 (December 1928): 318–23. See also Salim Tamari's discussion of the uncovered sewage pipes out of Jerusalem in *The Great War and the Remaking of Palestine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2017), 59–60.
- 4 *Franji* (pl. *afaranja*) is a term used historically by Palestinians to refer to western Europeans.
- 5 Belief in jinn was widespread among Christians as well as Muslims in late Ottoman Palestine, and is referenced several times in this paper. Christian belief in jinn was not only the product of folk culture; the most widely circulated Arabic Bible, the so-called Van Dyck translation (completed 1865), used the collective plural of jinn, *al-jann*, on a number of occasions to denote what is usually translated in English as "spirits." For examples, see Van Dyck, Arabic edition, *al-Lawiyin* (Leviticus) 19:31 and 20:6 and *Samu'il al-awwal* (1 Samuel), 28:3 and 9. Jubra'il Dabdoub and Marie-Alphonsine most likely grew up reading this version of the Arabic Bible although as Catholics they may have later switched to the Jesuit Arabic Bible, translated by Augustin Rodet and Ibrahim al-Yaziji and first published in 1880, which also used the term *al-jann* in line with the Van Dyck version.
- 6 Unless otherwise indicated, the description of the miracle recounted here is based on two sources: the first-hand account provided by Marie-Alphonsine in Arabic in her notebooks, transcribed in Arabic into two manuscripts and reproduced by Sister Praxedes Sweidan in *Kalimat al-'adhra' al-mukarrama al-umm marie-alphonsine danil ghattas* [Words of the Virgin Mother Marie-Alphonsine Danil Ghattas] (Jerusalem: Latin Patriarchate Press, 2004), translated by the author; and a description provided by the Franciscan scholar Benedict Stolz based on research carried out in the 1930s on the life of Marie-Alphonsine, in Stolz, *A Handmaid of the Holy Rosary*.
- 7 Here I have imagined Jubra'il's near-death visions, based on wider research on near-death experiences and how that research might apply to the specific context of Bethlehem. Belief in 'Izra'il as the angel that transported people to the next world at the moment of death was widespread among Christians and Muslims in Palestine in the early twentieth century. See, for example, H. H. Spoer and A. M. Spoer, "Sickness and Death among the Arabs of Palestine," *Folklore* 38, no. 2 (1927): 115–42. Comparative research on near-death experiences by the likes of Kellehear, Pasricha, and Corazza has suggested the phenomenon of the "life-review" in near-death experiences is a cultural function of specifically Western notions of the interior self and linear notions of time, deriving from the monotheism of Christianity. But these characterisations tend to overlook the existence of non-Western forms of monotheism (Islamic, Christian, Jewish, etc.) that can also espouse linear notions of time. As a Palestinian Roman Catholic Jubra'il seems to straddle these divides and therefore I have included a form of life-review, albeit in jumbled, surreal form. Some of the key publications on near-death experiences include: Allan Kellehear, *Experiences of Near Death: Beyond Medicine and Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 28 and 33; Satwant Pasricha, "A Systematic Survey of Near-Death Experiences in South Asia," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 7, no. 2 (1993): 161–71; and Ornella Corazza, "Exploring Space-Consciousness in Near-Death and Other Dissociative Experiences," *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 17, no. 7/8 (2010): 173–90.
- 8 'Izra'il was seen as a messenger of God, not the arbiter of a person's death. See Spoer and Spoer, "Sickness and Death," 116–17. Throughout the text I have used Arabic versions of religious terms (such as Allah for God, Yasua' for Jesus, as-Sideh for the Virgin, and the feast days) that were used by local Christians. This serves to emphasize the wider Arabo-Islamic context in which Palestinian Christians lived and the cross-fertilization of ideas and practices between Islam and Christianity.
- 9 The accounts of both Marie-Alphonsine and Stolz mention that Jubra'il's sister Sara began to tear her dress at the moment of death. The detail on later sewing it up again with wide stitches was a general practice, described in Spoer and Spoer, "Sickness and Death," 135.
- 10 The flashbacks refer to specific periods or events in Jubra'il's life: his time in Manila where he opened a shop selling Holy Land devotional objects (specializing in rosaries); his attendance of the

- Chicago World's Fair of 1893 (where the world's first Ferris wheel was unveiled); his years living in Paris where he had a shop on the Boulevard de Strasbourg; and the death of his brother Morcos at the age of seventeen when Jubra'il was aged eight. The object of the rosary provides the thread that links these flashbacks as it was integral to Jubra'il's economic and spiritual life, as well as his resurrection.
- 11 The following section is based on Marie-Alphonsine's first manuscript in which she describes her series of visions and dreams of the Virgin Mary. See Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 104–36. Direct quotations from the text are indicated in endnotes.
  - 12 In Bethlehem the Virgin Mary is commonly known as *is-Sideh* – the colloquial Arabic version of *al-Sayyida* (“the lady”). The title “lactator of holy milk” refers to local legends explained in passages below relating to the Milk Grotto in Bethlehem.
  - 13 Only the first of Marie-Alphonsine's two manuscripts (describing her visions of the Virgin Mary) was burned. The second manuscript (describing her work with the Rosary Sisters and the miracles she performed) still survives in its original form.
  - 14 Marie-Alphonsine, first manuscript, 2–5 (reproduced in Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 105–6).
  - 15 '*Abdah haqirah* in the original Arabic. In a religious context 'abdah usually carries connotations of being a servant of God, although literally it means a female slave. Haqirah can be translated variously as wretched or even despicable.
  - 16 Many of Mariam's meetings with the Virgin Mary seem to contain sexual undertones. In one example she writes: “I stayed for a while with her until I quenched the burning thirst of my desire [*ghalil ashwaqi*] for the sweetness of her delights [*udhubat bahjatha*]. In another passage: “The Virgin used to approach me amidst a radiant light, in her hand something round and luminous, and would enter into me. I felt as though I was having holy communion with the taste of honey [*halaawa 'asaliyya*] in my mouth which I kept inside me as long as I could without eating any food.” Marie-Alphonsine, first manuscript, 8 and 38 (reproduced in Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 108 and 123). This mirrors the sexuality described in other analyses of female Christian mystics in the region such as Akram Khater's study of the eighteenth-century Maronite nun, Hindiyya al-'Ujaymi. See Akram Khater, *Embracing the Divine: Passion and Politics in the Christian Middle East* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 173–82.
  - 17 The ritual is discussed in James Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints: Everyday Religion in Ottoman Syria and Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 155. Although the effigy was usually named Umm al-Ghayth (Mother of the Rain), Grehan stresses the overlap with the Muslim cult of the Virgin Mary, as well as older pagan practices.
  - 18 Spoer and Spoer, “Sickness and Death,” 18.
  - 19 The following examples are taken from oral traditions that still circulate in Bethlehem. Some of them are mentioned in the research published by Issa Masou at Bethlehem University. See: [bethlehem-holy-land.net/Adnan/bethlehem/Stories\\_of\\_Places\\_and\\_Persons.htm#\\_ftn1](http://bethlehem-holy-land.net/Adnan/bethlehem/Stories_of_Places_and_Persons.htm#_ftn1) (accessed 17 January 2018); [www.palestine-family.net/index.php?nav=6-20&cid=8&did=6312](http://www.palestine-family.net/index.php?nav=6-20&cid=8&did=6312) (accessed 31 March 2018).
  - 20 The Arabic phrase Mariam uses for self-mortification (or mortification of the flesh as it is often called in Catholic theology) is *imaataat jasadyya*. See Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 124 (first manuscript, 40).
  - 21 Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 129 (first manuscript, 50).
  - 22 Jubra'il's journey to Copenhagen is described in an unpublished memoir written by his cousin, Ibrahim Yuhanna Dabdoub, 8 (translated by the author).
  - 23 Jubra'il is describing the famous Tivoli Gardens opened in 1843 and considered to be the second oldest amusement park in the world.
  - 24 According to Emile Habibi, “A *khurafa* is a man who offers up – by way of excuse – the claim that he has acted under a genie's spell ... but isn't believed by people, who say he's just ‘telling fairy tales.’” See “Introduction” (Oration) in Emile Habibi, *Saraya, The Ogre's Daughter: A Palestinian Fairy Tale*, trans. Peter Theroux (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2006), 8–9.
  - 25 Dabdoub unpublished memoir, 8. The earnings of 1,500 French “lira” (as they are referred to in the memoir) were unusually high at the time, although it was divided among the four merchants who travelled to the Copenhagen exhibition – Jubra'il, his brother Ibrahim, his cousin Anton Dabdoub, and Abdullah Dabboura.
  - 26 I have imagined the specific details of Jubra'il's departure, his motivation for leaving, and his tales upon return, all based on wider contextual research on the migrations out of Bethlehem in that period. We know from the Spanish colonial immigration records that Jubra'il and his companion Anton Sa'di arrived in Manila via Singapore on 17 October 1881 and that they opened a shop in the Binondo district selling Holy Land devotional objects. See Philippines National Archive (PNA),

- Manila, SDS 1716, *Radicacion de Extranjeros*, 17 October 1881.
- 27 The dates of Jubra'il's marriage, the births of his children and his wife's previous marriage were obtained from the Latin Parish Archive, Bethlehem.
  - 28 There are no specific sources detailing Jubra'il and Mariam's visit to the Milk Grotto, but it is probable they would have visited the grotto given its widely attested popularity among local residents as a fertility shrine.
  - 29 This particular imagery is borrowed from the fifteenth-century account of Suriano who wrote that women who drank such potions would have "paps and breasts like two fountains." See Francesco Suriano, *Treatise on the Holy Land*, trans. Theophilus Bellorini, and Eugene Hoade (Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 1983), 137.
  - 30 The Franciscan chapel was built in 1871–72. A number of renovations and modifications have been made since including another chapel built into the back of the caves in 2007.
  - 31 Issa Abdullah Hazboun and his wife Helena donated a large mother-of-pearl cross that today still hangs over the main staircase leading down to the caves. Two separate plaques (in Latin and Arabic characters) beneath the cross record: "Oblatum ab Issa & Helena A. M. Hazboun & fils 1935."
  - 32 Several sources attest to the Franciscan practice of stamping the Jerusalem Cross (a five-fold cross associated with the Crusader kingdom and later the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem) onto packages of the milk grotto powder. See for example Corneille le Bruyn, *A Voyage to the Levant: Or, Travels in the Principal Parts of Asia Minor*, trans. W. J (London: Jacob Tonson, 1702), 200.
  - 33 This has long been the standard ritual of prayer when drinking the mixture and is still practiced today. See [www.hazboun.org/arthur/milkgrotto/milkgrot.html](http://www.hazboun.org/arthur/milkgrotto/milkgrot.html) (accessed 15 January 2018).
  - 34 This ritual is based on instructions in a leaflet provided today by the Franciscan custodians of the shrine which they claim is according to longstanding customs.
  - 35 In 1927 (the year of Mariam Ghattas' death) H. H. Spoer wrote that she had once met a nun from the Rosary Sisters who had expressed the belief that severe illnesses were produced by jinn and that a large crowd could help disperse the illness. See Spoer and Spoer, "Sickness and Death," 119.
  - 36 See "Blessed Mother Marie-Alphonsine Daniel Ghattas: her life and her miracles," online at [en.lpj.org/2015/05/11/blessed-mother-marie-alphonsine-daniel-ghattas-her-life-and-her-miracles/](http://en.lpj.org/2015/05/11/blessed-mother-marie-alphonsine-daniel-ghattas-her-life-and-her-miracles/) (accessed on 16 March 2018).
  - 37 There is no direct reference to Mariam's mother doing this, but it was a well-known practice at that time among Jerusalemites whose previous children had died. See, for example, Spoer and Spoer, "Sickness and Death," 141.
  - 38 Spoer and Spoer, "Sickness and Death," 11.
  - 39 Stolz, *A Handmaid of the Holy Rosary*, 28. Reports of icons of the Virgin Mary "sweating" oil that cured the sick were common in Palestine and Syria at that time. See Grehan, *Twilight of the Saints*, 155.
  - 40 Duvignau, *Mother Marie-Alphonsine*, 24–5. Duvignau carried out research on Marie-Alphonsine's life and described her death on these pages of his book. His account is considered authoritative by the Sisters of the Holy Rosary.
  - 41 See Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 124 (first manuscript, 40–1).
  - 42 "I was praying and pleading and asking her to show me the true mentor with a clear sign . . . and I asked her to choose a son of the Arabs of our nation [ibn 'arab min jinsna]." See Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 128 (first manuscript, 48–9).
  - 43 Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 129 (first manuscript, 50).
  - 44 Unless otherwise indicated, the following description of Marie-Alphonsine's life and miracles with the Rosary Sisters is based on her second manuscript, reproduced in Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 138–70.
  - 45 See Eugene Rogan, *Frontiers of the State in the Late Ottoman Empire: Transjordan, 1850–1921* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 159–61.
  - 46 In western tradition, the Old Testament prophets Joshua, Jethro and Job respectively.
  - 47 Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 154 (second manuscript, 9).
  - 48 Marie-Alphonsine uses the expression "the wonder at the well" in her description. See Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 142 (second manuscript, 3).
  - 49 Palestinians have long associated the striped hyena with these demonic traits and practices. For an early academic discussion see Tawfiq Canaan, *Mohammedan Saints and Sanctuaries in Palestine* (London: Luzac, 1927), 243–5. Striped hyenas still inhabit the Dead Sea wilderness today, albeit in smaller numbers, and continue to be hunted due to their association with evil jinn.
  - 50 Marie-Alphonsine, second manuscript, 17 (reproduced in Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 170).
  - 51 Duvignau, *Mother Marie-Alphonsine*, 238–40.
  - 52 See Sweidan, *Kalimat al-'adhra'*, 170 (second manuscript, 17).

# The Memoirs of the Palestinian Maskobi Doctor

George "Yuri" Rodenko, M.D.

Foreword by Olla Rodenko

## Editor's Note:

Using a 1962 pharmaceutical promotional agenda, Dr. George Rodenko (1897–1974) began recording his memoirs in very neat handwriting, detailing his early life's journey until just before the Nakba. These excerpts, edited slightly for clarity, focus on his years studying in Lebanon and his early life in Palestine. A number of extended passages on hunting – Dr. Rodenko's deep passion and an arena in which he sought both leisure and expertise and described in remarkable detail – have been excluded here, but will be published by *JQ* in the future, in print or online. Excerpted, edited, and annotated by Carol Khoury.

*My father Dr. George Rodenko was known to many Palestinians by his moniker, Dr. al-Maskobi (from his hometown, Moscow). He began his medical career in Gaza, but became most renowned for his work at the Church Missionary Society (CMS) hospital in Jaffa where, as a general practitioner – like most physicians at the time – he became particularly well skilled at treating a wide variety of cases. He was a very amicable person, always joking with his patients and dispensing advice. His reputation spread throughout Palestine. My mother Frida Bahu, a staff nurse from Jerusalem, was my father's constant companion in the clinic. They loved each other dearly, and we were a happy family of four girls and one boy.*

*In 1948, the year of the Nakba, the situation became very difficult. My aunt Milia lived in Ramallah so it was decided that the family would travel there. With a few suitcases, our dogs, our maid, and the driver, we went to Ramallah hoping to return to Jaffa within a few weeks. After the withdrawal of the Arab armies and with more refugees coming to Ramallah it became hopeless to go back to Jaffa. Dr. Rodenko became a refugee for the second time. Under fire, our maid and the driver went to Jaffa and retrieved a glass cupboard, and the birds. Those were the only things that were saved from our home. We were told the occupying Jews later threw the furniture, including a piano, from the second floor to the garden.*

*With our return to Jaffa impossible, we settled in Ramallah; life had to be resumed and Dr. Rodenko/al-Maskobi soon began working again. His patients – who were now also refugees from Jaffa, Lydd, Ramleh and other places – came looking for their doctor. We, the children, were enrolled in the Friends School.*

*In 1957 when two of his daughters, my sisters Tatyana and Zenayda, were studying*

*in Beirut, a letter arrived to the university [the American University of Beirut] from my father's brother Nikolai Rodenko inquiring about his brother Dr. George Rodenko. The two brothers had been separated from each other since 1918. Nikolai was living at the time in Germany after having left the Soviet Union with his family in 1941. The university replied that Dr. George Rodenko had graduated in 1927 and that his daughter Tatyana was currently studying medicine there. After thirty-nine years apart the two brothers had found each other: Nikolai and his wife traveled to Ramallah where they lived with us until his death. He was buried in the Russian church at Gethsemane in Jerusalem.*

*In September 1974 my father, who was only 76 years and in good health, decided to have some medical tests after passing blood in his urine. He went walking to the hospital. During the tests the surgeon doctor carelessly ruptured his colon. They operated on him to repair the damage but he then suffered a heart attack. Several days later, on 6 October 1974, my father died: a sad ending for a great doctor. All of Ramallah mourned. A lady said: Ramallah is not the same without Dr. Rodenko's hat (which he always wore for his daily trips to the local club).*

*Dr. Rodenko/al-Maskobi was buried next to his brother Nikolai in the Russian church at Gethsemane in Jerusalem. He had loved this church. Whenever we visited it with him he would sit there looking at al-Aqsa Mosque and admiring the view of Jerusalem.*

*At the time of his sickness and death, he had been writing his memoirs and sadly had not written of events beyond 1944.*

*The Russian family from Jaffa is now scattered all over the world, just like other Palestinian families. His son Peter is in Dallas, Texas, where his son is also a famous Dr. George Rodenko. Tatyana, a doctor, is with her family in Chicago. Some grandchildren are in Los Angeles, one is in Germany, and another in Malta. Two of us, Zenayda and myself, are in Amman with our families.*

## **A Ukraine Childhood**

I was born on 30 April 1897. They named me Yuri – George. I was the fourth and last son in the family. Our family was living in the small town of Klintzi in Ukraine,<sup>1</sup> surrounded by pine trees and woods, with a small river flowing across it and a medium-sized lake at the northern border. My childhood games were flying kites, breeding pigeons and catching singing birds such as goldfinch, bullfinch, and siskin which gave us a wonderful concert every morning. Every spring, on 7 April, I and everybody else in Russia used to open the doors of the cages and let the birds free because it was their mating



George Rodenko's photo taken for the graduation from the AUB, Beirut, June 1927. Family album.

time and it was considered a big sin not to allow birds to build their own nests. In winter we played with snowballs and divided ourselves into two groups, building fortifications from snow and attacking each other. I would enjoy riding on sledges with the other boys and careening very fast downhill. At home I often sat in a warm room near the fire looking through the window at bullfinches as they sat on the trees eating their seeds.

Now I want to write about my family: My father finished the military medical academy<sup>2</sup> in St. Petersburg and came to Klintzi to practice. He was a doctor in charge of factories, hospitals and three schools. His private practice was very busy. His only vacations were spent hunting, fishing, and collecting mushrooms and wild flowers. He was fond of reading and drinking lots of very strong tea. My mother had little education, but was a very clever woman. She was the best housekeeper, very energetic, strict, the best in cooking. She was fond of playing cards and going to the forest to collect mushrooms and swimming in the lake in summer.

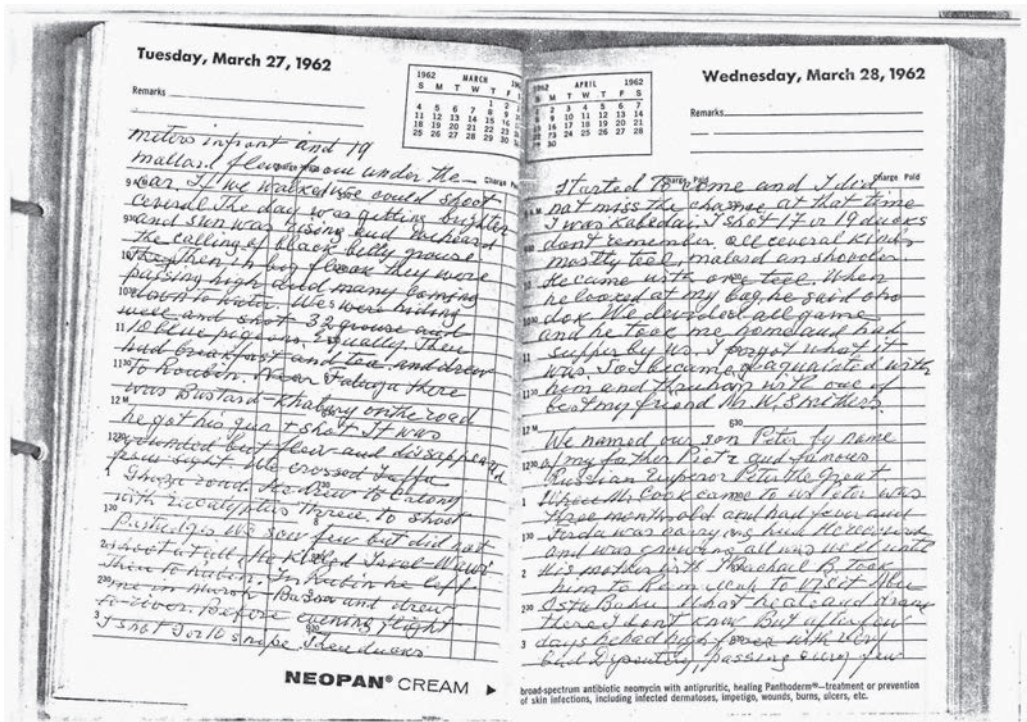
My oldest brother, Alexander, finished gymnasium [high school] in Chernigov town and entered the university engineering department in St. Petersburg. He was clever, the best in mathematics, but he did not study well. He spent his time between the opera and the races. He married while at university. His wife was Polish and Alexander was spending so much money that he had to write home saying he's short of it. My mother used to run to the post office to send him money by telegram. It took Alexander about ten years to receive his diploma. He became an engineer in an arms factory, and then worked as a high school teacher. Later Alexander was shot by the government forces (civil war).

My second brother Nikolai also finished gymnasium in Chernigov and entered the University of St. Petersburg to study natural history. He too was lazy and used to run after the ladies a lot. He also married while he was a student, had one daughter and divorced his wife, married again and had a daughter and a son. His son was also shot by the government forces (civil war). During Nikolai's teaching career, he ran away from Russia with the Germans to Bavaria. Later, I was able to invite him to Jordan [Ramallah, West Bank] after he found my address through the American University in Beirut.

My third brother Valerian was very religious. He finished middle school in the town of Novozibkob and entered the theological seminary. After he finished there he entered the agricultural university<sup>3</sup> in Kiev. He became a priest for several years, married and had a daughter and a son, but the son was killed at the front during the war. Then Valerian became a teacher and, while I know he was alive during the war, I don't know what happened later.

We were living well and happily. Then in 1914 World War I started. In 1917, when the first revolution [Bolshevik] started, all of us in our family were in favor of it. My brother Valerian was chosen to be the leader commissar of the workers. It was spring and my father, Kola, and I went to Feshenko's farm with Mikaila, of course to shoot male ducks and woodcocks. Two days after returning from shooting my father became ill. He had a fever which worsened every day. Two doctors came and diagnosed typhoid fever. Of course there was no treatment for it at that time. After two weeks he became delirious and died. He was 64 years old. His funeral was two days later and practically everyone





A page from the pharmaceutical promotional agenda on which Dr. Rodenko wrote his memoirs in his neat handwriting.

from Klintzi and thousands others from the villages around Klintzi came to attend. He was buried under pine trees. Mama cried very much and we all helped drop the coffin into his grave. Very few people had such a father. People called him *bezserbrenik*, “the father of the poor,” meaning the man who does not care about money.

I passed to the eighth year of gymnasium which was the final year. The second revolution occurred and the communists took over the government. I took my diploma from gymnasium and applied to the medical school of the University of Kiev.<sup>4</sup> By this time the Germans had been beaten on the western front and a peace treaty was signed. The Germans began to evacuate the Ukraine and I thought if I stayed in Klintzi after the Germans left, I would be unable to go to Kiev to the university, so it would be better for me to leave with them.

## On the Road<sup>5</sup>

I left Klintzi with the German army, and walked thirty kilometers to the town of Novozybkov. There I took the train and rode in the baggage wagon, reaching Kiev after fifteen days. Because the communist army was approaching Kiev, I left to Odessa to enter the white army. Soon I joined the cavalry division in Rostov. We came to the town of Kerch in Crimea and disembarked there to get ready to fight again. We later passed

by the Bosphorus near Constantinople and reached Gallipoli in the Dardanelles. There I saw a big Russian ship in the harbor loaded with people and getting ready to leave for Brazil. I decided to join them. By the time we got to the Aegean Sea the motors stopped and for several days we were helpless. We ran out of food and fresh water. Fortunately a French ship was passing by and we made all kinds of signals to attract the attention of its captain. The ship came to us and pulled us to Sicily.

After two days, a special ship from France came to pull us to Corsica to the town of Ajaccio, the birthplace of Napoleon. The French government told us that if we want to stay in Corsica we must sign a contract for one year with our employer or else we will be taken to Constantinople. I thought one year was too long, so I decided to leave and try my luck in Constantinople. One day, as I was walking on Taksim Street, I met the major or the officer who had been commanding our squadron, Mr. Nikolai Dimitrovich Kouzenstor. He told me about the American Russian Committee that was sending Russian students to continue their education at the American University in Beirut. He said he wanted me to go and that he would help me. I immediately ran to the French consulate and got the visa. Then I left with him to the port where the French ship was getting ready to leave in a few minutes! We were twelve Russians along with supposedly French soldiers who were really Algerian and Senegalese blacks. We had good military food and a bottle of wine each daily. We Russians of course got acquainted with each other, and in two days we reached Beirut.

## **A Russian at the AUB Medical School**

We said goodbye to the French officers and soldiers on the ship and went off by tram to AUB. There we were met by Professor Hall, the principal of the preparatory school and a very nice old man. We had a big dormitory for lodging and took our food in the dining room with small boys from the junior departments. To begin with, it was good: we did not work, and I and a few others got secondhand clothes and monthly pocket money. We also began to learn English. Our teachers were Professor Hall, Mr. [Bayard] Dodge and one young American teacher whose name I forgot. My Latin and French helped me pick up this new language. Then summer vacation came and the university closed, so they took us to school in Aley where we continued learning English throughout the summer.

In October we returned to AUB and were asked what we wanted to study. I and a student named Krasnyanski said we wanted to study medicine. Another student from my group entered freshman studies, and the rest went into commerce. So I started my first year at medical school and found life changed. Not only was there no more pocket money but on top of that we had to work as waiters in the dining room for two hours and every Saturday afternoon to cover our scholarship.

My English was really too weak to study medicine. I could not understand a single word, but what was more difficult for me was to answer the questions. I was looking in the dictionary all the time to find out the meaning of the words, and then I would try to

remember them in order to understand the subject. I was studying until midnight but my lessons were still not ready, so I would wake up at four in the morning to study again. Later on in the morning I had to go to the dining room to serve the students their food, then after that I would go to my classes.

During the first quarter of the year all my grades were unsatisfactory except histology. My teachers knew that I was working very hard, but my English was poor, so in the faculty meeting they decided to give me the chance to study until the midyear. My friend Krasianski was kicked out of school and so he went to France. In the midyear exams I passed all my subjects except anatomy, and at the end of the year I passed all subjects. My first grade in organic chemistry was 5/100 and the last quiz was 45/100.

I passed to the second year of medical school and then summer vacation came again. A Russian-American engineer, Kisilocvi, gave me a job of carrying iron to the fourth floor of a building on my shoulders in return for twenty-five Syrian piasters. In summer Beirut was like an oven and in that heat I worked nine hours a day for two months. Then AUB's dining room opened and they asked me to come and serve there. At that time I was a waiter for the teachers and in return had good food. Never mind about money! The vacation passed, students came back, and second year of medicine began.

Second year passed quickly and my English became a little better although I was still weak. But I passed all subjects with satisfactory grades. Summer came and the doctors and professors were leaving to the mountains. Dr. Parr, our bacteriology teacher, asked me to guard his house. That year the AUB dining room was to open all year round so I worked there as a waiter having my meals, and spent the nights at Dr. Parr's house. When summer passed and Dr. Parr came back, he gave me three gold Turkish pounds. I finally became a rich man! I bought a secondhand pair of shoes and a pair of underwear. Then I started third year of medical school.

Third year was not that difficult for me and even more interesting. We began to study real medicine by going to the hospital and outside clinics by sections. Those who had average grades above 75 at the end of the year passed to the fourth year without an oral examination. I was one of those but then our medical school extended the program from four to five years just as I became a senior! We all fought against it and partially won. They gave us a chance to spend our final fifth year at any hospital we liked.

During the summer vacation I worked in the dining room, had my food there, and was living in a room at the AUB opposite its main gate. In meantime, I was attending out-patient clinics and other operations at the hospital. I learned how to give intravenous injections and vaginal examinations, and gained very good experience and saw many interesting cases. Students came back after the summer vacation and we began our fourth year as seniors, each one of us with a junior medical student from third year to lead. We were called often during the night for labor cases at the hospital and we were allowed to handle deliveries. Fourth year was much easier and more interesting.

Dr. George Noucko [that is, Dr. Nehme' Nucho]<sup>6</sup> was lecturing to us about tuberculosis (TB). I passed to the fifth year with good marks, and at the end of the year Dr. Noucko asked me to spend the summer at the TB sanatorium<sup>7</sup> in Shebaniya. I had many cases

during that time. The treatment for TB was calcium injections thus inducing pneumothorax by injections of air in the pleural cavity to collapse the affected lung. I learnt quickly how to do it but patients were dying like flies – from the flu. As I was making my rounds in the evenings to see the patients, they used to ask me when will they be cured. With all their hopes for recovery I would come the next morning and find their beds empty. It was astonishing how TB patients had hoped for recovery until the last moment.

There were many street dogs in Shebaniya, barking all night. They did not let us, or the patients, sleep. To solve the problem I gave them small doses of strychnine to get rid of at least some of them. At the end of the summer I was given seven gold Turkish pounds. I was glad: I went ahead and bought shoes and underwear, and was able to have a cup of tea occasionally in a restaurant.

In my fifth year I spent the first three months working at AUB hospital, then I was sent to Tripoli to an American hospital<sup>8</sup> where Dr. Boyes was head doctor. The hospital was in al-Mina, about two kilometers from Tripoli. I would visit Tripoli very often by a tram run by mules for three Turkish coins. My practice there was very good and interesting since Dr. Boyes gave me cases that required operations for delivery. At the end of my three-month term, I was given three gold pounds and I bought two pairs of underwear.

The last months at AUB passed quickly, the fifth year ended and graduation day was set for 22 June 1927. I did not have a new suit to wear so I borrowed five gold pounds from a nurse to make a new black suit and to take two kinds of photographs. On our graduation day we had lunch in West Hall with all of the new graduates; many old AUB alumni also came. Then at four in the afternoon commencement began. We medical students were last and as my last name starts with an R there were only four or five graduates after me. Finally I got on the platform but without many people clapping for me since I had no relatives and very few acquaintances. President Dodge gave me my diploma, shook my hand and said, “Congratulations, Dr. Rodenko!”

## **First Appointment in Tripoli**

We had to sit for a French examination to be able to practice in Lebanon and Syria. It was very easy for me, and I got my license and left two days later to Tripoli. My salary was twelve gold Turkish pounds, which was very little for a doctor. Food was bad, but I had a very good practice. We had a nurse called Anisa who was trained in AUB in bacteriology. She taught me many things and showed me interesting slides – TB, gonococcus, malaria strains, amoeba plate tests and moving amoeba.

We had many cases of malaria, including malignant cases. At that time a new Bayer preparation came out for malaria, plasmoquine tablets which were very effective for this kind of malaria. We started treating patients with these tablets and they were cured. We had three cases of severe, complicated malaria where the patients died. Many cases of liver abscess were cured following operations by Dr. Boyes, and pelvic cases due to gonorrhoea were treated and in a few days the patient would be cured. I had a very good experience

indeed, including tonsillectomies, prostate operations, iridectomies, and labor cases.

In one very interesting case a few school boys went for a picnic from Tripoli to Bsharre. One of them had a revolver and they started to play with it until it fired accidentally. The bullet went into the abdomen of a student. He was brought to our hospital in a bad condition. First we took X-rays to locate the bullet, then he was taken to the operating room where Dr. Boyes opened his abdomen. We saw fragments of a tapeworm moving in his peritoneal cavity and sixteen holes in his intestines perforated by the bullet. We stitched the holes and washed the cavity with saline, inserted a drainage tube and thought the patient would die from peritonitis. Man proposes but God disposes. He did not get peritonitis, or suppuration. We removed the tube after a week and he was discharged in ten days. There was no penicillin or any other kind of antibiotics at that time except to trust in God and do your best.

HAUT COMMISSARIAT  
DE LA  
RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE  
AUPRÈS DES ÉTATS  
DE SYRIE, DU LIBAN, DES ALAOUTES  
ET DU DJERBL, DRUZE  
INSPECTION GÉNÉRALE  
DES  
SERVICES DE SANTÉ

### PERMIS D'EXERCICE DE MÉDECINE

VU le diplôme No. 229. décerné par la Faculté de l'École de  
Médecine de l'UNIVERSITÉ AMÉRICAINE de BEYROUTH, en date  
du.....29 Juin.....1927.....;

VU le résultat favorable des examens passés devant la Commission  
déléguée par le Haut-Commissariat de la République Française en SYRIE et  
au LIBAN ;

avons accordé à M.....Gourgn.....Rodenko.....  
le permis d'exercer la Médecine en Syrie et au Liban :

BEYROUTH, le.....29 Juin.....1927



The "Permis d'exercice de médecine" [Permission for Practicing Medicine] issued to Dr. Rodenko on 29 June 1927 by the French Authorities, allowing him to practice medicine in Syrian and Lebanon. Family papers.

## Beirut Leads to Gaza and Nablus in Palestine

I was fed up with the hospital food so I sometimes went for lunch at a French restaurant even though my salary was poor, about nine English pounds. After fourteen months at the hospital and saving very little money, I decided to go to Beirut and look for a better job.

At that time Dr. [Robert] Stirling came to Beirut to look for a doctor to work with him in an English hospital in Gaza. Dr. [E. St. John] Ward, the AUB medical school dean at that time, called me to ask if I would like to go to Gaza with Stirling. They would pay me twenty-two and a half English pounds per month with lodging, and every year I would get an extra half pound per month. I agreed and he arranged my visa for Palestine. I left the eighty-five gold pounds I had with me in the AUB treasury.

I went to Haifa by taxi. On the border between Lebanon and Palestine the French

customs and the police asked me if I had gold money. I said that I did not, and they stamped my passport. A Nansen passport<sup>9</sup> for a Russian refugee! We came to Palestine. Soon we arrived to Haifa and the driver took me to the railway station. I bought a second-class ticket to Gaza and was soon on the train to Egypt. I was able to see the country and reached Gaza in the evening. I forgot how I got from the station to the hospital but I remember very well how I entered through the gate to the Church Missionary Society (CMS) Hospital Compound.

The first to meet me were the head nurse Emily Dabbika and hospital pharmacist [Hagop] Arsenian. They took me to a small house that belonged to the hospital. There was no doctor in the hospital at that time so I was rather busy. I was eating my meals at a Jewish hotel where the food was Russian Jewish and not too bad. There was a pharmacy in Gaza and I became acquainted with a Russian Jewish dispenser and a private Russian Jewish doctor. Very often in the afternoons, the three of us played a Russian card game called Preferans – I was always winning.

Early in the morning a few days after I arrived I heard a strong knock at the door. When I opened the door, a public health department man showed me a letter from a government doctor named Haddad asking me to go quickly with forceps to help him deliver a woman at her house. Two doctors, Haddad and Beckman, had spent all night trying to deliver the baby but could not do so. I brought forceps from the hospital and took off to her house. There I found about fifty people and doctors sitting near the woman who was lying in a flood. I asked what the matter was and they said that it is just a difficult case. I examined the woman and found it was an arm presentation. I examined the baby's heart but could not hear it. I then asked for soap and water, washed my hands, put one hand inside to push the baby's arm back, grabbed one of the baby's legs and pulled it out, then the other leg and delivered the baby in a few minutes. The people there clapped their hands although the baby of course was dead. He had died a long time ago but the mother was fine. Both doctors were embarrassed.

My name in Gaza became well known. While I was there a letter came to me from Dr. Ward asking me to return to AUB to be an assistant to Dr. Parr in bacteriology. I refused and Dr. Ward has been very cross with me since then. Unfortunately after two months when Dr. Stirling returned from his vacation I was asked to transfer to the CMS hospital in Nablus. I agreed and met Dr. [Louisa] Pigeon, a lady doctor, who was in charge of the hospital. We did not have many cases and none of special interest.



Dr. Rodenko's membership card at the Arab Medical Association in Jaffa, issued on 17 December 1947. Family papers.

## Jaffa and Medical Renown

Two months later the CMS asked me to go to Jaffa where Dr. Khalil was in charge of the hospital. The matron was Miss Morris and there were two staff nurses: Zuhra and Frida, my future wife. Miss Morris was in love with Frida but she was also a most mischievous person. She used to smile to people, but deep inside she was a bad person. She started to like me but I became friendly with Frida. Then I was asked to go to Salt where I spent two months, and then came back to Jaffa.

Most of the missionaries were full of mischief, as were ours in Jaffa. Dr. Khalil resigned and entered the [Trans-] Jordanian Frontier Force Service. I remained there alone with a few good people like Miss Stella Garaeb, Miss McConey, Mr. Sarafin our dispenser, and of course my future wife, head nurse Frida Bahu. I was alone in the hospital for several months and had much work to do. We had a large outpatient clinic and sometimes there would be almost 100 patients waiting. Very often I would finish clinic work around four in the afternoon and then go to the hospital to make my rounds.

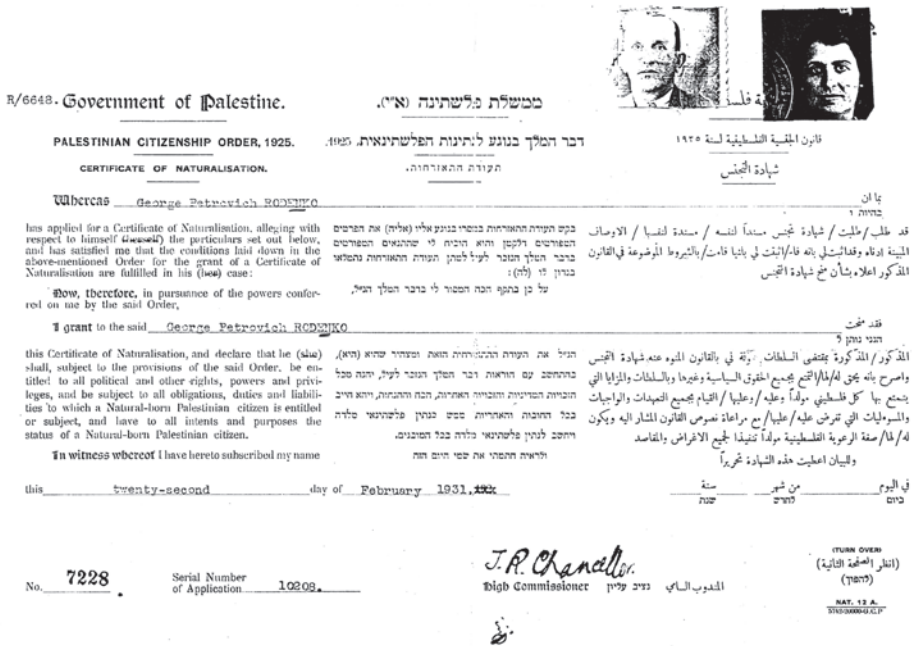
There were many anemic patients, most of whom came from orange grove areas. They had neither malaria nor nephritis and could not all be pernicious anemia cases. I remembered that when I was working in Tripoli an Egyptian fifth-year student from AUB had come as an intern to our hospital. He was writing his thesis about *Ancylostoma*, hookworm. Recalling his thesis, I asked myself if all of these anemic cases could be *Ancylostoma*? I told the nurse to get me a stool specimen from a patient to examine with a microscope which we had available. I made a slide, examined it, and at once found ova that were different from ascaris and tape worm. Inside some of them were moving larvae. I looked it up in a bacteriology book and identified the ova as those of hookworm, *Ancylostoma duodenalis*. The treatment was carbon tetrachloride but the pharmacies and even PhD pharmacists did not have it. There was a CMS hospital in Cairo, so we wrote asking them for carbon tetrachloride since they had many cases of *Ancylostoma*. We received the drug after a few weeks. The dose was 4cc at bedtime, followed the next morning by magnesium sulphate purge to be repeated again after a week. The patient was then discharged to come back after a month. When they came back they were different people, strong, color in their face, and they used to kiss my hand. News about curing them spread in the villages and many new cases started coming. The hospital was full of them and my name became well known for being the first doctor to diagnose *Ankylostoma* in Palestine. The disease was carried to Palestine by Egyptian laborers who came with the English during the First World War.



George Rodenko with his wife Frida Bahu, date and place unknown. Family album.

# Frida and Childbirth

During this time I had my eyes on Frida and we became friendly. I wanted to get married, so I asked Frida and she agreed. But as the custom goes with all Arabs, she told me to go to Jerusalem and ask her brother Micha'il . So one day I went to Jerusalem and found Micha'il near his office. I told him that I wanted to marry Frida and he said, "Mabrook." After several weeks we were married at Mar Elias church near Jerusalem. There were two priests, a Russian, Otety Tekhon, and an Arab, Khalil. The service was long and tiring but after it was over we went to Jericho for two days for our honeymoon.



The Certificate of Naturalisation, issued on 22 February 1931 by the Government of Palestine, granted to George Rodenko declaring him "entitled to all political and other rights, powers and privileges, and be subject to all obligations, duties and liabilities to which a Natural-born Palestinian citizen is entitled or subject, and have to all intents and purposes the status of a Natural-born Palestinian citizen." Family papers.

Back in Jaffa we lived in a small house with two small rooms, a small dining room and kitchen, in the hospital compound. The furniture bought from Tel Aviv was simple but durable, since we are still using it until now. Frida stopped working at the hospital and spent her time cooking and taking care of the house. An old woman helped us.

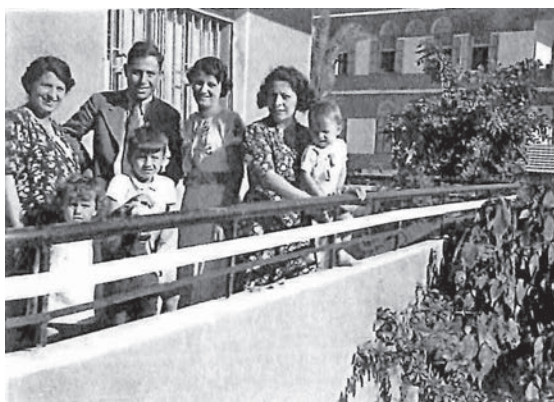
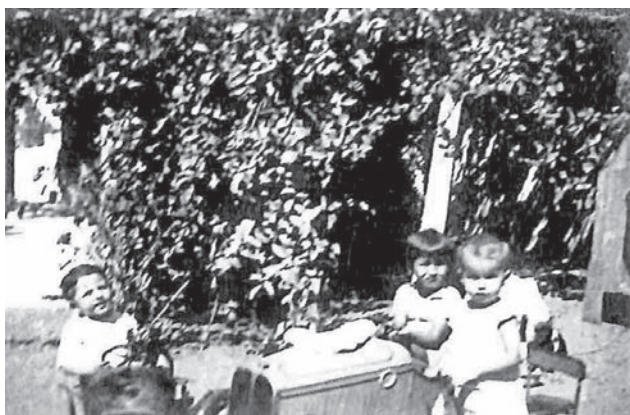
In the afternoons I used to go to a coffee house called Abu Shakush. I played pinnace and rummy with Dr. Burdkush and Mr. Saba who was a pharmacist. In the evenings we went to play cards at Mrs. Halliway's, our neighbor. Then Frida became pregnant. She liked halawah very much and every morning ate some. Her due date came and the baby seemed big. I made a mistake by not taking her to the hospital in Tel Aviv. People



advised us to get a German midwife from the German colony. When her labor started, the midwife came, a middle-aged woman and very energetic, but she could not deliver Frida. She called me in the morning and after examining her I found out that there was no heartbeat. The baby was dead so I took Frida to our hospital where Dr. Carnee, a French doctor, came and delivered a dead, big and nice-looking baby boy. We lost our first son; he was buried near the hospital.

## Private Practice in Ajami, Jaffa

I was working hard but I was paid very little and outside practice was forbidden. Our hospital had an outpatient clinic in Lydda which was opened twice a week. I and another English doctor each went once weekly. Patients used to pay five piasters for a visit and medicine, which was the same as what they paid at any hospital. I went to the clinic early to finish by noon. The English doctor was jealous of me and he did not like the fact that all patients wanted to be seen by me. Miss Morris was jealous too. So Frida and I decided to resign. If I had had a written contract with the hospital – which I did not have



From the family album. Place and date unknown.

– I would not have been able to work in the same town for two years after resigning. We found a house in the Ajami neighborhood that belonged to the Majdalanis, so we told the people at the hospital goodbye and we moved. Our new home was full of scorpions and far from the main street. But soon the patients discovered it and during the first month I made two and a half times more money than I had made at the hospital. We started to buy furniture for the house and we found a good servant.

Frida became pregnant again and one day, nine months later, Frida had light pain early in the morning but she did not tell me. That morning I went shooting and when I came back her pains were stronger so I immediately took her to Tel Aviv to Dr. Poukhovski's hospital. Early the next morning, Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi arrived – my son Bannoor, Peter. Frida had a very simple normal delivery and the baby was healthy. We took him home after a few days and Frida nursed him. We named our son after my father, Piotr and the famous Russian emperor Peter the Great. I was working well and we were making much money. Our friend Abu Khalil came to us daily, played with Peter, carried him and sang to him, “*Idi, Idi, Salam idi, Salam idak al-baba...*”

It was time for Frida to have another baby. This time her labor was not normal so we took her to the French hospital in the evening and Dr. Bouraux delivered her. We had a nice-looking blond baby girl, a future doctor. We named her Tatyana, a good Russian name in many ways, popular in Russian literature and in many romances.

[In 1934–1935] trouble erupted in Palestine. The Jews were coming in the thousands. We had saved enough money and decided to build a house, so we bought a piece of land on the main street and started to build. It was 1935 and our engineer was Butros Shamiya from Jerusalem. It was a two-story house with a garage, a clinic on top, a garden in the front and a backyard. Arabs started to strike against the English government, so our house construction stopped for several months. While the house was being built, Frida was there with the workers every day, pregnant with a big abdomen, often telling them to change this and that.

I was gone to see a patient in our car with Miss Morris and the driver Hassan when that afternoon Frida had labor pains. Her cousin, *bint khalitha*, Emily Dabbika, delivered her. Again we had a girl and named her Zena “Zenayda.” She was fifteen days old when we moved to our newly finished house after the strikes were over.

Our new house was beautiful and very strong, with double walls, a cement roof, asphalt, tiles, handsome entrance, and big verandas in the front and back. The front garden was full of roses, carnations, and beautiful trees. The backyard had roses, lemon and *kashta* [graviola or soursop] trees, a cage for the poultry and pigeons, an electric pump for the water, and a beautiful bathroom with green tile and walls. We had a gas heater which gave us hot water in just a few moments. The garage and the clinic had white walls and tiles and many other features – in short the house was beautiful and one of the best in Jaffa. I had a new Buick car which I bought from Emile Katarji. It was wonderful and I had a nice Armenian driver called Simon Gagarian.

One woman had amenorrhea for two years. I treated her and she started to have a normal menses, and became pregnant. They called me for her labor and she delivered a

baby boy. The neighbors could not believe that the woman had actually gotten pregnant and had a baby, and when they saw the child they said, “Muscofi found him in his bag (*shanta*)!” We had two other good friends, Emile Katorji and Saba Farah. Neither had been able to have children for fifteen years. There was not a single sperm in their seminal fluid. So I started treating both men, and to my surprise their wives both became pregnant. Emile’s wife had twin boys but one died, while Saba’s wife had a girl and a boy. Very good luck, *min Allah*, from God.

My work was very good. I had many patients in the morning, had two hours of sleep after lunch, and then saw more patients in the afternoon. We saved money and bought a piece of land near our house because we did not want people to build on it and disturb us. Then we had another child, a girl and we named her Zoya. When Um Bannour got pregnant again, we had our fifth child, a baby girl who we named Olla (Olga).

#### Endnotes

- 1 Klintsy, as it is commonly spelled, is now in Russia.
- 2 The S. M. Kirov Military Medical Academy.
- 3 The National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine.
- 4 The Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv.
- 5 The following paragraphs, which have been condensed from a longer account in the memoir, omit many details but retain all of the major routes of his journey. Although his account does not provide dates, it does give durations. Thus one can conclude that the author arrived in Beirut in 1921, three years after leaving his hometown.
- 6 “Professor Emeritus Nehme’ Nucho is most well-known for his tireless and pioneering work in the diagnosis and treatment of tuberculosis. He graduated with an MD in 1901 from what was then the Syrian Protestant College and returned in 1904 to join the medical faculty. In 1908, Nucho was approached by Dr. Mary Pearson Eddy to help at the newly established Hamlin Memorial Sanitorium, which was primarily used

to care for tuberculosis patients. At that time, tuberculosis was essentially incurable. Nucho introduced many advances in dealing with this dreaded disease, including surgical treatment of advanced cases as well as new methods for early diagnosis before it appeared on chest x-rays,” in *Main Gate*, American University of Beirut Quarterly Magazine, 5, no. 4 (Summer 2007), online at [staff.aub.edu.lb/~webmgate/summer2007/profile.htm](http://staff.aub.edu.lb/~webmgate/summer2007/profile.htm) (accessed 17 April 2018).

- 7 In the early 1900s, the Presbyterian missionary Mary Pierson Eddy began taking care of tuberculosis patients in the region. She started Hamlin Sanatorium for tuberculosis which gradually became known as The Hospital for Chest Diseases. Online at [hamlinhome.org/](http://hamlinhome.org/) (accessed 17 April 2018).
- 8 Kennedy Memorial Hospital in Tripoli.
- 9 Nansen passports, advocated by the polar explorer Fridtjof Nansen in the aftermath of World War I, were internationally recognized refugee travel documents used from 1922 to 1938. They were first issued by the League of Nations to stateless refugees.

## “A Young Man of Promise”

### Finding a Place for Stephan Hanna Stephan in the History of Mandate Palestine

Sarah Irving

*Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem is an annual award launched in 2017 to commemorate the memory and work of Ibrahim Dakkak (1929–2016), former chairman of the Advisory Board.*

If one has heard of Stephan Hanna Stephan at all, it is probably in connection with his ethnographic writings, published in the *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society (JPOS)* in the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>1</sup> Stephan was one of what Salim Tamari tentatively calls a “Canaan Circle,” the nativist anthropologists of Mandate Palestine, among whom the best known is Tawfiq Canaan.<sup>2</sup> Along with Elias Haddad, Omar Salih al-Barghuti, Khalil Totah, and others, they described and analyzed rural Palestinian culture and customs, seeing themselves as recording a disappearing way of life which, in its diversity, reflected the influences of myriad civilizations.<sup>3</sup>

This body of work, revived by Palestinian nationalist folklorists in the 1970s, is regarded as key to demonstrating the depth and longevity of Palestinian culture and identity, thus earning Stephan and his companions a place in the nationalist pantheon. However, as the research presented here highlights, his life story embodies two main themes above and beyond his ethnographic work. The first of these is Stephan’s contribution to Palestinian intellectual production during the Mandate era, which was greater than he has been given credit for. The second is a foregrounding of the complexity of life under the Mandate, in which relations between Palestinian Arabs and Jews and members of the British administration overlapped on a daily basis, defying clear lines and easy ex post facto assumptions about personal and professional relations between the different communities.

In articles such as “Palestinian Parallels to the Song of Songs,” published in *JPOS* in 1922, where Stephan lays out the lyrics of folk songs collected from singers and reciters across Palestine, Stephan certainly demonstrated his best known, Canaanist

perspective. As the title of the article suggests, he saw the songs he had gathered as incorporating elements from Biblical literary culture as well as links to Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and other civilizations.<sup>4</sup>

Such works support the idea that there was a kind of proto-nationalism to the writings of Stephan and his colleagues. This was not necessarily a *consciously* political way of articulating ethnographic ideas. Rather it stemmed from confidence in a Palestinian national and historical identity with ancient roots and contemporary richness and diversity – expressed in a way which can be seen as “strategic” in the challenge it posed to European and American scholarship which ignored modern Palestinian Arabs in favor of Jewish connections to the Holy Land.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, for Stephan to claim a Palestinian identity for the Song of Songs, as he clearly does in the article, shows the robustness of his belief in this idea. The Song was an important text in discourses of Zionist and Jewish identities; a common interpretation saw it as a hymnic articulation of the passionate love between the Jewish people and the land – the actual earth – of Israel.<sup>6</sup> To present the Song as inherently Palestinian was, therefore, a bold move.

Stephan’s ethnographic work was important in its time and widely cited by international scholars. But, as this article shows, his talents and achievements went far beyond this. He left no diaries or memoirs, and few other documentary traces of his life, ideas, and works. But by piecing together the fragments of evidence that do exist, we can build up a picture of a scholar and thinker underrated both during and after his own lifetime.

## Early Years

Stephan Hanna Stephan was born in the village of Bayt Jala, near Bethlehem, in 1894.<sup>7</sup> As a boy he studied at the Syrian Orphanage, or Schneller School, a Lutheran German institution established by Johann Ludwig Schneller in Jerusalem to house children made destitute in turmoil which swept Lebanon in 1860.<sup>8</sup> By the time Stephan attended it had become one of the most important schools in the city, teaching both the needy and the children (male and female) of mainly Christian families. It has a particular role in the histories of the “Canaan Circle,” since it was attended by all three of the most prominent members – Canaan, Haddad, and Stephan.



Stephan H. Stephan with an unidentified baby on his lap. Place and date unknown. Family album.

Canaan and Haddad, both Lutheran Protestants, remained connected to this community throughout their lives, but Stephan was less integrated into Jerusalem's Lutherans, whether German- or Arabic-speaking, since he came from Bayt Jala's Syriac community.<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, Stephan was baptized at the Schneller School, as he recorded in a letter many years later:

About 40 days ago, the old director, Herr Schneller, passed away – Allah may welcome him in his grace. He was a gentleman in every respect. Today, on 24th May [in] 1908 he confirmed me. Back then, I was still a brat of barely fourteen.<sup>10</sup>

This letter places Stephan not only under the religious tutelage of Theodor Schneller, son of the school's founder, but also confirms his date of birth in or around 1894. It also highlights the fact that the Syrian Orphanage did not confine its education to Protestant children and that many of its alumni retained their own faiths.<sup>11</sup>

## First Publications

Stephan's first articles for the *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society*, published in 1921–22, have already been mentioned. But the same year he published another piece, one which situates him within debates happening across the Arabic-speaking world. This was a two-page article entitled simply “al-Mar'a” (“Woman”), in the January 1922 edition of *Sarkis*.<sup>12</sup> In it Stephan outlines an idea of the place of women in Palestinian society which bears the imprint of important works from the *Nahda*, or Arab renaissance, which flowered in Cairo and Beirut in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In particular, the arguments Stephan puts forward contain strong echoes of those found in two classics of Nahda thought on the role of women, Qasim Amin's *The Liberation of Women* and *The New Woman*.<sup>13</sup> In this view, women should not be confined to the home (as upper-class women often had been in the Ottoman era), should receive education, and should be entitled to work and have a public role, up to a point.<sup>14</sup> Like Amin, however, Stephan tends to articulate these ideas not in terms of rights for women, or of a fundamental sense of equality between the sexes, but because they represent a signal of modernity, linked to notions of social development and progress which permeated many strands of Arab thought and nationalism in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>15</sup> Once women took a fuller role in it, a society was seen as having reached “the highest peaks of civil life, prosperity, civilization and urbanity.”<sup>16</sup>

The significance of Stephan's article is twofold. Firstly, *Sarkis* was an important publication in Nahda circles, founded by Salim Bin Shahin of the prominent Sarkis family and running from 1905 to 1924.<sup>17</sup> Salim Sarkis had previously edited another magazine, *Mir'at al-Hasna* (Mirror of the Beautiful), of which at least sixteen issues were printed

in Cairo in the late 1890s, before launching his eponymous journal.<sup>18</sup> The latter published writings on religion and society by figures such as Ameen al-Rihani,<sup>19</sup> and to find his work in it demonstrates that Palestinian writers, even one as insignificant at the time as Stephan, were not only conscious of and engaged with key institutions of Arab thought and culture at the time, but were reaching beyond their national press into the regional conversation.<sup>20</sup> Secondly, the content of Stephan's article shows his awareness of debates happening in this milieu, and his willingness to involve himself in them, seeing them not as the abstract concerns of Egyptian or Lebanese society but as discussions in which Palestine should also take part.

In terms of the actual woman in Stephan's life, we know little. He married and had children; one of these was a son called Arthur, according to a 1934 letter from Stephan to the Finnish anthropologist Hilma Granqvist, in which Arthur's bout of rheumatic fever and subsequent bed rest is mentioned.<sup>21</sup> A 1935 letter mentions two sons and Stephan's wife, although no names are given.<sup>22</sup> A chance email from Stephan's granddaughter, Cristina, cleared up some of these questions: Stephan's wife, Arasky Keshishian, was Armenian, and their two sons were Arthur and Angelo.<sup>23</sup>

## Jerusalem under the British

Where Stephan spent the First World War remains a mystery. He might have been conscripted into the Ottoman military, although as a Christian he may not have seen the front line; many Ottoman officers did not trust non-Muslim conscripts, and instead used them as laborers and porters.<sup>24</sup> One clue that Stephan may have been in the Ottoman army is a reference in "Palestinian Parallels to the Song of Songs" to the "Kedkan Kurds between Jerablus (the ancient Carchemish on the Euphrates) and Mimbij (the ancient Bambyce) . . ." from whom he heard a "Kurdish ditty."<sup>25</sup> Given that Stephan came from a modest, if educated, background, in which extensive travel might not have been expected, military service seems a likely explanation for his presence so far north.

For the period of British Mandatory rule in Palestine, Stephan was employed by the Mandate administration. He started out at the Treasury but,<sup>26</sup> with his knowledge of history and anthropology attested to by his *JPOS* writings, he soon moved to the Department of Antiquities. Despite his publications and long career, Stephan remained in fairly low-status roles, and never appeared in the lists of employees in the Blue Books, the official gazettes sent by all British colonial administrations to the Foreign and Colonial Office on an annual basis.

We can see in this the department's discriminatory practices, charted by several scholars: although numerically Arabs far outnumbered Jews amongst Mandate employees, the vast majority of the former were caretakers, guards, or other poorly paid, low-status jobs. Jewish staff of the Antiquities Department, by contrast, often arrived in Palestine with doctorates from European universities and were hired alongside British officials in

the most responsible posts, although the head of the department was always British.<sup>27</sup> The department did train a number of Arab antiquities inspectors, including Dimitri Baramki (later a professor at the American University of Beirut), Awni Dajani, and Salim Husayni (future leading figures in the Jordanian Antiquities administration). Some of these attained high positions during the Mandate, but they were few in proportion to their share of the Palestinian population.

Alongside the discriminatory hiring policies of the department, many of the scholars working there brought with them assumptions about “oriental” peoples, the place of the Bible in the history of Palestine, and the politics of the contemporary region, which colored their views of Arabs and Jews and their cultures and intellects.<sup>28</sup> These tendencies must be seen against a background of British Protestant notions about the Holy Land, which understood contemporary Palestinians as “degraded” relics of the Biblical past.<sup>29</sup> Besides affecting the status of Palestinian Arab employees within the department, these underlying ideas also resulted in distorted views of the material environment of Palestine itself, with Ottoman and other Islamic-era remains sidelined in the legislation and archaeological practices of the British administration.<sup>30</sup>

For Stephan, therefore, the Department of Antiquities must have been on one hand a workplace in which his fascination with history and ethnography could be satisfied, and on the other a site of personal and intellectual discrimination. He never became a full librarian in the Department of Antiquities (a position held by Leo Mayer 1933–34 and Walter Abel Heurtley 1934–38<sup>31</sup>), but he did work in the library of the Palestine Archaeological Museum;<sup>32</sup> and the *Palestine Gazette* reported in 1946 that the previous year he had been moved (perhaps promoted) from Assistant Librarian to Archaeological Officer.<sup>33</sup> The breadth of his duties and knowledge is highlighted by the range of publications and projects which bear his mark, ranging from translations of Ottoman legal documents,<sup>34</sup> to co-authorship of Dimitri Baramki’s report on excavations at a Nestorian hermitage in the Jordan Valley.<sup>35</sup> Stephan’s own description of the Museum library shows the importance of its holdings at the time:

The Library is open only to students. It contains some 20,000 volumes on the archaeology, history, geography, topography, art and religions of Palestine and the Near East. A Records Section adjoining the Reading Room enables the student to obtain all the information he [sic] requires on any archaeological site in the country.<sup>36</sup>

Stephan was responsible for a project in the 1940s, in which the Palestine Museum sought out and made photostatic and handwritten copies of important manuscripts in private libraries in Jerusalem. Most of the museum’s holdings survived the wars of 1948 and 1967 intact, remaining at the renamed Rockefeller Museum after its occupation by the State of Israel, so in some cases these copies are vital records of texts later lost, stolen or damaged.<sup>37</sup>

His employers recognized that Stephan’s skills exceeded the level of his job;



correspondence exists from Robert Hamilton (chief inspector of antiquities, later director of the department) requesting permission from the Government Office to pay Stephan for his translations from Turkish, above and beyond his salary.<sup>38</sup> But given the endemic racism, it is worth wondering whether Stephan's own choice of signature was deliberate; his English-language work was almost always signed 'St. H. Stephan,' a European-looking name which has resulted in misidentifications (for example, as "Stuart H. Stephan") right up to the present day.<sup>39</sup>

Stephan may not have received full credit for his work at the department, but his ethnographic writings were well-received by other scholars. W.F. Albright referred to him as a "young man of promise"<sup>40</sup> and his work quickly attracted attention. The *Quarterly Bulletin* of the Palestine Exploration Fund customarily listed items of interest in other publications, often including articles from *JPOS*: Stephan's articles are mentioned from 1923 onwards and in 1924 his *Song of Songs* article was mentioned as the "chief feature" of its issue.<sup>41</sup> The following year "Lunacy in Palestinian Folklore" was picked out for lengthier description, ahead of a rather critical commentary on a contribution by Albright himself.<sup>42</sup> Although the bulk of Stephan's published work appeared in a small range of Jerusalem-based journals, he did venture beyond these. In the 1930s he contributed to a series of *Post-War Bibliographies of the Near Eastern Mandates*, listing publications on social sciences in the Middle East. This collection was edited by the eminent mathematical sociologist Stuart C. Dodd, at the time based at the American University of Beirut.

## Colonial Relations

The tone of Stephan's personal writings suggests familiarity and relaxed intellectual and social relations with European scholars in Jerusalem. In an exchange of letters with Granqvist, he offers friendly critiques of the Arabic transliteration and translation in her books.<sup>43</sup> In the same letter he mentions, in a tone which combines respect for an elder with social familiarity, that: "I saw Sitt Louisa [the Artas resident and anthropological writer and botanist Louise Baldensperger, 1862-1938] recently: she is robust. The state of her mental vigour is astonishing. She gives her best wishes."

Elsewhere, Stephan writes that he is reviewing the collection of 5,000 Arabic proverbs published in 1933 by Bethlehem pastor Sa'id Abbud, noting that "I will then talk about them to Herr Dr Kamp[f]meyer. We both have the same 'hobby,' namely folklore, as occurring in spoken language."<sup>44</sup> The tone places Stephan on the same level as Kampfmeyer (a German Orientalist and Arabic philologist<sup>45</sup>), categorizing their interest in folklore in the same way. This does not seem the choice of words of a man who sees the European scholar as more expert than himself. In an earlier letter, Stephan sent Granqvist his best wishes for her "important work on Palestine,"<sup>46</sup> highlighting his concern for Palestine as an issue, and suggesting that he saw ethnographic work by the likes of Granqvist as significant for Palestine itself.

On the other hand, in another letter to Granqvist, Stephan writes of her analysis of Palestinian peasant society that: “We never had this idea and have to learn a lot from the West. We just have to prove that we Orientals are students who are quick and eager to learn.” Whether or not this is Stephan flattering his employer, the tone resembles that of Fanon’s “colonized intellectual,” automatically reading Western ideas as superior to those of colonized peoples. How should this be squared with Stephan’s intellectual and cultural self-confidence and nationalist reputation? Stephan’s other works convey something of the difficult line he trod throughout his career, between his sense of Palestinian culture and of his own intellectual authority, versus the colonial working environment and assumptions against which he struggled to be heard.

## Translating Palestine

Stephan’s publications in the *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* were ethnographic studies, but an important body of his work consisted of translations, many for the *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine*. Most of the originals on which Stephan worked were in Ottoman Turkish, a few in Arabic and Syriac, and the articles fit logically alongside other contents of the journal, mainly archaeological reports and finds analysis. Stephan’s work on Mamluk and Ottoman documents received scholarly recognition; in 1943, for instance, the editors of the *American Journal of Archaeology* wrote:

A document of considerable interest for Turkish and Moslem history is an endowment deed of Khasseki Sultan, favorite and queen of Suleiman the Magnificent (1520–66), which is preserved in the Khalidiyye Library, Jerusalem. The deed, which is the preliminary Turkish version, not the final Arabic one, is translated by ST. H. STEPHAN... Stephan’s notes constitute a valuable supplement to the article *waqf* in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*.<sup>47</sup>

The most significant amongst Stephan’s translations is, however, a version from Ottoman Turkish of the Palestine sections of Evliya Celebi’s monumental travelogue. Evliya (pen name of Mehmed Zilli, 1611 – c.1682) was a Turkish courtier and writer whose ten-volume *Seyahatname* (Book of Travels) extends from the Netherlands to Persia and spans over four decades. Stephan’s translation was based on the original Topkapi Saray manuscript of the *Seyahatname*, of which the Palestine Archaeological Museum possessed a photostat copy.<sup>48</sup> The six sections were published from 1935 to 1942, accompanied by annotations on subjects such as place names, connections to Arabic, Jewish, Turkish, and other literature and traditions, and historical background. However, these were only written by Stephan himself for parts five and six of the series; for sections one to four they were contributed by Leo Aryeh Mayer, of whom more later.

Stephan’s translation of the *Seyahatname* has, since its publication, been an important

source for historians of seventeenth-century Palestine.<sup>49</sup> Through Evliya's words, it presents a busy, populous territory, the inhabitants of which include Druze, Jews, Kurds, Christians, and Muslims, and where the towns and cities are home to bathhouses, schools, mosques, synagogues, churches, caravanserais and markets, many with impressive architecture and decorations.<sup>50</sup> But as well as providing information and detail, I argue that Stephan's selection of this subject highlights particular themes from his other writings, such as the role of women, the idea of Palestine as a space for harmonious relations between the Abrahamic faiths, and the existence of a defined territory called Palestine.

Evliya, for example, was "impressed" by the women of Jerusalem, "in particular by their upbringing and education." Dror Ze'evi contrasts this with the account of another traveller, the Franciscan Eugene Roger, who was physician to the Lebanese emir Fakhr al-Din in 1632–33.<sup>51</sup> Writing of a visit to Jerusalem, he insisted that women of "the Orient" were mere chattels, without status or freedom.<sup>52</sup> These instances highlight the value of the *Seyahatname* as evidence for the society of early modern Palestine, but also foreground the image of gender relations which Stephan had promoted in his *Sarkis* article a decade earlier. Evliya's Palestine was, like Stephan's to some extent, urban in character, and in Stephan's day that meant modern.

Also significant is Evliya's repeated use of the term Palestine to describe the territory through which he journeyed. It has, as Haim Gerber puts it, "the ring of something Evliya had heard from people in the area," and suggests that the inhabitants had a concept of a specific unit called "Palestine," regardless of official Ottoman nomenclature.<sup>53</sup> This is replicated in Stephan's translation, which uses phrases such as "the land of Palestine"<sup>54</sup> and repeats assertions from Evliya such as "all chronicles call this country the Land of Palestine."<sup>55</sup>

To this day there is no definitive critical version of the *Seyahatname*, even in the original or in modern Turkish, and no comprehensive translated edition.<sup>56</sup> This makes Stephan's translation all the more important, and highlights why it needs to be seen as a significant contribution to scholarship on early modern Palestine. It allows scholars access to the most important and detailed of the few descriptions of Palestine from a non-Western perspective, and is politically significant insofar as it helps to refute ideas of an empty Palestine, devoid of culture, enterprise, or even people. This explains why Stephan's translation is noted as an event in its own right in 'Arif al-'Arif's history of Jerusalem, first published in 1961.<sup>57</sup>

The story of the *Seyahatname* translation would not, however, be complete without considering the involvement of L. A. Mayer (1895–1959), Stephan's collaborator on four of the six sections in which it was published, and the light this sheds on the complexity of intellectual life in Mandate Jerusalem. Born in Eastern Galicia in January 1895 to a line of rabbis, with parents who were early sympathizers with the Zionist cause, Leo A. Mayer became fascinated by Islamic art while studying at the Oriental Institute of the University of Vienna.<sup>58</sup> He completed a doctorate in Islamic urban architecture and became librarian at the Institute, studied at the Vienna rabbinical seminary, and helped to

found the Hashomer Jewish youth movement. At this stage, under the influence of Martin Buber, Hashomer was mostly concerned with the cultural and spiritual revival of Jewish youth.<sup>59</sup> In 1920 Mayer went to Berlin to take up a position in the Oriental Department of the Prussian State Library, but in 1921 he moved to Palestine.

Mayer, with degrees from prestigious European universities, came to Jerusalem with all the career advantages that Stephan lacked. He rapidly found a job as an Inspector in the Department of Antiquities; under its auspices he excavated in Jerusalem with Eleazar Sukenik and researched the Hittites with the head of the department, John Garstang.<sup>60</sup> He also explored Arabic language studies, working in the 1920s on a dictionary of Palestinian spoken Arabic (never published) with philologist Naftali Tur-Sinai.<sup>61</sup> Alongside this, he was involved in planning an Islamic and Oriental studies institute for the Hebrew University,<sup>62</sup> and was officially employed as a lecturer when the School of Oriental Studies opened in September 1925.

Among Jewish scholars in Palestine, Mayer's interest in Islamic and Arabic culture was unusual; of work sponsored by the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society and Hebrew University during the Mandate, only Mayer's studies and Stekelis' work on prehistoric Palestine were not on "Jewish" subjects such as synagogues and burial sites.<sup>63</sup> Mayer's research is also noteworthy in that one of his main concerns was to unearth the names and life stories of Arab craftsmen, sifting through the signatures on items in museum collections and reconstructing the links between objects. At the International Congress of Orientalists in Istanbul in 1951 he reported his identification of hundreds of individual artists and craftsmen, bringing to light the names of formerly anonymous creators of masterpieces in "stone, wood, metal and glass."<sup>64</sup> He later published volumes on Muslim artists – architects, astrolabists, woodcarvers; those on metalworkers, armorers, and stone carvers were issued posthumously.<sup>65</sup>

From his first days in Jerusalem, Mayer made friends of "educated Arabs who opened their libraries to him"<sup>66</sup> and "from the start supported all moves for an entente with the Arabs and counted many of them among his friends."<sup>67</sup> He "knew how to cooperate with other scholars and publish results jointly. Other scholars acknowledged his helpfulness and were therefore always willing to help him in return,"<sup>68</sup> and his work with Stephan attests to this. However, he was also described by obituarists as a "proud and devoted"<sup>69</sup> and "convinced and staunch" Zionist.<sup>70</sup> As well as moving to Palestine and working as a mainstay of its primary university, he joined the Jewish Palestine Exploration Society in



Stephan H. Stephan. Place and date unknown. Family album.

1922 and served as its president for many years. The combination of his cross-community friendships and links with Hashomer and other groups advocating for a binational state suggests that collaboration was not just a personal choice, but part of Mayer's adherence to a cultural Zionism, focused on Jerusalem as a seat of renaissance, not the center of a new and exclusive state.

But Stephan and Mayer's cooperation did not last the length of the project; the annotations and footnotes of the final two pieces are all Stephan's work. The publication dates of the sections offer a clue: two of those annotated by Mayer appear in 1935, one in 1936, and one in 1938. All are short sections of the whole – five, ten, four, and thirteen pages respectively, suggesting a slow, cumbersome and/or meticulous process. Three were probably written before the Palestinian Uprising of 1936-39 and the last soon after its start. Did the relationship break down under political pressure between the two men or from their wider circles? The pattern seems to fit contexts such as rising tensions between Jews and Arabs, the spike in immigration after the Nazis took power in Germany in 1933 – and the fact that Stephan never followed up on his other notable collaboration with a Jewish partner, an Arabic handbook for Steimatzky's (a Jewish bookstore which at the time had branches in Beirut, Damascus, Cairo, and Baghdad as well as Jaffa, Haifa, and Tel Aviv).

## Stephan as a Broadcaster

Stephan's scholarly articles for the *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* and the *Quarterly of the Department of Antiquities of Palestine*, though highly rated by his academic contemporaries, probably had only a tiny reach. But Stephan was also a practiced voice on Palestine's government-run radio station, which started broadcasting in March 1936.<sup>71</sup> This seems not have been part of his job, as the topics of his radio lectures overlap with his amateur studies. The "Listener's Corner" column on 19 April 1938 described Stephan's talk of the preceding day:

In the Arab Hour yesterday, Mr. Stephan Hanna Stephan gave a talk on "Punch and Judy" which was not what you might think, but rather a form of entertainment common in Arabic-speaking countries for a long time, which in all modesty might be described as a precursor of the "talkie." It consists of a shadow-play, accompanied by spoken dialogue; to this day, one can see it performed in some parts of the Nablus district, to say nothing of Byron's mention of it in one of his travel poems.<sup>72</sup>

Stephan's other subjects, according to program listings in the *Palestine Post*, included "Wit and Wisdom in Arabic Folksongs" on 13 December 1936, "Forgotten Trades of Palestine" on 29 January 1937, "Turkish Monuments in Palestine" on 1 April, "Libraries of the Umayyads" on 7 November 1938, and in November and December 1938 a series

on Palestine in the Stone Age, the “Nomadic” age, and under the rule of the Pharaohs, Assyrians, and Greeks. On 28 August 1939 he delivered a talk on “The festival of Nebi Rubeen in Southern Palestine.”

His radio programs gained Stephan a wider audience than any of his written work. Radios were played in cafes and village guesthouses; up to a third of the population may have been listening by the end of the Mandate (far more than read newspapers).<sup>73</sup> Talks by “learned men” like Stephan seem to have been part of radio’s appeal, to go by their large share of airtime and their prominence in advertisements for radio sets.<sup>74</sup> Perhaps most importantly, this was the only major forum in which Stephan (or any of his colleagues) had an opportunity to talk about their ideas of Palestinian history and culture *in Arabic*, to an Arabic-speaking audience extending across the whole Mandate region and all social classes. Stephan’s programs told rural Palestinians that their culture, with its music and folktales, was not primitive and illiterate, as the British administration and Zionist colonizers implied, but worthy of preservation and study and possessed of a long and honorable history.

## Beyond the Academic Sphere

Stephan also made forays into other popular genres. Of the “Canaan Circle,” both Elias Haddad and Stephan wrote manuals for English- and German-speaking students of Arabic. Stephan’s contributions to this genre were *Arabic Self-Taught: A Primer* and its German equivalent, *Leitfaden für den Selbstunterricht in der arabischen Sprache* (with an accompanying *Sprachführer*, or phrasebook). All three volumes were published in 1935 by Steimatzky’s and printed at the Syrian Orphanage Press in Jerusalem.<sup>75</sup> This business relationship brought together a company now known as Israel’s largest bookstore and a printer usually associated with Jerusalem’s Anglophone and Arab communities; as such, it confounds post-Nakba norms of separate social and commercial interests.

*Arabic Self-Taught: A Primer* retailed at three shillings, around £5.00 at modern prices;<sup>76</sup> its standards of production were comparatively poor and there seems to have been no proofreading by a native English speaker.<sup>77</sup> The book was clearly aimed at beginners: the preliminary remarks mention that Arabic, “like Hebrew and other Semitic languages, is written from right to left.”<sup>78</sup> The general appearance of the *Primer* is not user-friendly by today’s pedagogical standards, as much of it comprises dense lists and blocks of Arabic words with their transliterations and translations, and verb conjugation tables.<sup>79</sup> Pronunciation is given in the colloquial form, with the letter *qaf* dropped as found in urban Palestinian dialects.<sup>80</sup>

Stephan sticks to anodyne subject matters, without controversy for any of the communities in the Palestine of 1935, but he does list Arabic-language newspapers, many of which criticized the Mandate administration and Zionist immigration.<sup>81</sup> The choice of vocabulary reveals the anticipated readership for the *Primer*, with detailed lists

of names and relevant terms for departments of the Mandate administration. Under the vocabulary for the Department of Antiquities, for example, we find words and phrases such as Museum, prehistoric, “dealer in,” “Inspector of,” faked, and auditor.<sup>83</sup> More touristic vocabulary also appears – words for use at a money changer or terms for Christian pilgrimage sites – but the overall tone concentrated on those with longer, professional stays in mind, such as civil servants, policemen, students, and religious staff.

As well as his Arabic textbooks, Stephan used his skills in English and knowledge of Palestine to communicate with Anglophone readers by writing travel guides to Palestine and parts of Lebanon and Syria. Since the nineteenth century, and especially since the start of the Mandate, tourism had been a major industry in Palestine; by the 1930s guides by European and Jewish authors were common, but examples by Palestinian Arabs were rarer. Stephan’s English-language guides consisted of: *This is Palestine: A Concise Guide to the Important Sites in Palestine, Transjordan and Syria*, published by Bayt-ul-Makdes Press in Jerusalem in 1942 (second edition 1947), and *Palestine by Road and Rail: A Concise Guide to the Important Sites in Palestine and Syria*, printed in Jerusalem in 1942. Both are credited to St. H. Stephan and Boulos ‘Afif, a Jerusalem-based photographer who had, during the 1930s, published tourist maps of Palestine and coauthored, with one Jamal Nazzal, the *Path-finder Guide to Palestine, Transjordan, and Syria*.<sup>82</sup>

Stephan and ‘Afif’s works are small, cheaply produced books, easily fitting in a pocket. They are clearly designed to appeal to short term visitors, probably ordinary soldiers from among the masses of British and Commonwealth troops stationed in the Middle East in World War II,<sup>83</sup> rather than the hardback volumes produced in the nineteenth century for wealthy travellers. Stephan and ‘Afif, I suggest, saw their guidebooks as an opportunity to counter the image of Palestine found in contemporaneous Zionist guides, in which Jewish immigration rescued the land from neglect and ignorance, and to promote Arab Palestine as capable of social and technological modernity without European colonialism or Zionist settlement.

Examples of technological, educational and architectural manifestations of Arab modernism include a description of the Via Dolorosa, noting the “Moslem” Rawdat al-Ma‘arif college, the Armenian and Syriac convents with their libraries and printing presses – “one of the best and most up to date” of which is to be found at the Greek Convent in the Old City of Jerusalem.<sup>84</sup> A survey of the suburbs of Jerusalem includes “modern” Arab areas such as Shaykh Jarrah and the Nashashibi Quarter.<sup>85</sup> Farther afield, the “serene little” city of Bethlehem is home to a “large number of schools and charitable institutions,” while the “fashionable” ‘Ajami quarter of Jaffa rivals Tel Aviv for its “beach, modern hotels, cafes and excellent restaurants.”<sup>86</sup> Implicitly countering Zionist claims that European Jewish migrants were responsible for reviving Palestinian agriculture after centuries of Arab mismanagement, Stephan notes how “the late Muhieddin al-Husseini” had used older irrigation channels for his up-to-the-minute “model banana plantations in the plain of Jericho.”<sup>87</sup>

Stephan and ‘Afif also highlight the long Arab place in Palestinian history, with “beduins from the east” ruling the country “during the period of Judges [in which Bedouin raids are mentioned] and often before it.”<sup>88</sup> But Palestine is also presented as “a connecting link between East and West, North and South,” a land of many peoples in which invaders blended into existing inhabitants. This proto-Levantine idea of Palestine’s culture also shows in the importance Stephan and ‘Afif attach to continuity and coexistence. At Rachel’s Tomb, near Bethlehem, the mihrab within the sanctuary and a “cemetery for the beduins living around Beit Sahur” are described alongside Jewish worship at the tomb.<sup>89</sup> And, underlining precedents for harmony between the three monotheistic faiths under glorious Arab rule, Shaykh Khalil al-Khalidi (1863–1941) is cited as calling the “ravishing” town of Bayt Jala a “piece of Andalusia, transplanted to the Holy Land.”<sup>90</sup>

While Stephan and ‘Afif usually maintain a dispassionate, formal tone, their style of writing becomes reverential and emotional when describing major Christian sites. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre, for instance, “contains what is most dear to every Christian, the place of the Passion of Our Lord and His Sepulchre, from which He rose gloriously on the third day.”<sup>91</sup> Jesus is referred to as “Our Lord” and olive trees on the hill of Gethsemane outside the Old City of Jerusalem are said to have “witnessed the greatest agony and the most fervent prayer history has ever recorded.”<sup>92</sup> While, therefore, Stephan and ‘Afif assert Arab authenticity to the land of Palestine in both ancient and modern times, they do so in a distinctively Christian voice, perhaps because of their own personal beliefs but also, perhaps, with the aim of using common faith as a way of communicating with European visitors.

Stephan and ‘Afif’s attitude towards the Islamic history of Palestine is noteworthy when set alongside these Christian sentiments. In common with the notion – widespread in Arab nationalism – that non-Muslim Arabs were “culturally Islamic” and benefitted from the glories of Islamic civilization, Palestine’s Islamic heritage is foregrounded, for instance:

The Sanctuaries of the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa Mosque are considered by Moslems to rank in sanctity only after those of the Kaaba in Mecca and the Tomb of the Prophet in Medina. Whenever possible, pilgrims to Mecca and Medina would on their way home include these Jerusalem Sanctuaries in their pilgrimage.<sup>93</sup>

The early Arab Islamic conquerors of Greater Syria are regarded positively, portrayed as natives of the land to the same extent as the Canaanites and Hebrews, and as belonging to periods in which Palestine had a “comparatively high civilization.”<sup>94</sup> According to Stephan, “As long as the Arabs ruled, peace reigned in the Holy Land,” although other Islamic rulers (Fatimids, Mamluks, and Ottomans) are labeled “foreigners” who, like the Christian Crusaders, bring decline and chaos.<sup>95</sup>

This sense of belonging is also asserted in the tone the authors use to stress their



familiarity with Palestine and deep personal knowledge. As well as their academic and intellectual authority, conveyed through an emphasis on up-to-date information from archaeological excavations and new research, a more intimate kind of knowledge is posed in behind-the-scenes, insider tips. Such instances are characterized by a sudden familiarity of manner, communicating directly with the reader in the second rather than third person, as in:

The Tomb itself, now covered with marble slabs (of which the upper one is cracked), is guarded night and day by a Greek priest. (You may ask him to show you part of the living Rock, seen through a small window, against which he is standing).<sup>96</sup>

And:

The medieval cloisters are in good condition. A small collection of antiquities is in the upper storey, where the western door is especially of interest. The keys are with the guardian. (Apply at the southern door).<sup>97</sup>

Stephan and ‘Afif, two Christian Palestinian Arabs, thus frame themselves as offering an authoritative account of the Holy Land on more than one level. As well as “book learning” and historical information, they present themselves as giving the reader a window on Palestine which is personal and authentic, trustworthy both as a tourist guide and as a source of knowledge on how a European visitor should view competing claims to the land.

To Palestinian nationalists who demanded a boycott of the Mandate administration or fought in the Uprising of 1936–39, producing a publication for British soldiers might have seemed a betrayal; during the 1936–39 rebellion working for the British administration attracted criticism and sometimes violence.<sup>98</sup> However, with the 1939 White Paper signed by Musa al-Alami and Jamil and Amin al-Husayni, and Jewish immigration apparently subject to tighter controls, Palestinians with Western sympathies could justifiably believe that British support for Zionism was waning and that the Mandate would eventually lead to independence, as it had in other Arab countries.<sup>99</sup> As well as grasping a commercial opportunity in issuing this smaller, cheaper guide with its very targeted audience, Stephan and ‘Afif should be seen as directing their message at a mass readership in the hope that British public opinion would, in the end, bring them an independent State of Palestine.

## **The Nakba Years**

As well as his job in the library of the Palestine Archaeological Museum, Stephan worked at the Khalidiyya (Khalidi Library) in the Old City of Jerusalem. According to Walid Khalidi, Stephan helped his father, Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi, head of the Arab College, and Shaykh Amin al-Ansari to care for the family’s famous collections. This



Stephan H. Stephan with Sheikh Yacoub Bukhari, head of the Naqshabandi Sufi tariqa and members of the sheikh's family. Source: Courtesy of Mrs. Muasser Aruri.

role ran from the death of Shaykh Khalil al-Khalidi in 1941 until Stephan and Ahmad al-Khalidi were forced to flee in 1948.<sup>100</sup> This highlights another field of Stephan's broad networks: Ahmad Samih was a member of nationalist and educator Khalil Sakakini's "Vagabonds" circle (along with Tawfiq Canaan and Musa 'Alami),<sup>101</sup> and of the Royal Society for Asian Affairs (along with 'Awni Bey 'Abd al-Hadi).<sup>102</sup> He was also husband of the notable Lebanese feminist Anbara Salam Khalidi. These acquaintances, like his Sarkis article, place Stephan among debates about the nature of modernity and its place in Palestine's future.

Stephan's long career at the Department of Antiquities, meanwhile, ended amidst the beginnings of a major international drama. Stephan was one of the first people to be shown the newly discovered Dead Sea Scrolls after members of the Syrian Orthodox congregation took them to their archbishop, and he apparently "confidently pronounced the scrolls worthless."<sup>103</sup> Correspondence between Millar Burrows and the director of the Department of Antiquities, R.W. Hamilton, confirms that Stephan was so skeptical that he did not even refer the matter to senior staff.<sup>104</sup> He wasn't the only one to pass this erroneous judgment: after acquiring books on the Hebrew alphabet for the archbishop, he brought in the Jewish scholar Toviah Wechsler, who "agreed with Stephan that the scrolls were not ancient."<sup>105</sup>

In late 1948 and early 1949, however, we find Stephan in Cyprus. A letter from Wechsler to the *Jewish Quarterly Review* quotes a message received from “Mr. Stephan,” dated Nicosia, 8 January 1949.<sup>106</sup> More concretely, a report by the British head of the Department of Antiquities in Cyprus, A.H.S Megaw, reveals that Stephan had been studying a “Muslim tombstone” found at Paphos in 1936. Stephan analyzed the inscription on the monument, concluding that it dated from ah 164 (ad 780 or 781), demonstrating that some of the earliest Islamic invaders of the island had likely settled there. Although Stephan died before he finished the work, he left sufficient notes for Megaw to compile the brief report, and a list of acknowledgments to helpers in Paphos.<sup>107</sup>

Although most Palestinian refugees in 1948–49 fled to Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan, some wealthier families headed instead to Cyprus.<sup>108</sup> However, Stephan’s presence there was less permanent. According to Stephan’s granddaughter, her father (Angelo, Stephan’s second son) had numerous Cypriot entry stamps in his passport.<sup>109</sup> It seems that Stephan was carrying out research for the colonial Department of Antiquities on Cyprus – perhaps even as a prelude to a job there? This might also account for Stephan’s absence from director R. W. Hamilton’s 1947–48 letters from the Department of Antiquities in Jerusalem. Hamilton often mentions his Arab colleagues, socializing with and worrying about them, but Stephan is curiously absent.

Stephan, however, did not remain on Cyprus, but headed, like hundreds of thousands of other Palestinian refugees, to Lebanon. Most went there because it was the nearest safe destination, and many expected to return after a few weeks or months. But Stephan died there just a year later, in 1949.<sup>110</sup> This explains references to the “late” Mr. Stephan, in Megaw’s report on the inscription from Paphos, in an article by an Israeli scholar which utilizes Stephan’s translation of al-Suyuti’s work on earthquakes in Palestine, and in correspondence to various learned journals from figures embroiled in the Dead Sea Scrolls controversy.<sup>111</sup> Widowed and a refugee, his wife Arasky left for Brazil during the 1950s, along with their sons.

## Conclusion

Among the paperwork of the American School of Oriental Research in Jerusalem is a chit dated 8 November 1936, recording that a copy of Ciasca’s *Tatiani Evangeliorum Harmoniae Arabice* (a nineteenth-century Latin version of the Diatessaron, a second-century Assyrian attempt to ‘harmonize’ the four gospels) had been lent to the Department of Antiquities “for a period of ten days.” At the foot of the document is a bold, spiky signature which reads “St. H. Stephan.”

Stephan Hanna Stephan has, until now, been known almost solely as a follower of Tawfiq Canaan, one among a loose circle of Arab Palestinians writing during the Mandate about the culture and history of Palestine. As this article shows, however, he was much more than that. His intellectual fingerprints can be found widely scattered, through

debates within Arabic-speaking Palestinian society about what its past comprised and what its future might look like, in historical studies of the Levant, and through language and tourist guides which informed the way in which British officials and soldiers, mainly of the popular classes, encountered and experienced Palestine.

His life story, when studied in as much detail as is possible and in combination with a reading of his works, also highlights the quotidian complexities of life for ordinary Palestinian Arabs during the Mandate period. We might see Stephan as a patriot, a believer in Palestinian identity and rights. But we must also see him as someone who had to make daily decisions and negotiations about his relationships with Zionist Jewish immigrants and with colonial British managers, colleagues, and perhaps even friends. This in no way detracts from the authenticity of Stephan's identity and beliefs, but it does challenge easy notions about what such commitments mean for people living, working, and thinking under occupation.

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#### Endnotes

- 1 This article is based on part of my PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 2017), substantially revised. I would like to thank my supervisor, Dr. Tony Gorman, for his patient support during this research. I would also like to thank Ms. Cristina Stephan, granddaughter of Stephan Hanna Stephan, for her support and enthusiasm for my work on her grandfather's life.
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- 3 Tamari, *Mountain against the Sea*, 2, 95–111; Philippe Bourmaud, "'A Son of the Country': Dr Tawfiq Canaan, Modernist Physician and Palestinian Ethnographer," in *Struggle and Survival in Palestine*, ed. Gershon Shafir and Mark LeVine (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 104–24; Khaled Furani and Dan Rabinowitz, "The Ethnographic Arriving of Palestine," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 278–79.
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- 26 “Subscribers,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 1 (1920/21): 225
- 27 Ilana Feldman, *Governing Gaza: Bureaucracy, Authority and the Work of Rule, 1917–1967* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 65; Albert Glock, “Archaeology as Cultural Survival: The Future of the Palestinian Past,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 23, no. 3 (Spring 1994): 74–75.
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- 38 Israel State Archives B/28/34, letters dated 7 May 1934, approved 16 May 1934.
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- 44 Stephan to Hilma Granqvist, 27 March 1934, Palestine Exploration Fund archive, Granqvist file document 370.
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- 53 Gerber, “‘Palestine’ and Other Territorial Concepts,” 567.
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- 57 ‘Arif al-‘Arif, *al-Mufassal fi tarikh al-Quds* (Jerusalem: Matba’at al-Ma’arif, 1961/1999), 267.
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- 65 Hirschberg, "In Memoriam," XII.
- 66 Hirschberg, "In Memoriam," XII.
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- 68 Hirschberg, "In Memoriam," XIV.
- 69 Hirschberg, "In Memoriam," XV.
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- 76 National Archives Currency Converter, online at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default.asp#mid](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/default.asp#mid) (accessed 7 April 2016).
- 77 Stephan, *Arabic Self-Taught*, 26, 75.
- 78 Stephan, *Arabic Self-Taught*, Preliminary Remarks, n.p.
- 79 Stephan, *Arabic Self-Taught*, XII–XXI, 1–144.
- 80 See, for example, Stephan, *Arabic Self-Taught*, 31.
- 81 Stephan, *Arabic Self-Taught*, 82–83.
- 82 The latter, published by the Palestine Educational Company (owned by Edward Said's uncle and father), may be the first travel guide to Palestine written by a Palestinian. Boulos 'Afif also had the misfortune, in 1943, to be one of the earliest complainants of copyright infringement under Mandate intellectual property law, when his lawyer issued a letter against a Jewish photographer called Kovatch, in whose shop window 'Afif had spotted for sale his own set of fourteen images of the Via Dolorosa. Michael Birnhack, *Colonial Copyright: Intellectual Copyright in Mandate Palestine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 252.
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- 84 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 47, 28–29, 58.
- 85 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 75.
- 86 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 85, 153.
- 87 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 117.
- 88 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 1–2.
- 89 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 82–83.
- 90 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 83–84. Al-Andalus has been an important motif for Arab cultural attainment, as well as religious co-existence, since the medieval period. In the nineteenth/twentieth centuries it was adopted by literary writers such as Jurji Zaydan and historians such as Shakib Arslan to make points about religious coexistence, Arab or Islamic unity, or nostalgia for a lost paradise, and is thus likely to have been a known trope for both Khalidi and Stephan. See, for example, Jonathan H. Shannon, "There and Back Again: Rhetorics of al-Andalus in Modern Syrian Popular Culture," *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 48 (2016): 10–11. The idea was also cited in several articles on Jewish-Muslim-Christian relations in major Arabic periodicals such as *al-Muqtataf* and *al-Hilal*, which circulated in Palestine in this period. See Jonathan Gribetz, *Defining Neighbors: Religion, Race, and the Early Zionist-Arab Encounter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 150, 158.
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- 93 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 34.
- 94 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 1.
- 95 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 4–5.
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- 97 Stephan and 'Afif, *This Is Palestine*, 54.
- 98 Abboushi, "Road to Rebellion," 42; Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, 103–104.

- 99 Cohen, *Army of Shadows*, 133–4, 146–54.
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- 103 Millar Burrows, *The Dead Sea Scrolls* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1956), 6–8.
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# The Books in My Life: A Memoir

## Part 1

Tarif Khalidi

I have spent more of my lifetime with books than with people. The reason, perhaps, is that I have found a sort of amusement in books that I did not find with most people. Thus, over my lifetime, the number of friends that I had decreased and the number of books I befriended increased. I became older and more firmly isolated. My real world became that of reading and writing. Fakhr al-Din al-Razi described the behavior of the elderly as “doubting most of what is said, refusing to pass final judgments, cowardliness, fear, and an awareness of the repercussions of situations in addition to greediness for food, insolence, anger, and a love of safety.”<sup>1</sup> I do not know how many of these traits I currently possess, but I find some of them to be precise descriptions of the psychology and behavior of the elderly. I have no doubt that questioning everything, refusing to pass judgment, and an appreciation of situations’ repercussions are also traits often derived from the experience that one finds in books. Indeed, if books offered nothing else, their benefit would still be great. As for their other virtues, I can only direct the reader toward the magnificent and supreme depth of thought found in the first part of al-Jahiz’s *al-Hayawan*.

I must admit that the direct inspiration for writing my memoirs came from a number of books, most recently the British academic and critic John Carey’s *The Unexpected Professor: An Oxford Life in Books*, published in 2014.<sup>2</sup> In it, Carey narrates his literary life’s memoirs, describing the books that had an impact on his mind and imagination. The idea of the book attracted me, and my daughter, who is also a university professor and who had given me the book as a gift, encouraged me to follow in Carey’s footsteps. I found that a person who spends most of his life on research, education, and academic writing lives largely on the

### Editor's Note:

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periphery of public life and great events. If there is any benefit reaped from the experiences of such a secluded life, it is through the books and theories that have occupied it.

## Jerusalem, circa 1943

I think I was around five when I started to learn how to read. My first book was based on a new theory that children should start reading by learning complete words rather than the alphabet, a novelty at the time. I do not know the source of this theory, or whether it was imported from the West, but my mother later informed me that the great Palestinian scholar Khalil al-Sakakini had, with my father, developed this theory and adapted it to suit Arab children.<sup>3</sup> Sakakini is a highly distinguished Palestinian writer and his memoirs, *Kadha ana ya dunya* (Such Am I, O World), are among the most enjoyable of the twentieth-century Arab world.<sup>4</sup> In them, he reviews the history of Palestine during the first half of that century in the form of a diary that mixes seriousness and jest, providing a vivid picture of various personalities and intellectuals, men and women, in Palestinian society.

Going back to my first book, it was found in all Palestinian schools. The first words I learnt were *ra's*, *ru'us* (head, heads) and *dar*, *dur* (house, houses). We progressed in a bit to four-letter words, of which I remember *wadi* (valley) and *sari* (mast). Soon, reading became a great pleasure, especially when we reached the first joke in the book: “How delicious *karabij halab* are!” “Have you tasted them?” “No, but my teacher has, and he said they were nice.” “Ha ha ha!”<sup>5</sup> The pleasure of reading increased when I became able to read the headlines in the daily newspapers that arrived to our house: *Filastin and al-Difa'*. These headlines relayed news of World War II, to which I paid scant attention, as my imagination was captured then by the adventures of the Sicilian bandit Salvatore Giuliano in the mountains and valleys of Sicily, and his amazing ability to continuously escape from the Italian police.<sup>6</sup> My childhood enchantment with rogues, it seems, has continued, as a few years ago I embarked upon a collaborative research project about a bandit from al-Biqa' – the notorious Milhim Qasim.<sup>7</sup>

The first books I read were by the Egyptian writer Kamil al-Kilani, a pioneering children's writer in the Arab world and a friend of my father's. Kilani's books kept me



Tarif Khalidi with a book in his hands. Courtesy of Tarif Khalidi.

company for a number of years. He would choose from a wide array of international stories and make them flow in simple but well-written language. I still remember the story of the nightingale and the rose, and my sadness when the nightingale threw himself onto the rose's thorns, piercing his heart to paint his beloved rose red as she had wished. I later found out that it was one of Oscar Wilde's stories.

My first school was al-Umma School and the principal was Shukri Harami, from whom one glare was enough to silence the rowdiest of classes. He taught history and perhaps at the time I sought his approval. Hence, from that distant time, history became my favorite subject. My passionate interest in history pushed me from Kamil Kilani to Jirji Zaydan, whose novels I devoured: *al-'Abbasa, Sister of al-Rashid; al-Amin and al-Ma'mun; The Conquest of al-Andalus; The Fugitive Mamluk; Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi and the Intrigues of the Assassins*; and many, many other tales that I cannot now recall. No doubt, a whole generation of Arab youths read these alluring stories that revived Arab history as vivid literature, full of lifelike characters that the reader could almost see, touch, and converse with, feeling happiness during their joyous occasions and crying for their losses. Zaydan's stories included fast action within precise timing and location. The scenes within his stories were cinematic, stealing the readers' breath and leaving them unable to put the book down, even during meals or at bedtime. I do not know if an extensive literary study of these stories exists, but the marvelous magic with which Zaydan wrote his tales deserves such a study, in my opinion. It may have been that Zaydan derived his inspiration from Western historical novels, such as those written by Sir Walter Scott, but there is no doubt that Zaydan's mastery in reincarnating the past is superior to that of Scott; I later read the latter's novels and found them very long and boring, requiring a great deal of concentration and patience to follow their events.

## The Diaspora

I was ten years old when we were forced to leave our home in Jerusalem, becoming refugees like hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who fled from Zionist terrorism to the surrounding countries. I was not aware of it at first, but this tragedy was manifested gradually in a sort of agedness that swept over the whole family, each experiencing it in their own way. Learning and education became of utmost importance, and the space and freedom of childhood receded. My father aged quickly and died shortly after the loss of Palestine; the feeling that education was a most urgent objective and the utmost priority increased. I did not absorb this initially; to the contrary, the quality of my readings perhaps deteriorated, as I abandoned Jirji Zaydan and took up the stories of Arsène Lupin, translated into Arabic, which were very popular in Beirut at the time.<sup>8</sup> Arsène Lupin was a gentlemanly thief who, like an urban Salvatore Giuliano or Robin Hood, mastered the art of eluding the police and disappearing, foiled the plans of "true" criminals who sought to do real harm, and sometimes lent a helping hand to the weak and poor.

The deterioration in the quality of my reading was also manifested in my increasing passion for American comics, such as the cowboy stories of Tom Mix and Gene Autry,<sup>9</sup> and especially the adventures of Little Lulu and her gang – Tubby Tompkins, Annie and Iggy Inch, and others. These comics had not been translated, so I had to read them in English, which was not all that difficult. Little Lulu portrayed an idealized small world of beautiful American suburbs, in which children played in total freedom and had never-ending thrilling adventures. I then moved on to the *Classic Comics* series, which adapted classical Western novels to comic strips.<sup>10</sup> This agitated some of my family, who considered the comics a distortion of the classic novels; however, these comics encouraged me later to read the original novels. At that time, my family also subscribed to illustrated Egyptian magazines such as *al-Musawwar*, *Akhir Sa'a*, and *al-Ithnayn*, which I devoured greedily and awaited like an infatuated lover from one week to the next.

My family quickly intervened: What is this Arsène Lupin? What are these comics? What will become of him if he continues along this degenerate path? My brother Usama (God rest his soul) got involved and decided that the only remedy for this decadence was classical Arabic poetry, of which he had learned thousands of lines by heart. He started teaching me poetic meter, and I still remember the first one to become entrenched in my mind due to its musicality, *al-wafir: mufa'alatun, mufa'alatun, fa'ulu*. I found its beat attractive and simple, and easy to learn, so I composed a few verses in this meter, proclaiming affection and praise for my mother, as I was then going through the Freudian Oedipus phase.

This juvenile effort encouraged my brother to teach me poetry (paying me a quarter lira for each verse I memorized). The first poem I learned was al-Mutanabbi's elegiac poem for the sister of Sayf al-Dawla: *tawa al-jazira hatta ja'ani khabarun / fazi'tu fihi bi-amali ila al-kadhibi* ("The news crossed the peninsula until it reached me / and my hope urged me to disbelieve it"). We then launched into Abu Tammam and the ode on the conquest of Amorium, after which we moved to Abu Firas and the mourning dove (*al-hamama al-na'iha*), then to the poet al-Hutay'ah and *Tawi thalath*, and on to many other poems whose titles I cannot remember, but which implanted within me a love of poetry that was consolidated day by day.

When history became my profession, I continued to find value in poetry not only because of its literary beauty, but also because of its great importance in revealing the imagery and mentality of the past, to which we have not yet given sufficient attention. Thus, poetry for the historian offers a gateway to a bygone era; if we want to retrieve an image of the past, we should, no doubt, study its poetry (and its art, as well).

## In England

In 1951, my family sent me to a boarding school in England. Perhaps they took this decision thinking that I had not yet been completely saved from perdition. God only knows that I was enthusiastic about joining such a school, as I had read, perhaps in

*Classic Comics*, the story of *Tom Brown's School Days*, first published in 1857, during Queen Victoria's reign, and which became a model for stories about boarding schools in England.<sup>11</sup> My days at the school were not at all like Tom Brown's, except in their brutality and the frighteningly hierarchical, military system. As for his exciting adventures, I had no similar experience during my four-year stay in that prison, though I shall not beg for tears or sympathy by describing my misery further. I have to admit that I benefited from two things: first, learning Latin and Greek; and second, the ability later to withstand (almost!) all of life's trials and tribulations by recalling the difficulties of those times.

Knowledge of Latin and Greek was the most important advantage I was able to take away from boarding school. At the time, the two languages still enjoyed a great deal of academic regard and respect. Moreover, specializing in them, and in Greek and Roman history, at A Levels meant entering the strata of elite students. Further, it meant being exposed to two civilizations that had a deep and widespread influence on European civilization, and on Islamic Arab civilization. Learning Latin was not difficult, especially since my knowledge of Arabic conjugation and syntax helped me grasp the foundations of Latin's conjugation and syntax, as we find the nominative, accusative, and genitive cases in Latin. Latin meter, too, is similar in many aspects to its Arabic counterpart. Latin remains, to a certain extent, in my memory until today. As for Greek, I found it difficult and more complicated – time quickly eroded its outlines, despite reading in class the plays of Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, the histories of Thucydides and Xenophon, some of Plato's dialogues, and passages from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Homer's *Iliad*. In class, more emphasis was put on translating texts accurately than on literary analysis.

*Antigone* by Sophocles made a great impression on me. In it, a young girl, Antigone, is the exceptional spiritual protagonist, who courageously challenges not only the role imposed upon her by society as a girl, but also the tyranny of a manipulative ruler who feigns abidance by religious teachings. As for Latin literature, it was first and foremost represented by Julius Caesar's book on the Gallic wars, after which we gradually tackled Tacitus, the great historian of Rome. I found the latter's language much more difficult, but he is the foremost ironic historian. To this day I repeat his famous statement after the Romans destroyed the cities of Britain: *Auferre, trucidare, rapere, falsis nominibus imperium; atque, ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant* ("To ravage, to slaughter, to usurp under false titles, they call empire; and where they make a desert, they call it peace"). It is as if he is describing what Israel has done and continues to do in Palestine.

During those four years and the three years that followed at the University of Oxford, my mother, God bless her, sent me and my sister Randa weekly letters in Arabic, penned in the beautifully simple style for which she was known.<sup>12</sup> She was forced to wait for extended periods to receive a reply, which was often written in a comical mixture of formal (*fusha*) and colloquial Arabic. I mainly read in English and, from time to time, in French. Thus, Arabic faded off screen, as they say.

I specialized in history at university, and the curriculum then concentrated on the history of England in the Middle Ages, as if what was happening in Europe or Byzantium or the Arab and Islamic worlds during those eras had no connection whatsoever with

England. The only professor of medieval history at Oxford who mentioned, within his general lectures, civilizations and peoples beyond England was the famous historian Sir Richard Southern. He later wrote a small book, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*, in which he analyzed the historical epochs of those outlooks.<sup>13</sup> In my opinion, this book remains the point of departure for any study of this subject, despite the subsequent publication of a number of books on the same topic.

Years later, when I was planning a book on the writing of history among the Arabs, I had the opportunity to meet Southern over a cup of tea. As one of his major interests was the writing of European history, I sought his advice and asked him to point me to what had been written on that subject for comparison, which he did. I told him of my disappointment during my student years and he told me that the curriculum had improved since my time. He was tall, thin, and friendly, and resembled the saints – St. Anselm and others – whose biographies he wrote.

It became evident to me that my interests were no longer concerned with history per se, but with the writing of history and its philosophy, within which there was rich material for analysis, imagination, and research. I placed history aside and set forth into the study of its theories and intellectual points of departure. At the time, however, these topics were not very popular among English historians, as historical theories mostly came to them from Europe and in particular from France and Italy. I do not remember who advised me to read Benedetto Croce's *History as the Story of Liberty*, but, due to its complexity, it almost totally wiped out my new interests.<sup>14</sup> However, I persevered and read it with the stubborn zeal of a young man – a quality I am no longer blessed with today. I understood approximately ten percent of Croce's theories, but his proposition that all history was contemporary history, and that the consciousness of the historian is what makes history, made a lasting impression on my mind. Croce was opposed to the great theories of history, one of the most important of which was, of course, Marxist theory. He was also against any attempt to articulate laws of history or to turn history into a science similar to the natural sciences. Later, I read *Napoleon: For and Against* by the Dutch historian Pieter Geyl.<sup>15</sup> In this study of biographies of the French emperor, Geyl concluded that history is an eternal debate and that consecutive generations of historians find in it whatever suits them; reaching what one could call truth through history is thus well-nigh impossible. At the time, I was attracted by Geyl's book and another by the Belgian historian Henri Pirenne titled *Mahomet et Charlemagne*.<sup>16</sup> In the latter, Pirenne proposes that the Arabo-Islamic conquests closed the commercial doors of Europe. This led to the development of the feudal system within Europe, as represented by Charlemagne's kingdom. In other words, Muhammad led to Charlemagne. I found within these books theories that one could describe as beautiful, as they present simple and clear understandings of history, just as Einstein summarized the laws of physics in a beautifully simple equation.

In brief, these books and others like them completely took control of my thoughts and when the time came for final exams, I received an excellent mark for historical theory and mediocre marks in purely historical subjects. The result was a third-class honors degree, or what is equivalent to a C. The family, which believed me to be a "genius," was let down,

as they had been let down before. I only felt that I regained some credibility fifteen years after my graduation, when I was invited to give the annual George Antonius lecture at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Oxford. Its title was “Space, Holiness, and Time: Palestine in the Classical Centuries.” The great and dearly departed Albert Hourani and other historians seemed quite taken with my lecture. I was satisfied by the admiration of the “Oxonians” and I felt that I had finally “taken vengeance” on my university.

## **At the American University of Beirut**

After graduation, I set out to find a job, the American University of Beirut seeming to me the natural destination. It had been my father’s university and my many uncles’, and I had two brothers and a sister among the teaching staff. One of these relatives came to my aid, and the dean of Arts and Sciences, the dearly departed Dr. Farid Hanania, decided that I should join the department of General Education, as it was then called.

I must say a few words about this department, as it had a deep effect on my relationship with books and my later inclination toward the history of thought. The idea behind this department came from the United States, from Columbia University in particular, and it was built on the educational principle that students, no matter what their specialization, should not leave university without having studied some of the great classics of Western civilization, both ancient and modern. This idea was transported to Beirut and the department was established about five years before I joined it in 1960. The assigned texts were divided over two years of study into four historical sections: ancient, medieval, modern, and contemporary. The texts were, in effect, excerpts, which the students read each week. Each week started with a public lecture on the assigned text for all the students, followed by an afternoon meeting with the staff to discuss the lecture and text. Most of the ancient and medieval texts were not unfamiliar to me, as many of the modern and recent ones were. But I found that all of the texts required a great deal of preparation so that they could be presented to the students within their conceptual and historical contexts. What is the importance of this text? How should we read it? What is its value in our times? What, how, why, and other questions ad infinitum having to do with the interpretation of texts.

\* \* \* \* \*

Then I reached Dante Alighieri’s *Comedia (The Divine Comedy)* – “comedy” during Dante’s time, of course, did not mean a humorous story, as there is no place whatsoever for laughter in Dante’s work, but rather a story with a happy ending. Dante’s poem, in its three parts, constitutes a journey, a pilgrimage even, into the afterworld, beginning with hell, continuing through purgatory, and ending in paradise. Its vastness and fantastic multidimensionality unfold upon a superbly constructed structure, its layers of symbolism reflecting Dante’s belief that our own world was a mere image or symbol of the Hereafter. The journey begins with the poet finding himself lost in a forest, the forest of doubt,

where he goes astray. This recalls *al-Munqidh min al-dalal* (Deliverer from Error) by al-Imam al-Ghazali; indeed, had al-Ghazali written of his spiritual journey in verse, we may have found sympathies between him and Dante on many matters.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, a number of European and other researchers have suggested parallels between Abu al-‘Ala’ al-Ma‘arri’s *Risalat al-Ghufran* (Epistle of Forgiveness) and Dante’s *Divine Comedy*.<sup>18</sup> I still remember Dr. Richard Lemay, one of my colleagues in the department at the time, showing me some short sentences from Dante that had proven difficult to decrypt by experts over the centuries, and which he proved were in Arabic. The jury is still out, as the English saying goes, on the connections between Dante and Arab civilization, but the matter is no doubt worthy of further research.

Dante’s hell is in the shape of an upside-down cone within the earth, formed by God’s expulsion of Satan from heaven. This hole is real and symbolic at the same time, and tunnel-like structures extend along its internal sides. These contain various sinners, starting with those who committed minor “sins of the flesh” closest to the top of the hole, and reaching those who committed major sins (“sins of the mind”) at the bottom. Each of those sins has its own appropriate punishment whereby each sinner confesses to the nature of the sins. (Or, as is mentioned in the Qur’an, *wahum fi ma ishtahat anfusuhum khaliduna* (They lived amidst what their souls desired, eternally) and *dhuqu ma kuntum ta‘malun* (Taste that which you used to commit!))<sup>19</sup> Sins of the flesh are punished as befits them: forbidden lovers are placed in a whirling tornado, so that they will feel in the afterlife the storms whipped up by their love, and so forth. At the bottom of the pit is a frozen lake, where we find Satan, eternally chewing the head of Judas Iscariot – betrayer of Christ, representing the Church – and Brutus – the Roman betrayer of Julius Caesar, representing the empire or state. Betrayal is among the most serious sins, according to Dante, as it completely freezes human emotions.

The poet’s journey takes him from one ditch to another that is even deeper. There, the Roman poet Virgil serves as guide, explaining in detail to Dante the formation and structure of hell. The two poets meet an endless stream of people from both modern and ancient times. Some express penitence, while others insist upon sinning even after death, or inhabiting a realm of both life and death – as is mentioned in the Qur’an, “and death will come to him from every direction, though he himself is not dead.”<sup>20</sup> These sinners have no hope of exiting hell, and remain there forever.

Purgatory is a cone-shaped mountain on the other side of the globe, formed as a result of the creation of the hole containing hell. It also has ledges spiraling outside it, climbed by those who hope to reach the peak and ascend to heaven. Some say that purgatory is the part of *The Divine Comedy* that is closest to reality, as there we are in the company of those who still hope to reach heaven by gradually shedding sins and purging the human psyche of its faults. At the peak, we reach an earthly paradise, where the purged soul surges toward heavenly paradise. Heavenly paradise, described in the third part of the comedy, is shaped like a flower (or perhaps a Roman amphitheater) and in it we find the saints arranged according to their closeness to the throne. This third part did not, over time, gain readers’ admiration to the same extent as hell and purgatory, as it is like a set



image with no action compared to the constant bubbling action of the first two parts.

The number of events, meetings, dialogues, wise sayings, images, scenes, and speeches contained in the epic of Dante's *Divine Comedy* is unimaginable. These are religious, scientific, political, and ethical, constituting the full spectrum of Dante's medieval European world. We Arabs play a part in this epic, too, having a role in a place called Limbo where there is neither torture nor hope. There we find ancient philosophers like Aristotle and Plato, as well as Arab philosophers like Ibn Rushd and Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi, regarded as an example of chivalry in Dante's time. As for the venerated Arab prophet, he alongside 'Ali (peace be upon him) are in the tunnel of those who split the Church, meaning that Islam, in Dante's view, is a Christian heresy.

In 1983, I visited Italy and wanted to see some of the places about which Dante had written. I took a rural bus to the town called Gubbio, and from there to the top of the mountain where the Sant'Ubaldo Basilica is situated. I entered the church, where I found myself completely alone, and saw before me, on a slightly elevated part of the church floor, a glass coffin in which the saint's body lay untouched by decay. I was totally intimidated, and perhaps even terrified, by this scene, and did not even wait for the bus to return to the village, instead running down a steep slope next to a small stream. In this state, midway down, I fell upon a white marble slab chiseled with some of Dante's verse: *Intra Tupino e l'acqua che discende del colle eletto dal beato Ubaldo, fertile costa d'alto monte pende* (Between Topino's stream and that which flows down from the hill chosen by the blessed Ubaldo, from a high peak there hangs a fertile slope). I was satisfied by this direct contact with Dante's world, feeling as if I had experienced a revelation or a state like that which comes upon mystics, though this is not my usual state of mind.

Many of Dante's verses have become embedded in my mind, and at times I still repeat them to myself – or to someone gracious enough to listen. For example: *Nessun maggior dolore che ricordarsi del tempo felice nella miseria* (There is no greater pain than to recall the happy time in misery). Or the excuse mentioned by Paolo and Francesca for fornication after reading a book about love: *Galeotto fu 'l libro e chi lo scrisse: quell giorno più non vi leggemmo avante* (The book and writer both were love's pimps. In its leaves that day we read no more). Or the final verse of *The Divine Comedy*: *L'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle* (It is love that moves the sun and the other stars).

From Dante we turned to Niccolò Machiavelli (d. 1527 AD) and his famous book *The Prince*, in which many find a kind of constitution of what is now called pragmatic politics. This small book (one can read its twenty-six short chapters in only a few hours) produced such a tumultuous impact that it led many Europeans at the time to describe it as the work of the devil. Indeed, English literature of the period used the expression "Old Nick" to refer to both Niccolò Machiavelli and the devil.<sup>21</sup> *The Prince* is dedicated to Lorenzo de' Medici, the governor of Florence at the time, and belongs to a literary genre common to the East and the West usually called "advice for kings" or "mirrors for princes." The most famous examples within Arab Islamic culture are *al-Fakhri fi al-adab al-sultaniyya* (The Pride of Sultanial Literature) by Muhammad bin 'Ali al-Tabataba (known as Ibn al-Taftaqi) (d. 1309 AD) and *Siraj al-Muluk* (The Lamp of Kings) by al-Turtushi (d.

1127 AD), though perhaps most similar to *The Prince is the Siyosatnameh* (The Book of Government), written in Persian by the Seljuk vizier Nizam al-Mulk (d. 1092 AD). These works, including *The Prince*, combine wise sayings and historical experiences to formulate advice for rulers, distributed within chapters devoted to particular subjects connected to affairs of governance or the governor.

Machiavelli's second chapter states that he who inherits rule from his father or forefathers does not need as much advice as those who come into power and establish their rule without family precedent. His book is specifically directed toward this latter kind of ruler, as they face more complex and difficult problems. This new ruler would, according to Machiavelli, find utility in cruelty and violence, but he advises that this be used only once and on a large scale. As for the ruler's generosity, it should be bestowed drop by drop. In the seventeenth chapter, Machiavelli explores the ruler's relationship with the masses as follows: "is it better to be loved rather than feared, or vice versa? The answer is that one would prefer to be both but, since they don't go together easily, if you have to choose, it's much safer to be feared than loved."<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Machiavelli views the masses with contempt, describing "most people" as "ungrateful and unreliable; they lie, they fake, they're greedy for cash and they melt away in the face of danger. So long as you're generous and, as I said before, not in immediate danger, they're all on your side: they'd shed their blood for you, they'd give you their belongings, their lives, their children. But when you need them they turn their backs on you." However, the ruler "must avoid arousing hatred. Actually, being feared is perfectly compatible with not being hated. And a ruler won't be hated if he keeps his hands off his subjects' property and their women. . . . A man will sooner forget the death of his father than the loss of his inheritance."

The eighteenth chapter is the most famous and the one responsible for Machiavelli's bad reputation during his own time. The chapter starts with a call for the ruler to "be able to exploit both the man and the beast in himself to the full" – with the man associated with law and the beast with force. Machiavelli expands upon this with a metaphorical discussion of the ruler as adopting the qualities of the fox and the lion. The fox is able to discover traps and machinations, and the lion to ward off wolves. He follows this with the most infamous passage:

Hence a sensible leader cannot and must not keep his word if by doing so he puts himself at risk, and if the reasons that made him give his word in the first place are no longer valid. If all men were good, this would be bad advice, but since they are a sad lot and won't be keeping their promises to you, you hardly need to keep yours to them. . . . So, a leader doesn't have to possess all the virtuous qualities I've mentioned, but it's absolutely imperative that he seem to possess them. . . . It's seeming to be virtuous that helps; as, for example, seeming to be compassionate, loyal, humane, honest and religious. And you can even be those things, so long as you're always mentally prepared to change as soon as your interests are threatened. What you have to understand is that a ruler, especially a ruler new to power, can't

always behave in ways that would make people think a man good, because to stay in power he's frequently obliged to act against loyalty, against charity, against humanity and against religion.

These ideas are not completely alien to what we find in our own political texts and especially in the "mirrors for princes" literature. Turtushi, for example, tells us that after 'Abd al-Malik bin Marwan became caliph, he placed a Qur'an in his lap and said to it: "This shall be the point when you and I part ways." But closest in ideology to Machiavelli is what we find in Nizam al-Mulk's *Siyasatnameh*, which reads: "A ruler should commence war against his enemies but in a manner that leaves the opportunity open for reconciliation. He should draw up alliances and conventions, but in a fashion that enables him to break these agreements; however, he should undertake this in a way that would enable him to once again draw them up." The logic of the state, as we find within these texts, supersedes all else, including religious mores and injunctions if need be.

I do not understand why Machiavelli's book aroused such violent hatred against him. Did people at that time truly not know that rulers follow what we now call *realpolitik*? Or had the Church started to feel itself losing authority with the advent of new military-style European states willing to violate all norms to achieve their goals? Does this explain why the Church went on a rampage against *The Prince* and its author? Or did Catholic Europe then, as under Pope Alexander VI, intertwine theology and politics, and Machiavelli's affront had been to draw a clear division between them in an unprecedented, and outspoken, manner? I will leave these questions to the specialists, and let it suffice to emphasize the importance of these texts within both European and Islamic Arab thought, as Arab history often reveals obvious tensions between the sacred law of the religious scholar and *raison d'état* of the sultan.

## **The Microcosm of al-Jahiz**

One of Plato's dialogues describes Socrates' last days spent in prison, awaiting the execution of his death sentence – which he had received for corrupting the ethics of the youth. Socrates accepted his death sentence, but compared himself to a fly, buzzing about the great sluggish horse of Athens, stinging it here and there to rouse it; eventually the horse lost its patience and hit the fly with its tail, thus killing it. This metaphor can also be applied to al-Jahiz's (d. 869 AD) role during his era, biting and stinging every which way, interrogating both private individuals and the public. He argued people's views and ideas and, failing to find anyone with whom he could actually debate, invented opponents to bring the debate to its intellectual closure. He was fortunate that his life did not end as Socrates's did. If we want to compare al-Jahiz to a Western figure, then, we might imagine him as a combination of Socrates and Montaigne, with a hint of Voltaire. However, such comparisons do not give him enough credit, as his influence spread in the centuries after his death, and we, the Arabs, have never neglected him, except during

modern times, despite the unprecedented opportunity for scholarly investigations and research into his writings.<sup>23</sup>

It would not be incorrect to call al-Jahiz, who held that man was a microcosm that united various attributes found in the animal kingdom, a “microcosm” himself, for he seemed singlehandedly to shatter an old world and produce a new one. He caused a deep intellectual schism within Arab culture and devised new concepts for it, radically different from what had previously been known. Al-Jahiz roamed the fields of science and scholarship within his era, but he also researched societal beliefs and folk wisdom. He placed all beneath the microscope of his intellect, experience, and research, and transformed it from that which inspired awe of the past, to that which inspired amazement of the future and whatever the mind could bring forth in unending discovery. On this subject, he states:

Even a man credited with perfection, renowned for his intellectual ability and meet to outshine all other scholars, could not get to know all there is beneath a mosquito’s wing in a lifetime, even if he had the strength of all the wise observers in the world and could borrow the erudition of all the research workers endowed with a good memory, all the investigators and all the scholars who study ceaselessly and never grow weary of books.<sup>24</sup>

The wing of a mosquito? It is truly strange, this metaphor, but it accurately reflects the strange mixture of imagination and reason within al-Jahiz’s thought.<sup>25</sup> Although most enlightened Arabs these days find Ibn Rushd a worthy idol when it comes to rationalism, they may not have paid enough attention to al-Jahiz’s enlightened outlook. I find within his writings scientific horizons wider than those of Ibn Rushd. Al-Jahiz was deeply interested in world civilizations and he believed that Islamic Arab civilization was the product of the nations of India, Greece, and Persia, which he consistently referenced and whose civilizational knowledge, he believed, were transmitted from one language to another and from one generation to another “until it reached us and we were the last to inherit and look into it.” However, al-Jahiz did not consider the progress of science and knowledge inevitable, as the human mind remains vulnerable to illness, the most disastrous of which is emulation, which impedes both mind and progress. Likewise, al-Jahiz wrote that religion adopted through emulation and fanaticism rather than the mind leads to the stagnation and deterioration of civilizations, his own civilization being no exception.

Wherever al-Jahiz passes, we can glimpse the imprint of his brilliant critical intellect, often accompanied by the sarcasm he employed to refute outdated or illogical ideas. He is the most prominent example within the history of Arabic and Islamic thought of what we now call the “public intellectual” – one with wide-ranging interests, who addresses the problems of the era, whether they be political, social, intellectual, or literary, and delineates their boundaries, analyzes their discourse, and places them within their historical context. Al-Jahiz never leaves these issues without brushing away the illusions, fanaticism, or traditionalism attached to them. Al-Jahiz is the door through which we can

delve into our civilization during one of its enlightened eras, and time has only made me more appreciative of his genius.

## **At the University of Chicago**

In 1966, a new phase of my story with books began. The time had come to think seriously of my academic future, that is, of getting a PhD. I had no doubt that teaching had become my profession and there was no way to climb the academic ladder without one. With some difficulty, I obtained a scholarship to the University of Chicago in the United States. Thus I joined a group of colleagues who travelled to Europe and America in search of PhDs, dispersing us all over.

I had to choose within Islamic studies between medieval and modern history, and with no real hesitation – thanks to the six years I had spent in the department of General Education and those I had spent in British schools in the company of Greeks and Romans – I chose the former and moved directly toward the history of thought. From my university days at Oxford, I had been especially interested in the philosophy of history and its writing, so I decided to choose a subject related to the writing of history among the Arabs. At the time, the University of Chicago's department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations hosted a stellar group of professors, including the Iraqi Muhsin Mahdi, the German Wilferd Madelung, the Ukrainian Jaroslav Stetkevych, and the American professor Marshall Hodgson, author of the three-volume *Venture of Islam*, which I still consider the most important history of our civilization by a Westerner to date.<sup>26</sup>

Hodgson was an eccentric person; indeed, he was touched by the madness of genius. He was a deeply committed Christian and belonged to the Quaker Society of Friends. He was particularly interested in Sufi Islam, an interest I did not share. Hodgson attracted a number of students who became like a part of his family, and he would spend long hours with them to help them solve problems, intellectual and emotional. World history was one of Hodgson's main interests, and he was one of the first to renounce a Eurocentric outlook of world history and to call for understanding Islamic civilization through a comprehensive world perspective. Hodgson developed his own terminology, which he considered essential for understanding Islamic history. He differentiates, for example, between Islamic and Islamicate, or what is religious and what is civilizational, allowing the sphere of the civilizational concept to expand far wider than the religious sphere, which requires a universal outlook toward the writing of Islamic history.

Despite my affinity for Hodgson's approach, Muhsin Mahdi, because he had written a book about Ibn Khaldun, was chosen to supervise my thesis.<sup>27</sup> Mahdi was a follower of the philosopher Leo Strauss and his famous book *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, in which he tackled an analysis of philosophical writing during Europe's religious Middle Ages, when philosophy was persecuted.<sup>28</sup> Mahdi's book about Ibn Khaldun, like his later works on al-Farabi, teemed with ideas borrowed from Strauss about how philosophy was written in the medieval period, during which religion prevailed, and the need for

intensive research to find the hidden meanings within these texts. Therefore, we find that Ibn Khaldun is, in Mahdi's opinion, actually a "hidden" philosopher. I did not like this theory, as every "classic" book really includes a number of books, and there is never only one "key" to decipher its symbols. Moreover, most later intellectual historians did not adopt Strauss's theories.

Mahdi first suggested that I write about the works of Ibn Hayyan al-Qurtubi (d. 1075 AD), but we ultimately settled on al-Mas'udi (d. 956 AD). My introduction to the world of al-Mas'udi was through al-Jahiz. The works of al-Jahiz ultimately overshadow al-Mas'udi's history, as they do countless works produced during the so-called Golden Age of Islamic thought, between the ninth and sixteenth centuries. Still, delving into al-Mas'udi's world, with his wide-ranging and open-minded interest in a variety of realms of intellectual inquiry, meant entering into a world similar to al-Jahiz's due to his open interest in a wide variety of the sciences. I could not find within al-Mas'udi's texts what we could call the Straussian dimension – that is, another hidden text. It seemed to me that al-Mas'udi was Shi'i, but his Shi'ism was not hidden but open-minded and with wide horizons embracing all the sciences of the times. He selected the most relevant theories, philosophies, and intellectual approaches to explain the historical and scientific phenomena addressed in his texts. This intellectual independence is what gave his histories their great distinction among all Islamic schools of thought, though most of his writings have been lost. It seems to me that in our intellectual history these days we prefer to place classical thinkers in narrow intellectual boxes – calling one thinker Shi'i and another Sunni; labeling them Mu'tazili, Ash'ari, Hanafi, Shafi'i, Sufi, and so on; identifying one as a *mutakallim*, another a philosopher, and another a *faqih*; saying this one is *usuli*, that one is more *akhbari*, and so on.<sup>29</sup> Such categories fail to take into account that many of these figures were selective and eclectic in their thought, that they had drawn their knowledge from literary sources and their encyclopedic or *adabi* perspectives.

The University of Chicago's doctoral program at that time included mandatory attendance at graduate seminars for about a year and a half before commencing one's thesis. In these seminars, students were exposed to a wide scope of subjects within Islamic studies, including *'ilm al-kalam* (Islamic theology), literature, geography, history, political theory, and so forth. Most of these were new to me, but I found in them both direct and indirect relationships to al-Mas'udi and the writing of history. Facing a rich plethora of texts, I read avidly. My years in AUB's General Education department allowed me to approach these texts with a comparative analysis, to place them within a universal context and not only to register an effect here or there. The impact of thought is not mechanically transported from one thinker to another, and these Arabic texts truly spoke to the whole world, East and West. Al-Mas'udi, for example, aspired to write the history of the world – not just the Islamic world. The same applies to the numerous texts that see in the Holy Qur'an a call to discover the world of knowledge, and not one that restricted knowledge or encouraged closed-mindedness by considering its content sufficient: the Qur'an, in this view, should be considered a point of departure and not one of closure. Indeed, I believe it possible to divide Islamic thinkers into two groups: the first sees the Qur'an as the end

of all knowledge and the other considers it the beginning. The latter approach, in my opinion, is what gave our civilization its great vivacity and richness during these periods.

Any reader of al-Mas‘udi immediately recognizes that the horizons of his writings are beyond mere historical narrative and include not only the history of the world as his fellow historians knew it, but also the histories of nations ancient and modern, and a number of sciences related to history, such as geography, the natural sciences, and *‘ilm al-kalam*. Al-Mas‘udi also offers definitions for various terms, such as nation, experience, research, and tradition. This led Ibn Khaldun to describe him as the “imam of historians,” despite the former’s (in my view) cruel criticism that al-Mas‘udi narrated “absurd stories.” Thus, al-Mas‘udi was my choice as the subject of my dissertation and it was a blessed one, opening before me an expansive window overlooking the Islamic sciences and civilization of his times. My dissertation was later published in English.<sup>30</sup> It was my first book, and when it first came out, I embraced it with a passion no less than that with which I embraced my children.

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#### Endnotes

- 1 From *Kitab al-Firasa* (Book of Physiognomy).
- 2 John Carey, *The Unexpected Professor: An Oxford Life in Books* (London: Faber and Faber, 2014).
- 3 The author’s father, Ahmad Samih al-Khalidi, was a leading Palestinian educator and principal of the Arab College in Jerusalem from 1925 to 1948. See “Ahmad Samih Khalidi,” *Encyclopedia of the Palestinians*, ed. Philip Mattar (New York: Facts on File, 2005), 279.
- 4 Khalil al-Sakakini, *Kadha ana ya dunya* [Thus Am I, O World] (n.p.: al-Matba‘a al-tijariyya, 1955). An unabridged version of Sakakini’s diaries, along with correspondence and other writings, were published in eight volumes by the Khalil Sakakini Center in Ramallah and the Institute for Jerusalem Studies between 2003 and 2010. See *Yawmiyyat Khalil al-Sakakini: yawmiyyat, risalat, ta‘ammulat* [The Diaries of Khalil al-Sakakini: Diaries, Letters, Reflections], ed. Akram Musallam (Ramallah: Institute of Jerusalem Studies and Khalil Sakakini Cultural Center, 2003-2010).
- 5 The joke is a pun, as *karabij* has a double meaning – a kind of sweet, and lashes with a whip!
- 6 Salvatore Giuliano was a Sicilian bandit who rose to prominence in 1943. He is the subject of a 1962 film directed by Francesco Rosi, and a number of biographies in Italian and English. See Billy Jaynes Chandler, *King of the Mountain: The Life and Death of Guiliano the Bandit* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 1988).
- 7 See Tarif Khalidi and Mayssoun Sukarieh, “Halat Milham Qasim” [The Case of Milham Qasim], *Bidayat* 7 (Winter 2014), online at [www.bidayatmag.com/node/177](http://www.bidayatmag.com/node/177) (accessed 27 March 2018); Mayssoun Sukarieh and Tarif Khalidi, “Middle Eastern Banditry: A Study in History and Folklore,” in *In the House of Understanding: Histories in Memory of Kamal S. Salibi*, ed. Abdul Rahim Abu-Hussayn, Tarif Khalidi, and Suleiman Ali Mourad (Beirut: American University of Beirut Press, 2017).
- 8 Arsène Lupin was the fictional creation of French writer Maurice Leblanc, appearing in some 17 novels and 39 novellas by the author.
- 9 Tom Mix and Gene Autry were actors in Hollywood Westerns, whose film popularity led to spin-off comics and novels featuring characters of the same names.

- 10 The series launched in 1941 with a comic version of Alexandre Dumas's *The Three Musketeers*, and published 167 adaptations, the last being *Faust*, published in August 1962. See Michael Sawyer, "Albert Lewis Kanter and the Classics: The Man Behind the Gilberton Company," *Journal of Popular Culture* 20, no. 4 (Spring 1987): 1–18.
- 11 The novel, authored by Thomas Hughes, describes the experience of Tom Brown, a fictional boy based largely on the author's brother, at Rugby School, a public school for boys.
- 12 The author's mother, Anbara Salam Khalidi, was a prominent Arab writer, translator, and public intellectual. See Anbara Salam Khalidi, *Memoirs of an Early Arab Feminist: The Life and Activism of Anbara Salam Khalidi* (London: Pluto Press, 2013).
- 13 R. W. Southern, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).
- 14 Benedetto Croce, *History as the Story of Liberty*, trans. Sylvia Sprigge (New York: W. W. Norton, 1941).
- 15 Pieter Geyl, *Napoleon: For and Against* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949).
- 16 Henri Pirenne, *Mahomet et Charlemagne* (Brussels: R. Sand, 1922).
- 17 For a recent translation, see R. J. McCarthy, *Al-Ghazali's Path to Sufism and His Deliverance from Error: An Annotated Translation of al-Munqidh min al-Dalal* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2000).
- 18 On this question, see the introduction to Abu al-'Ala' al-Ma'arri, *The Epistle of Forgiveness, or a Pardon to Enter the Garden*, ed. and trans. Geert Jan van Gelder and Gregor Schoeler (New York: New York University Press, 2013).
- 19 Qur'an 21:102 and 29:55, respectively, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, trans. Tarif Khalidi (New York: Penguin Classics, 2008), 264, 325.
- 20 Qur'an 14:17, *The Qur'an: A New Translation*, 201.
- 21 On the origins of "Old Nick," see, for example, Anatoly Liberman, "Multifarious Devils, Part 2, Old Nick and the Crocodile," *OUPblog*, 5 June 2013, online at [blog.oup.com/2013/06/old-nick-etymology-word-origin/](http://blog.oup.com/2013/06/old-nick-etymology-word-origin/) (accessed 21 February 2018).
- 22 This and the following translations are from Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and trans. Tim Parks (Cambridge: Penguin Classics, 2011).
- 23 I myself found that I could not chase al-Jahiz's specter, and with some colleagues organized an international conference on him. Later, the proceedings were published in a book, which garnered critical acclaim and a World Book Prize from the Islamic Republic of Iran. See *al-Jahiz: A Muslim Humanist for Our Time*, ed. Arnim Heinemann, Manfred Kropp, Tarif Khalidi, and John Lash Meloy (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag for Orient-Institut, Beirut, 2009).
- 24 *The Life and Works of Jahiz: Translations of Selected Texts*, trans. Charles Pellat and D. M. Hawke (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 166.
- 25 For further discussion, see Tarif Khalidi, "A Mosquito's Wing: Al-Jahiz on the Progress of Knowledge," in *Arabic and Islamic Garland: Historical, Educational, and Literary Papers Presented to Abdul-Latif Tibawi*, ed. Riadh el-Droubie (London: Islamic Cultural Center, 1977), 277–289.
- 26 Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam*, 3 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
- 27 Muhsin Mahdi, *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History* (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 1954).
- 28 Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1952).
- 29 *A mutakallim* is one versed in 'ilm al-kalam – a theologian. A *faqih* is specialist in religious law (*fiqh*). According to the *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, the *akhbariyya* (sing. *akhbari*) are "those who rely primarily on the traditions, *akhbar*, of the *Imams* as a source of religious knowledge, in contrast to the *Usuliyya* [q.v.], who admit a larger share of speculative reason in the principles (*usul*) of theology and religious law." See W. Madelung, "Akhbariyya," in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, ed. P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W. P. Heinrichs (Leiden: Brill, 2012), online at [dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_islam\\_SIM\\_8312](https://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_8312) (accessed 24 April 2018).
- 30 Tarif Khalidi, *Islamic Historiography: The Histories of Mas'udi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975).



# In the House for Orphans

## A Jerusalem Boyhood

Reja-e Busailah

### Editor's Note:

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* is grateful to the Institute for Palestine Studies in Washington D.C. for permission to publish an excerpt from Reja-e Busailah's extraordinary memoir of his boyhood in Mandate-era Palestine (*In the Land of My Birth: A Palestinian Boyhood*, Institute for Palestine Studies, 2017). Here, Busailah takes us to the Old City and the House of Orphans, where his father has enrolled him because there were no other options for a blind boy. We enter the world of sound inhabited by a highly intelligent seven-year-old child, alert to everything around him, both the intimate details of his life and the turbulent public events surrounding him in Jerusalem.

I must have been almost seven when I was sent to a boarding school, the Islamic Industrial House for Orphans in Jerusalem (Dar al-Aytam al-Sina'iyya al-Islamiyyah). My parents did not know what to do about my education because of my blindness, my father told me later. The decision to send me to that school was made because there were no other options. They could have sent me to Schneller, the German missionary school, but they decided against it because of religion.

Before going to the school, I had already been made to see the doctor, Dr. Abu al-Arraj, though what a doctor had to do with the school was a mystery. He made me breathe while he put something cold against my back, then against my chest. He made me put my tongue out. I was puzzled and apprehensive.

The House for Orphans was in the Old City. It was quite far from Wad al-Joze but still within walking distance. My father took me there. We left early on a Saturday morning. We walked through Karm al-'Alami, where we passed the olive and medlar trees; then past Yousuf's store; on to Bab al-Zahreh; then Bab al-Amud; Bab Khan al-Zayt; Bab Hutta, where I was born; and finally, I believe, to Bab al-Sinisleh (al-Silsilah). We went through a big, heavy gate made of either iron or very thick, heavy wood. My father exchanged a few words with a man who seemed to have been waiting for us and then left hurriedly. The door closed after him with a heavy thud, big and final.

I was stunned. I could not believe that he had left. I was in a daze, surrounded by a mass of voices or sounds, vast and indistinct, without any meaning. My father thudded out and I thudded in through the heavy door.

A man grabbed me by the hand, jerking me out of my daze. We walked through a spacious cobbled yard and through the amalgam of sound. Then we turned right and walked up two flights of stairs, turned right again, and

continued through a narrow passage that opened both on the left and the right. We turned left and walked down a few steps and on through a spacious courtyard, which was called, I later learned, al-Manshar.

We reached what the man called “the shop.” Inside, there were people young and old, talking and doing something. Soon I realized they were all blind, and they were making brushes, brooms, and chairs. So many blind boys together, talking and working happily! But that was not enough to distract me from my father’s abrupt departure. Was he coming back? Did he go home? Did he really leave me?

\* \* \* \* \*



Entering the Old City through Bab al-Silsileh (Chain Gate). The House for Orphans, where I spent almost three years, was very close by. Khalil Raad Collection, IPS.

At first, I do not know where I am. It feels hard under me where I lie. It is wet, too, wet and cold. I have not done it in a long time. “Shame!” Mother would say, “Shame!” I am in a strange bed, a bed different from mine. The bed is narrow. I am not lying on the floor. I am in a narrow cot made of metal and cloth stuffed thin, above the floor. I hear sounds I have never heard before. I am surrounded by many breathings, frightened by their jarring harshness. I am alone among many I do not know, far from my parents and my sisters. I do not know this place, else I would go home. I cannot find my way in this large hall. I cannot find my way to that big door or gate with the big thud. And it is a long, long way from that gate to our house in Wad al-Joze.

At the shop the next day, the boys were expecting Sheikh Omar. He was not late arriving, with his cane and smelling of strong perfume. He went straight to the back room, his office. Soon he was calling to me. Muhammad Zayid walked with me. Sheikh Omar first asked if I liked the shop, but before I could respond he went on to the next questions: Did I know the Qur’an? How much did I know? “You better learn it, or else,” he said. “Muhammad Zayid will study with you, will help you.” Next he asked if I knew how to pray. My parents did not pray, and I did not. “Okay,” he said, “Muhammad Zayid will teach you how to pray, or else!” What else? I did not like Sheikh Omar. He had an old, soft voice and soft skin on his hand, but I did not like him. He made me feel uneasy.

Muhammad Zayid was a little older than I. He came from the village of Abu Shkhedim. He was gentle. You could hear kindness in his voice. I liked learning how to pray, though performing the ablution before every prayer soon became a chore, what with washing

the feet up to the hips, the neck and behind the ears, the hands up to the elbow, and the face. Muhammad Zayid kept emphasizing that I should never pray without washing first. “There will be terrible punishment,” he said, “for anyone who prays without washing.”

And there was a punishment soon to come. Mas’oud, it was rumored, had let out gas and prayed without making the ablution. It was said that before he was expelled from the school, he was flogged. I was glad I was not there when he was flogged. Later, I found out that I did not have to wash before every prayer if between the prayers I did not urinate, defecate, or let out gas. That was strange, and led to difficulties sometimes. Still, washing remained a chore. On the other hand, praying was soon to become fun, especially when we prayed at the mosque at night. I enjoyed all the motions – the standing while reciting verses from the Qur’an, the kneeling, the prostration, even the sitting on one leg, while all the time praising God and the Prophet. It was very much like play.

Days passed, and no Father, no Mother, only these boys who do not seem to care about either Father or Mother. They are preoccupied with many things, too many to think of Father or Mother. They laugh and play and learn as though this place were their home. Finally, about two weeks later, Mother came. She came and took me home, where I stayed the night. My sisters were there, and when I woke up in the middle of the night, the clock was there, ticking away as usual. I was reassured. But morning came, and Father and Mother were up early. I did not want to go back. I cried. I called to Mother.

“I would not send him to that school if there were any other,” I heard my father tell my mother. “Crooks wherever you go! At first he said there was no vacancy. He said maybe there would be soon, just to wait until after the elections. Now that the elections are over, he tells me there is a vacancy, but you have to pay. I told him that my son is not an orphan and that I was planning to pay in the first place. The crooks! No wonder Haj Amin’s reputation is falling. Anybody’s reputation would be hurt when surrounded by such people as this man Is’haq Darwish. I wouldn’t want this man as a janitor. And they make him a director! But your son has to go to that school. Maybe he can learn something there.”

\* \* \* \* \*

And so, it was not long before I was playing and laughing at the school. It was not long before I was making brushes like Muhammad Zayid, Ismail, and Abd al-Kareem. I began to belong again. We spent hours every day making brushes. From time to time, older boys or young men from the shop would go to faraway places in the city to deliver or sell what we made. I admired and envied them for being able to do this. They were smart and lucky. There was one, Talib by name, who did not make brushes. He only delivered or sold. He was partially sighted, and he had a distinctive accent. He came from faraway Beersheba, they said. He could count the sections of an orange even before peeling it. That was a feat, a marvel!

Later, Muhammad Ahmad, Mustafa Shu’aib, Mustafa Ibrahim, and I were made to join the sighted students in their classes to study Arabic, arithmetic, geography, history, and health. We even sat through drawing but did not draw. It was very enjoyable to leave

the stuffy room of the brush-making and go into the open, among those who could see, if only for a short while. . . .

I used to envy the sighted students because they seemed to make such use of pens and ink and chalk as I could not. And that would remind me of the slates and “pencils” at the kuttab. For some reason, the smell of ink and inkwells pleased and intrigued me. So did the sound of the chalk on the blackboard. When it did not screech, it was rich and full like the sound of Mother’s hair when she combed it. It was frustrating to me that though I was able to produce the same sound when I scribbled on the board with a stick of chalk, my sighted friends were not impressed. They only laughed. I liked filling my pocket with sticks of chalk.

Making brushes and memorizing the Qur’an are the prerogative or obligation of the blind. I did not mind making brushes, but I did not like the Qur’an following me to this school. There was enough of it at home with my father. The emphasis of the school was on the vocational – carpentry, printing, binding, and caning. That was for the sighted boys. Carpentry seemed to receive the lion’s share of attention. I used to enjoy going into the carpentry shop with the boys. It was very large. There we would fool around with the machinery.

The school had a band made up only, or mostly, of wind instruments. It was led by a Turk who used to taunt us for having supported the English against the Turks during the First World War. Referring to the Arab Revolt against Turkey during that war, he would say, “The English gave you almonds and sugar then. Now you have to pay them back. They will give your country to the Jews.” He spoke Arabic with a funny accent. I liked the accent but not what he said. There were girl students too, but they had their own quarters and I did not know what they did.

But there he comes. I hear his halting steps, his shuffling shoes. I hear the tapping of his cane approaching. I do not like him. I do not like his cane. I shall never carry a cane like him. I do not like the perfume he wears. Strange, that sometimes his perfume comes before him, and sometimes it follows him like a shadow!

It is late afternoon. I am about done making the last brush of the day. He passes through our room and says something in a vague, nonchalant voice. I feel uneasy. He goes down the three steps to where his office is, the inside room with the loose-tiled floor. There is going to be reciting today.

We are walking toward the reciting room. Muhammad Zayid says, “Now remember, the first verse of the three suras is the same, except – ”

“Except,” I interrupt, “the *Al-hadeed* sura does not have ‘what is.’”

“Good for you!” Muhammad Zayid says.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sometimes on Thursday evening, some of us boys walked to the Holy Haram to have a Turkish bath. There was a spacious room that was warm, if not hot. There was a variety of stone basins, large and small, deep and shallow. The temperature of the water varied. Some basins were warm, some quite hot. It was a delightful bonus to play or merely

lounge in the water there – so relaxing, so soothing, so much better than the baths Mother gave or the baths at school.

\* \* \* \* \*

In their sleep the boys made all kinds of sounds: breathing, snoring, moaning, and breaking wind. It was a humorous amalgam, though I felt afraid when the snoring with its various pitches prevailed. Blind Issam was a good boy, though a bit too innocent. Everybody liked him but everybody teased him too. His bed was not far from mine. One night I was waiting to hear him talk in his dreams, but he did not. Would he instead do what he had done another night, when the bedbugs got the upper hand with him? He woke us all up then, when, fully naked, he whipped the bugs off his body with his belt. “Crash!” echoed the hall with the whip. It echoed also with our uncontrollable laughter.

The bugs were very annoying, especially since they were impossible to catch. Our beds had plenty of them. They were strange; they bit you, but you felt the bite only after they had gone. But at least the bugs bothered us only at night. The lice bothered us day and night. We would catch them and crush them between our fingers. Each was the size, and more or less the shape, of a sesame seed. Every two or three weeks I would go home with bugs and lice, but what with Mother’s scrubbing and combing, I would always go back to school clean.

\* \* \* \* \*

At the table we were divided into two groups, with the dishes of olives (on “olive days”) and the dishes of olive oil and *zaatar* (on “olive oil and *zaatar* days”) placed in the middle of each group. It did not feel good when the blind hands bumped into each other while reaching for the olives in the congested traffic at our table. It felt even worse when they collided as they dipped the bread first in the oil and then in the *zaatar*. Often olive oil and *zaatar* spilled here and there and everywhere, and often there would be oil and *zaatar* stains on one of my sleeves. I smelled them, and I grew not to mind the smell. I knew we were different. I knew that the hands did not do this at any of the other tables in the dining room. My hand did not bump into my parents’ or sisters’ hands when I ate at home. Often I could sense how my parents were saddened, annoyed, or hurt whenever my hand miscarried as it traveled between the plate and my mouth. Their hands did not miscarry like mine. Nor did my sisters’. The blind must be no good. They are, as the Qur’an says, like the mute and like the deaf. They do not know. They are not equal to the sighted, like night is not equal to light, like shade is not equal to the blazing heat, like the living are not equal to the dead (Sura 35). The blind, then, must be cursed.

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There was never a moment of silence while we worked at the brush and broom shop. There was talking, there was joking, and sometimes there was the Qur’an. There was the noise from the caning shop nearby where the sighted boys worked. It was always

lively and boisterous there. Tala‘at and Zakariyya were frequent visitors from the caning shop to our shop. Tala‘at was serious, almost stern. Zakariyya was a puzzle to me. “Come Wednesday next,” he often said, “and all the blind shall be slaughtered like the Jews!” I believed him and I was afraid. Why “like the Jews?” I would wonder. The older boys were not afraid. They did not seem to care.

The school set up a microphone that was turned on whenever the Qur’an was being chanted over Radio Cairo by Muhammad Rif’at, ‘Ukashah, Munirah Abdu, Kareema al-‘Adliyya, and others. They all had good and appealing voices, and we often argued over who was the best. It was always so much better to listen to their voices sweetly chanting the Qur’an than to memorize it. But sometimes the microphone was still turned on when Abd al-Wahhab or Umm Kulthoum sang. That was always a treat. Abd al-Wahhab’s “*Ya dunya ya gharami*” (My love of life) and Umm Kulthoum’s “*Ala baladi al-mahboub waddeeni*” (Take me to my beloved town) were very popular then. Zakariyya said that Abd al-Wahhab had only one lung, and that a man had paid five pounds in order to kiss Umm Kulthoum through the glass! The radio announcer always described Umm Kulthoum as the “immaculate” or “infallible,” and the “Star of the East.” The word “immaculate” baffled me.

In the springtime we often heard the distinctive calls of two different doves: the one with the *coucucou-coucucou* call, which we boys translated into “*uthkuru rabbakum*,” the other with the “*ya joukhti*” call. The first reminded us to remember our God, the other sang about her precious feathers. It was strange that the call to remember God was cheerful, while the singing about the precious feathers was so mournful. And there was the *sinounou*, the bird who came in late spring, flying low and screaming loud and blithe. He was black. They said he never came down to the ground because he had weak legs, so that, once on the ground, he would not be able to fly again.

Many stories were told at the shop. Many dealt with the English and the Jews, against whom we were fighting to keep them from taking our country. The stories were told in expanded and contracted form, at work and outside work. There was the story of the



This studio portrait was taken around 1940. My sister Laila is to my left; my sister Najeebah is to my right, and seated in front is my brother Muhammad. My sister Salwa was still a baby. Family album.

dog that howled for three days straight, a bad omen, and in fact soon after the English surrounded the village and killed the rebel Haj Ahmad and his two sons. There were stories of English planes dropping fire on the rebels near the village of Deir Ghassaneh, where many Arabs died.

Everybody, especially Abd al-Kareem and Hamid, talked about the bravery of Abu Durrah and Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam. Everybody spoke with admiration and sadness about the self-sacrifice of Sheikh Izz al-Din. Sheikh Izz al-Din was a learned man. He had graduated from the great al-Azhar University – unlike Sheikh Omar who, I was sure, did not have much learning. Muhammad Zayid's hero was Hasan Salameh. Whenever he talked of him, his voice went low and reverent. The rebels, it was said, would outwit the English and their pursuing hounds by sprinkling black pepper behind them, which confused and frustrated the hounds.

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The jinn were never far from our thoughts, and Muhammad Zayid had many stories to tell about them. Every story had a hero called Hasan and a villain called Iddis. Hasan had a soft, gentle voice, while Iddis's voice was harsh and coarse. Almost every place was haunted, and woe to him who would venture to any of these haunted places at night. The carpentry shop on the first floor had a *marid*, an evil member of the jinn. We kept daring each other to go there at night.

One Thursday night three or four of us approached the shop, which had a broken window. After some urging and daring, I volunteered to confront the *marid*. When I got close to the window, I heard my companions run away. I was shaking but I stuck my head in the window and shouted, "*Marid! Marid! Marid!*" and then ran away. No one was in pursuit. I became a skeptic, but I was something of a hero for a short while.

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Muhammad Ahmad told the story about a church bell that sounded muffled. It used to be a good bell, strong and sonorous, the way church bells are supposed to be, he said. But this bell kept disturbing a saint in his sleep, so that the saint finally got up and slapped the bell so hard that its sound went somber and sad. Muhammad Ahmad had been to Schneller and would sometimes sound a bit different from boys like Muhammad Zayid and Issam.

One day while strolling, we were going over the chapter in the Qur'an called "the Earthquake." I had memorized the chapter but still did not know what an earthquake was, even though from an early time my mother and some of our neighbors spoke of the earthquake and even dated events by it. So I asked my comrades about the meaning of earthquake. Mustafa Ibrahim laughed and said, "That's when the earth swings and sways, so that buildings fall and people die. You see, the earth rests on one horn of the Big Bull down there. When the bull gets tired, he switches to the other horn and an earthquake takes place." When I asked where the bull stood, Mustafa said impatiently, "Shut up, Reja-e! You always want to know who brought forth the chicken and who laid the egg! Soon you will be asking who created God. The bull stands in the water."

The hyena story was common, with many variants. One night, a man was walking alone or riding his donkey when an animal suddenly brushed against him, quietly and softly. The man was afraid, for he knew it was the hyena. The hyena then urinated on his own tail, shook it in the man's face, and ran off. The man was spellbound and ran after the hyena calling, "Father! Father! Father!" They ran until they reached a cave. The hyena entered with the man following. Often in the story, the man would never be heard from again; the hyena got him. But in other versions the man was lucky. That was when he hurt himself as he ran after the hyena, cutting himself by brushing or bumping against a rock or stone just before reaching the cave. His bleeding broke the spell and brought him back to his senses. Everybody was afraid of the hyena. When children cried at night and refused to sleep, their mothers would warn them that the hyena was coming to eat them, and then there would be silence.

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Meanwhile, the Long Strike ended and we were back at school after the summer holiday. The Rebellion, however, continued. The Jews were still flooding our country. They were coming in through Haifa and Tel Aviv like waves big and small, in public and in secret. They were coming brazenly to steal away Falasteen. Sliman the artist used to say, "Thieves steal from you in the black of night; Jews rob you in the white of day." I understood the general meaning but was still vague about the "black of night" and the "white of day." Also, everyone was now talking about Balfour and how vicious he was. I had heard the name before because my father and our neighbors often mentioned it, but the references had meant little to me then. He was the one who wrote the memorandum giving Palestine to the Jews, as if Palestine was his country! We all hated Balfour.

Our rebellion against the English was growing and spreading fast, the fighting intensifying by the day. The Jews and the English were fighting back. The Jews were good at planting time bombs in markets and crowded places. Abu Ibrahim al-Hawwash, our neighbor, told about a Jew who planted a time bomb in the Old City and who was running away after the bomb exploded, killing and injuring many. Lots of people ran after him yelling, "Catch him! Catch him!" The fleeing Jew then started yelling, "Catch him! Catch him!" along with the others so as not to be noticed. But Abu Ibrahim caught him by his shirt, and the pursuers fell upon him and killed him. How Abu Ibrahim's shirt got bloodstained! How I admired Abu Ibrahim!

For the first time, I began to learn some differences between guns – the old Turkish gun, the Italian gun that was more noisy and flashy than effective, the English gun that was pretty good. But the German gun was the best. It had a longer range and was more accurate. How I wished to hold one! There was the gun that rattled bullet after bullet, nonstop. It was loud and shrill and was called a machine gun. Then there was the gun that also rattled bullet after bullet but made only a low sound. They called it a *mitrailleuse*. And there was the small gun, which was the wonder of wonders. It fired but made no sound at all! It could kill you without anybody ever hearing of it. We called its bullets "dumdums."



The English were killing us with their guns and hanging our rebels. They uprooted our trees and burned our crops. They blew up homes with dynamite and made people homeless. They forced the people to pay terrible fines. If only I could kill one! They tortured their prisoners, hanged them by their feet, yanked out their fingernails, and did other terrible things to them. They came to help the Jews take our land and homes. The Jews and the English were bad. The Germans were good because they did not like the English. If only they would come and help us against the English and the Jews. The Italians were good too. Most of us were glad when they won in Ethiopia. There was a popular song then supporting Mussolini against the Ethiopians, and I used to be puzzled by the line, "Stick to the macaroni, and stay away from the eggplant!" It was not long before even Franco was good because the English did not like him, and because he was friends with the Germans and the Italians.

Every now and then, a Palestinian was hanged by the English, and the people were sad and angry. The victims were always brave. They walked to the beam steadfast and eager to die. They became martyrs. In sympathy and solidarity with the many prisoners, everybody, young and old, would sing the most popular song then, which began, "Spread and cover us, O darkness of prison, for we love the prison with its dark, because after imprisonment there is only the rising dawn of another day."

About this time, I developed the habit of going after the news. In those days the newspapers were the principal source. My father would bring home the morning paper, and before he was done, I would snatch it from him and run downstairs to our neighbors, where one of the two Hawwash sisters, Wadad or Fawziyyeh, would read it to me. I wanted to hear how many Britons and Jews were killed and what bank or post office was robbed. I loved it when our rebels made off with such-and-such a sum of money from this post office or that bank, the Ottoman Bank and especially Barclays.

It was during this same period that I began to hear stories about Fuad Hijazi, Ata al-Zeer, and Muhammad Jamjoum, and about English cruelty and injustice to them, and about the courage of these three men who on the day of their execution argued with each other over who should walk to the gallows first. Each wanted to be the first to become a martyr. Muhammad Jamjoum broke out of his chains and beat Ata al-Zeer to the gallows. The three were hanged at the Acre Prison on a Tuesday, with an hour between each execution. For a long time after, Tuesday was considered a day of bad luck: "Don't travel on Tuesday." Some would also say, "Don't take a bath on Tuesday, don't clip your nails, don't cut your hair," else harm may befall you.

These executions had taken place years before the Great Rebellion, but now they took on new meaning. Once Abd al-Kareem said laughing, "I would like to see Muhammad Ahmad racing to the gallows to give up his life for his country!" We all laughed. "Imagine someone who went to Schneller, a school for the Christians, giving up his life for his country?" he continued. "Didn't they feed you pork over there?" And we all laughed. "Lachen, Lachen, Muhammad Ahmad," someone added, mimicking the little song Muhammad Ahmad had been taught at Schneller. Muhammad Ahmad had liked to sing this song, and he used to end his singing with the rapid rubbing together of his palms.

We all loved the poet Abu Salma. We loved him for his poetry, his bravery, and for his defiance of the English. In his poem "*Jabal al-Mukabbir*" (Mount Mukabbir), he wrote, "We will not cease until we have brought down the Bastille." For that, the English fired him from his teaching position. The Bastille here is the Government House, which the English erected on Mount Mukabbir and where the English high commissioner resided. Abu Salma also denounced the Arab kings in his famous poem, "Spread on the Flame of Song." All of us loved that poem. The poem denounces the Arab kings of Hijaz, Yemen, and Egypt, along with Emir Abdullah of Transjordan, for letting the Rebellion down, for letting us down, for betraying Falasteen. They betrayed us when they made us lay down our arms and trust the English.

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We became suspicious even of the Arab Higher Committee because it had agreed to end the strike, placing its full trust in the English. How could we trust the English when they were killing our men, destroying everything, and promising our country to the Jews? How could we, when right after we ended the strike they sent the Peel Commission to Palestine, which the next summer decided that our country should be partitioned between us and the Jews and that the Jews would be given the better part of the country, the fertile part including al-Jaleel (Galilee)? And that tens of thousands of Arabs would be forced out of their homes? Absurd, all of us agreed. The Arab Higher Committee must be suspect, then, even though Haj Amin is its chairman.

Of course, the Jews agreed to the partition. "Does not this prove," my father said to Abu Yousuf, "that the English are not to be believed or trusted? When they came to our country, they denied that they wanted to give our country to the Jews. Now they only want to divide it between us and them. Ha! Just wait, and you will see more."

Abu Yousuf agreed and added, "Yes, the English are much worse than the Jews."

It was around this time that I first heard the story of King Suleiman (Solomon) and the two women both claiming the same baby. The false mother agreed to King Suleiman's proposal that the baby be divided between them. The real mother refused. How smart and wise King Suleiman was! In their claim, the Jews were as false as the false mother.

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At the beginning of my third year at the House of Orphans, it was announced that the blind were to start learning Braille. This was a curiosity at first. We were to spend an hour or two one evening a week learning Braille somewhere outside the school. We were to be taught by two blind men, Mr. Jameel and Mr. Subhi. Mr. Subhi had a loud voice; Mr. Jameel a low, soft one. They were not from our school. The class was held in a large room in a large building. We learned little, and I was not very fond of either teacher. We were tired at the end of the day, though I did enjoy getting out of the school and walking in the open. Often I fell asleep while the two teachers were busy with other students. Somehow I cared little about the stylus and the slate or about the ruler and the clamp that held the paper straight on the slate.

One evening I wake up to find myself alone in the big room. Everyone has left. I call out, but there is no answer, only the echo of my voice in the immense silence. I call again and again, and I panic as I hear my voice grow louder. How could they go and leave me? I get up and find the door. It is locked. I pull on the handle in vain. I am afraid—afraid that the building may be haunted by a *marid* or a ghost. This time the *marid* would be quite different from the *marid* who haunted the carpentry shop, more vicious. There may be even an *'amura* there, she who tricks you, confuses you, and ends up doing you much harm, probably killing you.

At last I hear – or think I hear – a sound. I am confused by feelings of fear and hope. I wait. I hear the sound again, and my heart skips a beat. What can it be? The sound grows nearer and clearer, until it becomes footsteps, then the click of a key in the keyhole, and the voice of Saleem calling my name. I am at the door. “That’s what you get, when you fall asleep!” he says. But I am rescued.

One day, Muhammad Zayid, Muhammad Ahmad, and I were told that we were wanted down at the main office. So we went. Muhammad Zayid was called in first. He came out two minutes later. Before we could talk to him, I was called in. A man (later I learned that he was the director of the school) told me, “This is the mufti, Haj Amin.” A hand stretched out. I took it, I shook it, and I kissed it. It was hairy.

“*Allah yirda alaik*” (May God bless you), the owner of the hand said in a low, calm voice. I was in awe before our leader, the great Haj Amin. The three of us said little to one another about this incident. But I thought much about it, about the hairy hand, the deep gentle voice, and especially about his saying “May God bless you,” and about the enigma of whether blindness was a blessing or a curse. Why should the great Haj Amin call us in, let us kiss his hand, and give us the blessing? Were we cursed and therefore needed a blessing, or were we blessed and he needed a blessing? How would our kissing his hand bless him? He needed a blessing? Our great mufti in need of a blessing from us! Contrary to my expectation, my father did not seem much impressed when I told him of this. “Ah, yes,” he said. “And was the director there? Was Is’haq Darwish there?” That was all.

This incident took place about the time the English laid siege to the al-Aqsa Mosque for several days, and soon after, I believe, Haj Amin slipped out of the country in order to evade the English. The days of that siege were very difficult, with much firing at the mosque and from the mosque. They said many died. The English imposed a curfew on the city and shot at anything that moved. One dusk during the siege, I was walking to al-Manshar and the brush and caning shop when suddenly an object whizzed by with a whistle and slammed into the wall nearby. Later, they told me it was a bullet that may have been deliberate or that may have gone astray. I was lucky, everybody said.

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# Childhood Memories of a Jerusalemite

Nazmi al-Jubeh

## Editor's Note:

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## Farewell to the Old City

In late 1966 our new house was ready to welcome us. We were moving out of the Old City where I was born and had lived my eleven years, where I knew every detail, its alleys and people. The new house was less than a hundred meters beyond Jerusalem's southern wall, located in Wadi Hilwa, a green neighborhood with gardens and access to Jerusalem's only spring. Wadi Hilwa was part of Silwan, a quiet village adjacent to Jerusalem's walls, and historically in its shadows. The new house represented a step up in my family's social status, since it included all of the conveniences lacking in the old one: electricity, running water, our own bathroom, a small garden, and privacy, which we had never enjoyed in our shared courtyard. The best feature was a shower, imagine – a shower! Up to that moment I had never known that bathing outside of a plastic tub was even possible!

With our move, new sites were added on my daily path. Al-Haram al-Sharif continued to have a special place in my heart and daily schedule. To reach my school, al-Omariyya, located above the northern wall of al-Haram al-Sharif, I had to enter the Old City through Bab al-Maghariba (Dung Gate) and pass through part of the Moroccan quarter, past the houses of the Abu Su'ud family, and then into al-Haram al-Sharif through Bab al-Maghariba (al-Haram's Gate). On my return home I would first stop at my father's spice shop in Bab al-Silsila Street (Chain Street), as per his strict orders, to pick up any groceries or supplies he wanted me to take home. I would then go through Bab al-Silsila to 'Aqabat Abu Madyan (Abu Madyan al-Ghawth's Ascent), crossing the Moroccan quarter from north to south, and then out of the Old City to Wadi Hilwa and the new house.

The Moroccan quarter became part of my daily adventures and explorations. I was fascinated by the Moroccans' colorful traditional clothing. My favorite was a hood that hung over the shoulders and back. I was also intrigued by the Moroccan fez, which differed from that of the familiar Ottoman *effendi* which was popular in Jerusalem in the 1960s. The Moroccan fez was softer and shorter, and did not boost the height of the person wearing it. The clothes of the Moroccan women were also unfamiliar to me, and featured a *jalabiyya*. This was unusual for Jerusalemite women who wore Western clothes or the traditional black dress of the Levant.

My vocabulary was enriched with new terms and phrases as my ears became familiar with the Moroccan dialect although I did not understand everything, especially the dialect of tourists and *mujawir*, those who come to live in seclusion in al-Haram. Some words were close to our dialect, but the accent was different and the rhythm faster to the Jerusalemite ear, which was accustomed to slower, stretched out sounds, and dropped letters. Attention was required to understand just what people were saying. The truth is that I did not understand everything, but I usually understood the gist. I also noticed during that period that Moroccans could be distinguished by shared facial features.

I will forever remember the large fig tree that leaned over the high gates of al-Masluhi's garden on 'Aqabat Abu Madyan. I used to look forward to the ripening of its fruit every year in early September, watch them grow, and mark some so that I could pick them when ripe whenever I had the chance. I also got to know many of the neighborhood's children. It was not unusual for me to lay my school bag and grocery basket on the side of the road to go play football in the alleys. We would follow the football sometimes inside the yards of houses, as if the streets and empty plots were not enough, and we would be met by swearing and cursing, sometimes in a Moroccan dialect.

There were two types of residents in *Zawiyat* (corner) Abu Madyan, and they were not all Moroccans; there were the Moroccans who resided permanently in the city, and who became Jerusalemites with time, and there were visitors who stayed temporarily, even if these visits might be prolonged. The number of Moroccan visitors usually increased during the month of Ramadan, and after the pilgrimage season. They were distinctive from their clothes, the way they walked and of course their accents. The other residents of the quarter were primarily Moroccans whose ancestors had arrived in Jerusalem generations ago and eventually became local residents. Also, every year a few more of the *mujawir* would decide not to return home and stayed close to al-Aqsa Mosque. I learned a lot also about Moroccan food. Couscous was no longer strange to me after I learned it was what we call *maftul*, with some important differences, since I found that Moroccans are offended when their couscous is confused with other dishes. The strong aroma of spices coming out of the quarter's kitchens became a familiar fragrance to my nose.



Nazmi al-Jubeh in 1971. Family album.

And so the Moroccan quarter became a part of my small world: the “other,” the Moroccan, intrigued me, and I was always keen to learn more. I cannot really explain my lightning-fast friendship with the Moroccan quarter except by connecting it to my thirst to explore every alley and passageway in old Jerusalem. I came to know the Moroccan quarter inside out, starting with the main road that branched out from Bab al-Silsila Street and went through Abu Madyan al-Ghawth’s Ascent to the south snaking between the houses, and then descended down numerous steps, because the Moroccan quarter was built in the lowest part of the Old City. This road conjoined with another branch road that went to the east leading to Abu Su’ud’s houses (Zawiyat Abu Su’ud and the adjoining buildings) and finally al-Haram al-Sharif. An alley from this road led to al-Buraq wall. I explored thoroughly all the alleys in the quarter, and I believe now that they were the smallest and narrowest in the Old City. Almost none were straight roads; the network of streets twisted and turned. The houses in the Moroccan quarter were not the most beautiful in the Old City, or as high as houses in other quarters. But I recall the numerous small home gardens, and the many fig and pomegranate trees, more abundant in the quarter than in other neighborhoods. This is how the Moroccan quarter became one of my favorite childhood hangouts.

## **The “Iraqi Army” Demolishes the Moroccan Quarter and Dances over the Ruins**

My time exploring the Moroccan quarter turned out to be quite limited, less than a year, although I yearned to learn more about it. I was particularly interested in the apertures in the quarter’s northern walls, which led to an “unknown” that intrigued me. Although my relationship with the quarter’s children was cut short, I can still vaguely remember the features of faces I no longer see.

In June 1967, two days after the war erupted, my father decided – with a Jordanian military camp less than 100 meters from our home on the eastern slope of Jabal al-Nabi Dawud (Mount Zion), and following an exchange of cannon fire between the Jordanian and Israeli army and several bombings by aircraft – to take the family to the Old City for refuge, to my grandfather’s house in al-Sharaf neighborhood, near the Moroccan quarter. We left in a hurry and took only a few belongings with us. My father was certain that he would not be away from his life’s achievement for long. But he believed that being some distance from the military camp would reduce our risk, and the gates of the city and its sanctity would protect us from the worst.

We overcrowded my grandfather’s place, which was a peasant-style single-room apartment with a *mastaba* (platformed area) elevated three steps from the lower level. Al-Sharaf neighborhood overlooked the Moroccan quarter and was adjacent to its western side. The building’s large courtyard and multi-levels accommodated all of us during the day, but we all had to squeeze into the single room at night. The house residents and guests fell immediately into three groups. One group of men, children and adolescents

sat around the radio to follow the latest developments and news about the “victories” of Arab armies, and how close they were to “liberating Palestine.” They also went to the roof, from where they could see Jabal al-Zaytun (Mount of Olives) and Jabal al-Masharif (Mount Scopus) to the east, to monitor military developments in the field. From there they could also see the battles between the Jordanian and Israeli armies on Jabal al-Mukabir, six kilometers south of the Old City. The second group consisted of women and girls who seemed to be praying, reciting verses of the Qur’an and praising God most of the time, and, of course, also preparing coffee and tea over and over, and cooking to feed all the hungry mouths that had nothing to do except eat and drink. The third circle consisted of children who did not want to join either of the two other groups and for whom the occasion seemed like a carnival. They enjoyed jumping, screaming, and watching the acrobatics of adults as they rushed up to the rooftop whenever they heard an explosion or the roar of a military airplane, or whenever a neighbor came with breaking news or a “detailed,” “confirmed,” or “verified” report about the latest events and developments in the various battlefields.

My grandfather’s house, which was not far from our previous house in the Old City, was located in a large building constructed in the twelfth century and used as a hospice during the Crusader period. Of course, I did not learn this information until forty years later. The building was massive in size, and the rooms added to it in later centuries accommodated several families, including my grandparents who occupied a room on the ground floor. Their room did not have a kitchen, so they made a corner into a kitchen area; the toilet was shared with several other families. The house had two complete levels, and a partial third one that was occupied by our relatives. It seemed that some families, for one reason or another, decided as we did to take refuge in this building, and hence it very much resembled a refugee camp.

We were a family of thirteen members, and remained so after my eldest brother married and his wife joined us, while my second brother left to study in Damascus. But we did not manage to keep the magic number for long, since soon after, my eldest sister married and moved to Transjordan. My brother was in Damascus when the war started, and this was a cause of extraordinary stress. We did not hear from him until he arrived in Jerusalem two weeks after the war ended. He travelled from Damascus to Amman, and from there he had walked on foot to Jerusalem.

Countless stories could be told about what took place within the walls of that house during the time we spent there, but this is not the place to relate them. One day, while the “experts” in the first grouping were loudly discussing military strategies and analyzing the situation, others in the “control tower” on the rooftop announced the arrival of “Iraqi tanks” to the Mount of Olives, which they said were approaching the Old City. The women started at once ululating and everybody started clapping fiercely for several minutes until the adults asked the children to stop. The men prepared to take out their few, primitive weapons, which they were eager to use in this national wedding for which they had been waiting so long. They began to prepare themselves to attack the western part of the city, although no one had received any training in how to use weapons. Plans and priorities

were swiftly being drawn, and their enthusiasm and chivalry dominated the situation.

Some of the group members, I no longer remember whether residents or guests, even started to prepare themselves to return to their homes in West Jerusalem, from where many of them had been displaced in 1948. But the wisdom and experience of my grandfather, who was the eldest among them, prevailed. He asked everyone to be patient until the dust settled, and then to act accordingly. He insisted that a right will never be lost as long as claimants strive to restore it. Several hours after the “Iraqi tanks” were spotted on the Mount of Olives we heard loud noises in the street in front of the house. My grandfather rejoiced, with the signs of undeniable victory evident on his face. He decided to grab the large tea pot prepared for the residents of the house and to take it outside to the “Iraqi soldiers.” He explained that they would undoubtedly be exhausted from the long travel from Baghdad to Jerusalem, and they would certainly appreciate a cup of tea, their favorite drink, preferably well brewed, because “their tea” was darker than “ours.”

My grandfather was gone only seconds when he came back frantically, the sound of the huge iron gate slamming behind him echoing in the house’s hallways. He dropped the teapot and cups yelling, “Jews!” with his local accent, then fell unconscious. It was then that we realized that the Old City had fallen into the hands of the Israelis and that what we had presumed were Iraqi tanks were actually Israeli tanks. Today, five decades after the big tea pot fell from my grandfather’s hands, I can still hear the chaos, the cries and wails that filled the house afterwards. I will spare you and spare myself the painful memories of defeat, and how it affected those who were so certain of victory. My father, who was the head of the household, was overwhelmed with worry. He was not sure what to do in this new situation, especially after we heard loudspeakers announce a curfew in Hebrew, and order residents to hand in their weapons or leave them in the streets. He was even more worried about his house in Wadi Hilwa, and whether it was possible to return to it or not. He felt the world closing in on him, and his face, which was always rosy, turned bluish and his usual smile evaporated.

As soon as the curfew was lifted for an hour to enable residents to get food supplies, my father rushed to gather us from all around the house, like a shepherd gathering his flock, announcing that we will return to our house outside the gates in Wadi Hilwa in Silwan, amidst the protests and dismay of everyone, horrified by my father’s irrational and irresponsible decision. My father, however, was ill with worry over his new house which he had not yet enjoyed, and that is why he insisted on going back. He said that he would die only in his house and that he would never leave it, and neither he nor any of his offspring would ever become refugees anywhere. We left my grandfather’s house quickly to face the unknown. Afraid, we headed slowly and cautiously north towards Bab al-Silsila Street. We went down the steps, steps we had trodden thousands of times in the past, and knew so well that we could walk down even blindfolded. We saw nothing suspicious along our way: we did not see any soldiers or any destruction despite the sound of bulldozers and explosions that we had heard while at my grandfather’s house. We did encounter, however, people running silently without uttering a word, with anger and fear written all over their faces. Some of them were carrying heavy suitcases, while



others were dragging children behind them and even an older woman who couldn't walk. Given the circumstances none of this raised our suspicions. As soon as we reached Bab al-Silsila Street we turned right toward the east, and continued for fifty meters before turning south to enter Abu Madyan al-Ghawth's Ascent, where we walked through a small alley and then began descending down the stairs.

What we saw upon reaching Zawiyat Abu Madyan al-Ghawth, facing east, was indescribably horrific. Right there, at the bottom of the stairs, we saw soldiers, so many of them, heavily armed from head to toe, dancing and singing in a language that we did not understand, and behind them – emptiness. The Moroccan quarter no longer existed. The fig and pomegranate trees were gone, and so were the alleys I used to walk and play in. Muhammad, Sa'id, Si Yusif, Masluhi and his fig tree were not there, the only thing visible under June's hot sun was a cloud of dust hovering over a heap of rubble. Bulldozers, which I had never seen before in my life, were roaring along their metal chains to the tunes of victory music, completing a job as yet unfinished. That day I saw Ashkenazi rabbis for the first time; they were there in their black attire and strange hats (shtreimels),<sup>1</sup> dancing over the rubble ... dancing over my memories, over the homes of my friends and the paths that I so often frequented. For the first time in my life, I saw the Buraq Wall so huge. It looked unfamiliar, because it had been small, and difficult to see without going down an alley and through a gate first. But now the wall was in the center of the scene, and it was even possible to see al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock from that point, which had never been possible before, blocked by the crowded buildings in the Moroccan quarter.

I cannot say that any of us, the twelve people walking in the ruins of the Moroccan quarter, grasped what was going on, and I still don't know how it was that no one fainted, other than the fact that we were already expecting the worst. Within seconds soldiers surrounded us, raising their guns to our faces. They forced us to stop and bombarded us with words that we did not understand. Arrogantly, a soldier whose face was blue and indistinguishable from the dust that covered it, inspected us slowly and finally selected my eldest brother, who was in his late-twenties, and pulled him away from us, blindfolded him, and ordered us to continue walking. We walked without my brother, heading towards Bab al-Maghariba, leaving behind us a neighborhood reduced to rubble, dancing soldiers, a huge jarring wall, rabbis swaying their heads in front of it, bulldozers razing what was left of the quarter, and an arrested brother whose fate was unknown. We carried with us our humiliation, disgrace, tears and defeat, glancing back every now and then until the whole scene disappeared from behind us as we descended to the unknown, down the hill to the southern gate to leave the Old City through Bab al-Maghariba. Soldiers were everywhere. They followed us with their eyes as we walked the short distance of less than 100 meters, where their military vehicles were parked on both sides of a road that seemed endless to us.

I have been obsessed with bulldozers ever since. I watched them as they removed the stone blocks that had barricaded Jaffa Gate, New Gate and Zion Gate since 1948. I watched them closely as they razed the Arab buildings that had stood in what had been

mostly no man's land, between Jaffa Gate and Ma'man Allah (Mamilla) Cemetery, and Jaffa Street. I watched them as they flattened dozens of buildings from al-Musrara, and used force to unify the two parts of the city. Bulldozers still have a special significance in my life, but it was my first encounter with them during the demolition of the Moroccan quarter that led me to see them, until today, as tools of destruction and war.



Bulldozing the Mughrabi quarter, June 1967.

In September of 1967, and after the family was reunited, I went back to my school, al-Omariyya, which changed quite a lot during the summer. Although my route to school and to my father's shop technically did not change, I now passed through a plaza that had been built over the Moroccan quarter ruins. The road leading to al-Haram al-Sharif no longer twisted among the quarter's alleys but was now a heap of dirt. Entering al-Haram through Bab al-Maghariba meant crossing an Israeli military checkpoint, which controlled the gate and held the keys from the awqaf administration (Islamic Endowments). The courtyards of al-Haram al-Sharif lost their usual morning serenity, as they filled up now with Israeli tourists gaping around; "visitors" wearing military uniforms and carrying automatic weapons and "civilians" showing off their weapons became a normal scene.

In truth, nothing was the same, nothing was like it used to be, and Jerusalem was no longer Jerusalem. I no longer had time to quietly observe, I was always in a hurry, running in all directions for no apparent reason. I was running from myself, running away from the Israelis' eyes, running from my memories of the Moroccan quarter. As for the residents in the Mamluk mausoleums on the way to Bab al-Silsila, for whom I used to recite al-Fatiha, the first Sura of the Qur'an, whenever I passed by, I now made do with bestowing a very quick unapologetic glance.

There were big changes in the school too since most of the old teachers had not returned, not wanting to teach in schools controlled by the Israeli occupation authorities. They were replaced by young teachers, whoever had a high school diploma was employed, and even that requirement they were not strict about. More than half of my classmates did not return to class; some had left to Jordan, some had left school and joined the labor market, and the whereabouts of others are still unknown to me.

The occupation decided to pretend that life was normal, that it was business as usual in Jerusalem, that the Arab citizens of Jerusalem accepted the new situation and that there was no dramatic change. Therefore, it was important to them that the schools start at their usual time in September following the three-month summer vacation, and that everybody resume their lives as usual.

The second major change in school was that the occupation imposed its own school

curricula, which was the same as that taught to Palestinians living in the territory occupied in 1948. One of the interesting things in the new curricula was the disappearance of King Husayn Bin Talal's photo, which usually appeared on the first page of all school books, and of the kingdom's name and crown from the schoolbook covers. More interesting was the appearance of a Jewish teacher, with a short skirt, who taught us Hebrew. I still remember her name, Mariam. Another change was a book called "Israeli Civics," which prompted our home teacher to tell us: "Ignore this book completely as if you've never received it, and there is no need for you to bring it to school." Al-'Umariyya School was not the same school, just like Jerusalem was not the same city anymore.

It did not take long before teachers and parents alike rejected the occupation's curricula, and insisted that students should continue to study the Jordanian curricula, given that they will go to Arab universities after graduating from high school, and that these universities only accept the Jordanian high school diploma. But I did not wait for these changes. I took matters into my own hands. The change took years but this was how we gradually went back to studying the Jordanian curricula. I attended Israeli-administered government schools until I graduated from eighth grade. My last two years were spent in 'Abdallah Bin al-Husayn School in Shaykh Jarrah, four kilometers north of the Old City (al-Omariyya School taught only until sixth grade). My walk there from Silwan was across the Old City on foot to Bab al-'Amud (Damascus Gate), and then north on Nablus road past the American Consulate, YMCA, St. George's School, the American Colony Hotel and Zawiyat al-Shaykh Jarrah to the lowest point in the area. Then I climbed up the steep hill, passing the houses of the Ghosheh and Jarallah families until I reached 'Abdallah Bin al-Husayn School. In the afternoon, I detoured through Khan al-Zayt and Suq al-'Attarin, the spice market, to drop by my father's shop in Bab al-Silsila Street to take home the usual load of groceries, in addition to my heavy school bag.

The additional change that occurred on my school life was due to my patriotic instinct which started to develop at a young age. In 1970 there was a call to protect the Arab Kuwaiti Collage in Abu Dis from expropriation. I do not remember who was behind the call, but they were saying that the Israelis intended to turn the institute into a military camp, but that turning it into a school would save it from expropriation. As a result, I decided to leave 'Abdullah Bin al-Husayn School and registered myself at the newly established Arab Kuwaiti Collage without even consulting my parents. I felt that I was doing something very heroic. I discovered that the huge new school buildings and its big yards were totally unequipped to accommodate students, so we worked with teachers, employees and volunteers to remove the rubble from inside the buildings and clean them. We worked for days until we managed to install tables for students and provide the minimum requirements to start the school year. Enrolling in the Arab Kuwaiti College in Abu Dis did not only lead to an additional change in my relationship with the place, but it also raised my patriotic feelings and I became acquainted with the national movement, which I joined later that year. I was only 14 years old at the time. In that school, I was greatly influenced by my Arabic teacher, the writer Mahmud Shuqayr, who contributed greatly to the formation of my future. I do not know if he was aware of that, but his words and his teachings about patriotism had a great impact on me. Since I believed I was an

exceptional student, I decided to enroll myself in one of the most important schools then, the Hashemite School in al-Bireh, which only taught the eleventh and twelfth grades, scientific stream. It was the only school applying this system in the West Bank and there were five sections for each grade. A few months after I completed sixteen years of age, and six months after I started attending the eleventh grade at the Hashemite School, I was arrested, and that is how I got to know who demolished the Moroccan quarter, from others.

## **Reading on the Walls and Throwing Stones from Behind Them**

My memories in Jerusalem are not limited to experiences of the early days of the occupation. I had a life before that. I took up reading, or rather became addicted to it at an early age, for no reason that I am aware of. Since Jerusalem did not have public libraries, at least none accessible to me, when I was eight or nine years old I found two sources for books and magazines, both in Bab al-‘Amud. The first one was Shabanah, a street vendor, whose family sold daily newspapers and magazines for a living. He displayed his merchandise in a corner outside Bab al-‘Amud. I had two types of agreements with him; by one, I borrowed magazines for half a piaster and sat next to him in front of Bab al-‘Amud, until I read and returned them to him, provided they were intact, clean, without any tears or crumples. I used to sit there for an hour or more until I grew tired, hungry, or thirsty. The second option cost me a whole piaster, but it allowed me to borrow the big magazines, like *al-‘Arabi*, for a whole day since I couldn’t possibly read everything while sitting in front of Bab al-‘Amud. He allowed me to take a magazine home, which I did proudly, provided that I returned it the next day.

My second outside source of education was not very different from the first, and it was also located in Bab al-‘Amud, in front of Shaykh Lulu’s Mosque. The vendor was known as al-munadil al-jarih (the “wounded fighter”) and I assumed that he fought with the Holy Struggle Organization (al-Jihad al-Muqaddas) under the command of the martyr ‘Abd al-Qadr al-Husayni. He had a prosthetic arm with two fingers, to replace the arm he lost in the war. I never saw the prosthetic, only the two fingers covered in black rubber showing from below his sleeve. His shop was no more than a metal stall from which he sold used books, and he would lend me the books I chose for three days in return for three piasters. It was in that phase of my life that my journey with Nagib Mahfouz, Mohammad ‘Abd al-Halim ‘Abdallah, Ihsan ‘Abd al-Quddus and several others started. My relationship with these suppliers of education continued after the occupation in different ways, even after Jerusalem’s public library opened its doors, and I became one of its most active members. Shabanah still displays his newspapers in front of Bab al-‘Amud today, but I do not know what happened to the “wounded fighter,” or when his stall disappeared.

Understandably, my favorite place to read was not our full house in the Old City, but actually a nook in Jerusalem’s southern city wall, which was not far from our old house in al-Sharaf neighborhood. The city’s wall there is only a few steps higher than the built-up area of the Jewish quarter. I used to sit in a crenel of the wall, my back resting on one

merlon and my feet stretched out to the other side of the gap. The wall's height further down was over ten meters, and the view from there was as breathtaking as it was scary, as Silwan, Ras al-'Amud, Jabal al-Zaytun (Mount of Olives) and al-Sawahira extended in front of me. However, the most beautiful scene visible from that point was al-Furaydis Mountain, known as Herodian or Herod's Palace, to the east of Bayt Sahur. It appeared like the mouth of a volcano, but I was not destined to visit it until decades later. I used to stay in my favorite location until I finished reading whatever I had brought with me. I would sit there for hours, and sometimes I also brought along a small sandwich made of whatever I could find at home: labanah, jam, or dibs (grape molasses). I do not remember ever returning a book late, or returning one unread. I do not claim that I understood everything I read, but I was determined to read anything that fell into my hands to the end, as long it did not cost me more than one piaster, because a piaster was my allowance for two days. I never hesitated to put aside a piaster I earned from working in my father's shop to give to the "wounded fighter." I may have secretly taken a piaster from my father's drawer without him knowing for the same purpose, although my conscience would torment me for days afterwards, until I managed to convince myself that my action was legitimate and that this small lapse would not send me to hell.

After moving to our new house, my "office" moved to a small grove at the eastern foot of Jabal al-Nabi Dawud (Mount Zion), which was not far from the new house. There I got to know some members of the Arab Jordanian Army who were all from Transjordan, mainly from al-Karak. They were always welcoming, and greeted me with chocolates, maybe because I reminded them of their children, or maybe because they were impressed with how focused I was on my reading. In my turn, I was very impressed with, and will never forget, their kindness, generosity, and simple nature.

Among the trees there were several tunnels and pathways that the Jordanian Army had dug in preparation to defend Jerusalem and defend itself. Worry over the fate of these soldiers caused me to lose sleep as soon as the war started, when sounds of explosions could be heard from the direction of their camp. My fear increased while I was at my grandfather's house during the war.

As soon as we returned from the Old City, I snuck into Jabal al-Nabi Dawud, and searched through the burnt tunnels until I found five bloated corpses which I assumed were the corpses of my soldier friends, days after they were martyred. I pulled them one corpse after the other into one of the tunnels, and covered them with dirt and tree branches, without looking closely at any of them. It seemed to me that they had been killed by napalm bombs dropped from the air, as there were traces of fire in the location. I recited al-Fatiha, and asked for forgiveness on their behalf, as I used to do in Bab al-Silsila Street. I left the place with a dry throat, and blocked the image from my memory completely. I chose to remember them as they were before the war. I never knew what became of the other soldiers, and if they had endured the same fate and were buried by others in the same manner, or if they survived and returned to Jordan. I do not remember their names, and do not know their addresses. I do believe that I remember their faces, although I am not sure anymore, because the burns had changed their features. Perhaps I avoid remembering their faces. They were left to die alone, far away from their families,

and they were buried in a manner not befitting those who died defending Jerusalem. I still feel guilty that I never searched through their belongings to find something to remind me and their families of them, but the shock of what I saw and my young age prevented me from doing anything besides honoring them with burial.

I do not know what became of that collective grave that does not even have a headstone, where al-Fatiha was never recited by anyone but me. The occupation authorities bulldozed the whole area later to build a bus parking lot in front of Bab al-Nabi Dawud (Zion Gate), so I was not able even to read them al-Fatiha anymore, because I could no longer identify their grave. I have never told this story to anyone, not even to my family, and I do not know why. I am documenting it here for the first time.

As for my “awareness” of Israel before 1967, if I could call it “awareness,” it was based on my numerous questions and my endless wandering in the alleys of the Old City. I inquired more than once about the city’s closed gates: Bab al-Khalil (Jaffa Gate), Bab al-Jadid (New Gate), Bab al-Nabi Dawud (Zion Gate), and the deployment of the Jordanian army over the wall connecting these three Gates, and from Bab al-‘Amud (Damascus Gate) to Bab al-Maghariba (Dung Gate), occupying the western half of the northern wall, west of Bab al-‘Amud, all the western wall, and part of the southern one. These together formed almost half of the wall’s length. The sight of these blocked gates from inside the city was ugly; they were closed with unchiseled stone and cement, and were constructed haphazardly as if in a rush, grotesquely clashing with the fascinating Ottoman gates. To me these gates were the end of the world and behind them was the unknown, the unfathomable. I knew that the homes of some of our neighbors in the Old City were on the other side of the walls; refugee children in our neighborhood used to tell me that their home was behind Bab al-Khalil. As a child in the Old City, I never had the chance to examine what was behind the western wall of the city.

The second opportunity for awareness was in Musrara neighborhood, just north of Bab al-‘Amud, where al-Baziyan used to rent out bikes and I would practice riding. At the end of the neighborhood was a wall that, while not very high, blocked the view behind it. Soldiers from the Arab Jordanian Army were deployed there, and there were small openings, similar to the apertures in Jerusalem’s wall, that I used to peek through at the “other world.” I participated on several occasions with children my age in throwing stones at the other side, in front of the soldiers who were cheering us. The children of the “other” were retaliating by doing the same, and I managed several times to catch a glimpse of them while we were exchanging stone projectiles.

But it was not until later that I finally saw the “other.” I saw it in its shtreimels, dressed in black and heavily armed, I saw it dancing victoriously over the rubble of the Moroccan quarter.

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#### **Endnotes**

- 1 Large fur hats worn by Jewish Orthodox men on Jewish holidays and festive occasions.

# Institutionalized Separation and Sumud in Jerusalem's Periphery

## Survival and Resistance in Shaykh Sa'd

Oren Kroll-Zeldin

Before the separation wall, Shaykh Sa'd was Jerusalem. My family is in Jerusalem. Everything for me is in Jerusalem. It's hard for me that I can't go there. For example, my daughters are in Jerusalem. Their weddings were in Jerusalem and I couldn't go to their weddings.

– Hajj Sa'id, Shaykh Sa'd resident<sup>1</sup>

Octogenarian and lifelong Shaykh Sa'd resident Hajj Sa'id spoke these words in the late afternoon as he sat at the foot of his bed. I visited him to hear his stories about the changes in his life since the separation wall had cut off access from his village of Shaykh Sa'd to Jerusalem. He spoke freely of the pain he feels as a result of institutionalized separation, no longer being able to go to Jerusalem, and what it is like for him to be separated from his family in the twilight of his life. Hajj Sa'id has a green identity card, indicating that he is a West Bank resident, which severely limits his freedom of movement. His daughters all have blue identity cards that make them permanent residents of Jerusalem, granting them some rights that their father does not possess. As a direct result of this differentiated "citizenship" status,<sup>2</sup> Hajj Sa'id could not attend his own daughters' weddings. While in many ways Hajj Sa'id's experience is unique, his story is also similar to many others like him in Shaykh Sa'd and other Palestinian neighborhoods and villages in Jerusalem, where institutionalized separation has become a normalized condition of everyday life.<sup>3</sup>

Shaykh Sa'd is a small Palestinian village in Jerusalem's southeastern periphery, located on the borderlands between the official boundaries of the

Jerusalem municipality and the rest of the West Bank. Jerusalem's municipal boundary cuts through the village, with most of the village located just outside this border. Though technically outside these lines, Shaykh Sa'd is widely considered to be part of Jerusalem due to the village residents' strong historical, religious, social, economic, and kinship ties to the city.<sup>4</sup> It is precisely the location of the village that led to the construction of the separation wall on the municipal border, institutionalizing separation and imposing isolation by leaving most of the village on the West Bank side of the wall. Shaykh Sa'd can best be described as a no-man's land stuck between the Jerusalem municipality and the West Bank.<sup>5</sup>

Shaykh Sa'd is an example of the politics of exclusion in Jerusalem and provides a space to investigate the impact of institutionalized and physical separation on everyday Palestinian life in Jerusalem. Based on eight months of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Shaykh Sa'd in 2012–2013, this article examines the village's historical connections to Jerusalem and the contemporary policies that have created a context of isolation and institutionalized separation.<sup>6</sup> This article uses a brief ethnography of a taxi driver collective in the village to show how Shaykh Sa'd residents use creative strategies of resistance to survive despite difficult conditions of everyday life. The final section of the article focuses on *sumud*, or steadfastness, as a Palestinian cultural practice that Shaykh Sa'd residents use as a response to the institutionalized separation of the village vis-a-vis the separation wall and other Israeli policies of exclusion. Despite the impact of Israeli policies and politics of exclusion in Jerusalem, Palestinian Jerusalemites, including those in Shaykh Sa'd, remain steadfast and stay in Jerusalem, strengthening their identification with the city.

## **The Isolation of Shaykh Sa'd**

Shaykh Sa'd is one of four villages (with Jabal al-Mukabir, Sawahira a-Sharqiyya, and Sawahira al-Gharbiyya) that comprise 'Arab al-Sawahira, a network of Palestinian villages to Jerusalem's southeast, predominantly made up of five hamulas (extended families) who share social and kinship ties.<sup>7</sup> According to the most recent statistics, 1,757 people live in Shaykh Sa'd.<sup>8</sup> Shaykh Sa'd residents have the strongest ties with Jabal al-Mukabir and have long considered their village to be part of Jabal al-Mukabir and greater Jerusalem. Beyond the family, social, and economic ties between Shaykh Sa'd and Jabal al-Mukabir, there is an important geographical connection between the two villages. Shaykh Sa'd is located at the peak of a 650-meter mountain and can only be accessed from the west (that is, Jerusalem), where a road leads to the village from Jabal al-Mukabir.<sup>9</sup> As a result of this topography, the only way in and out of Shaykh Sa'd – except for an unpaved road from the village down to Wadi Nar/Kidron Valley and up a treacherous slope that connects to the West Bank – is through Jabal al-Mukabir, located inside the Jerusalem municipal boundary.<sup>10</sup> Despite the poor conditions of the unpaved road to the West Bank, it is used with relative frequency since it is the only lifeline to



connect the village to other Palestinian areas.

The seeds of Shaykh Sa'd's isolation were planted in 1967, though the full impact of that cataclysmic year would only become clear decades later. After the war in June 1967, Israel seized seventy square kilometers of territory from the West Bank, added it to the municipality of Jerusalem, and proclaimed the area subject to Israeli law.<sup>11</sup> Jerusalem's new municipal border cut through 'Arab al-Sawahira, thus creating both arbitrary distinction in the legal statuses of the residents in the area and an artificial boundary of separation. Jabal al-Mukabir and Sawahira al-Gharbiyya were included in Jerusalem's new municipal borders; Shaykh Sa'd and Sawahira al-Sharqiyya fell outside the Jerusalem municipality, though their residents remained intimately connected to Jerusalem and retained access to many of the social privileges available to those living in Jerusalem's official border.<sup>12</sup>

For nearly forty years, this distinction was not an issue for Shaykh Sa'd residents. Then, in September 2002, the Israeli military blocked the only road connecting Shaykh Sa'd to Jabal al-Mukabir, initiating a process of isolation that has since become further entrenched. In August 2003, the political-security cabinet of the Israeli military forces approved construction of a seventeen-kilometer section of the separation wall stretching from Bayt Sahur in the south to al-'Ayzariyya in the north.<sup>13</sup> The proposed route cut through Shaykh Sa'd, putting the entire village on the east side of the wall and separating it from Jabal al-Mukabir, making it and the city of Jerusalem inaccessible. In the summer of 2006, the Israeli military posted border guards to patrol the blockade around the clock and eventually built a permanent checkpoint to monitor everyone entering Jerusalem from the village. A few yards from the checkpoint is a panoptic military tower equipped with surveillance technology to monitor the area.

The exclusion of Shaykh Sa'd from Jerusalem has had drastic impact on everyday life for its residents. Shaykh Sa'd had been dependent on Jerusalem for its municipal services and since 1967 the Jerusalem municipality provided the village's infrastructure – water, electricity, telephone lines, and garbage collection – and social services such as education, unemployment benefits, health care, and social security. The people of Shaykh Sa'd worked in Jerusalem, many in the construction industry, as well as in Israeli and Palestinian schools, businesses, and organizations. Children from the village went to high schools in Jerusalem, usually in Jabal al-Mukabir, and later studied in colleges and universities in Jerusalem.

Since there is little farmable land in the village due to its small size and the steep terrain, Shaykh Sa'd residents purchased food from Jerusalem markets. Also due to lack of space, there is no cemetery in Shaykh Sa'd. The villagers buried their dead in Jabal al-Mukabir's cemetery. Today when someone dies in Shaykh Sa'd, the grieving family must coordinate the funeral with Israeli officials in the District Coordination Office (DCO), which controls the movement of Palestinians in and out of the West Bank. The family must apply not only for a permit to bring the body across the checkpoint into Jabal al-Mukabir, but also for permits for family and community members attending the funeral. The DCO generally only grants permits for a maximum of fifty people from Shaykh Sa'd, effectively excluding scores of family and friends from attending funerals.

Ibrahim, who is involved in local politics, explained that Shaykh Sa‘d cannot be understood as a village unto itself, separate from Jerusalem. “It is Jerusalem. Our lives are in Jerusalem . . . We need everything from Jerusalem: buy, sell, walk, pray, therapy, everything. Jerusalem is our city.”<sup>14</sup> Ibrahim points out that Shaykh Sa‘d’s connection to Jerusalem goes beyond the obvious religious and cultural connections that are important for Palestinians in general, and extends to daily economic reasons linked to survival, a sentiment reiterated by dozens of people in the village with whom I spoke. While residents rely on access to the city for these resources and services, they have been increasingly denied access to them because of their residency status. As a result Shaykh Sa‘d residents face tremendous hardships.<sup>15</sup>

## **Internal Divisions and Colored Identities**

To understand the impact of Shaykh Sa‘d’s institutionalized separation from Jerusalem, it is necessary to examine the differentiated “citizenship” categories of those in Shaykh Sa‘d. Approximately half of the villagers in Shaykh Sa‘d are permanent residents of Jerusalem and possess blue IDs, while the other half have green IDs that signify their different legal status as West Bank residents.<sup>16</sup> (Though “permanent residents” of Jerusalem have certain conditioned rights, they do not have the status of citizens, which is a further differentiated legal status with different rights.)<sup>17</sup> Thus a West Bank individual’s “residency” status – whether or not they are considered by Israel to be “permanent residents” of Jerusalem – is reflected in their identity card, either blue or green. Residency status depends in large part on where individuals or their relatives were when the Israeli census was conducted after the war in 1967. Those who were in Jerusalem (including Shaykh Sa‘d), and were counted in the Israeli census, were given the status of permanent residents and received blue IDs; if they were elsewhere in the West Bank, having temporarily fled to avoid the fighting, they did not become permanent residents of Jerusalem and were issued green IDs.

Palestinians in Shaykh Sa‘d who were born after the census were registered according to the official residency status of their parents. Most parents and their children had the same status. But in some instances, if the parents did not share the same residency status, and depending on the physical location of the birth and when the child was born, some families may have one or more children with Jerusalem IDs and other children with West Bank IDs. Sometimes, as in Hajj Sa‘id’s family, siblings or parents have different residency status, which affords them different privileges and access to varying resources. This process has trickled down over generations since the 1967 census, so not just siblings, but also uncles and aunts, grandparents, and cousins have different residency status. There are numerous cases of “mixed” marriages where one spouse is a Jerusalem resident and the other is not, which complicates where families live and raise their children.

Until Israel built the separation wall, the differences in the rights and privileges of residency status between Jerusalem and West Bank were considered minimal by Shaykh Sa‘d residents. Before the wall, everyone had the ability to move freely from Shaykh

Sa'd into Jabal al-Mukabir and other parts of Jerusalem, whether to work, shop, pray, or visit family in the city. No one suspected that one day their identity card would determine and severely impact the course of their lives.

Beyond marking an individual's status in society vis-a-vis the state and the occupation, residency status has served to produce socio-economic stratification within Shaykh Sa'd. Those with Jerusalem residency are permitted to cross the checkpoint and enter Jabal al-Mukabir and Jerusalem. They enjoy not only greater freedom of movement, but access to some rights and resources in Israel such as national health insurance and social security. Residents of Shaykh Sa'd with green West Bank IDs cannot share in these services and face significant challenges in their everyday lives. Since they can only enter Jerusalem with a permit, and since the most feasible and safe way to access the permit offices is through Jerusalem, they are stuck in a paradoxical situation. Either they enter Jerusalem illegally and risk serious reprisal, or they must travel the arduous dirt road to the West Bank and go from there by public transportation or taxi to the Civil Administration office to obtain the permit. Even if they make it to the office, they may be denied a permit or told to return the following day or week.

Divisions between those with green and blue IDs in Shaykh Sa'd are simultaneously stark and invisible.<sup>18</sup> The village is a small community where residents care for and look after each other, without regard to residency status. Most people I spoke with told me that there are no problems among village residents and that the only problems people have are with Israeli authorities and policies. However, some are envious of friends and family who have blue IDs.

Sami and Walid discussed this one morning as we sat together near the checkpoint in Shaykh Sa'd. "In Shaykh Sa'd there are high people and low people," Sami explained. "The high people are the ones with lots of money and blue IDs and the ones who work in Jerusalem." He did not explain who the "low people" are, his silence affirming that it was obvious. I asked Sami if there are tensions between the "high" and "low" people in the village, to which he quickly responded, "No. God bless them, the rich. God bless everyone and their chances. Between us, we don't discriminate."<sup>19</sup> Walid, who listened intently to the conversation, disagreed with Sami, and accused him of being ignorant and blind to the way others in the village treat them. "People with the blue ID look at us [people with the green ID] as though we're garbage," he said, opening the floodgates of discussion between them.<sup>20</sup> Over the course of the conversation more people joined in to listen or participate, adding their views on the subject in a lively and animated argument.

In another conversation, Rashid, a 23-year-old taxi driver with a green ID, succinctly summed up the feeling of having fewer freedoms than friends and relatives. "People who can cross the checkpoint are happier than we are," he said. "They have it good. They have freedom. They live a good life in comparison. But if your friends and cousins are happy then you don't get jealous. We are family and neighbors. We are happy for them. We want them to be happy."<sup>21</sup> Rashid makes the tensions feel real. He expresses genuine desire that his family to be happy; and he, too, desperately wants to be happy, but believes this to be impossible unless he has the same freedom of movement that others have.

On the surface, Rashid appears to be one of the happiest people in Shaykh Sa‘d. He is always smiling, laughing, and joking with his friends. Every day he works from early in the morning to late in the evening to save the little money he earns driving a taxi in the village. He plans to marry soon and needs the money to support his new family. But though Rashid may appear happy, at other times he expresses deep sadness as a result of the world in which he came of age, in which the color of his identity card prevents him from accessing Jerusalem and its resources. His wishes are simple: “I would just like freedom. If I could go anywhere I want, I’d see my friends and family in Jabal al-Mukabir.”<sup>22</sup>

Freedom of movement is a major issue for people in Shaykh Sa‘d, as it is throughout Palestine. On a daily basis, those with green West Bank IDs watch the people with blue Jerusalem IDs cross the checkpoint to enter Jerusalem. The latter are able to work in Jerusalem for higher wages, pray at al-Aqsa Mosque, visit their friends and family in Jabal al-Mukabir, and more easily access health care resources. More importantly, they are not confined to existence in an enclosed space. They can travel throughout Jerusalem, Israel, and the West Bank due to their permanent residency status. While the blue ID represents freedom and opportunity, the green ID reflects a morose daily situation with little hope of improvement; it symbolizes a life of poverty with little chance of accessing enough resources for daily survival. Of course, permanent residency and the blue ID represent discrimination and exclusion in Israel and greater Jerusalem as compared to Israeli citizenship. But in Shaykh Sa‘d, when juxtaposed with the green West Bank ID, the blue ID takes on a different meaning and representation. In effect, this reinforces the relationship among Shaykh Sa‘d residents to Jerusalem, as access to the city becomes more important than access to the West Bank and the rest of Palestine.<sup>23</sup>

## **A New Checkpoint Economy: The Taxi Drivers’ Collective**

After the separation wall was constructed, many young men with green West Bank IDs were unable to find jobs, could not obtain the necessary permits to work in Jerusalem, and were to sit at home with nothing to do. Their daily struggles led a small group of young men to devise a creative idea that would both employ them and help improve an aspect of daily village life, a struggle that only existed as a direct result of the separation and isolation of Shaykh Sa‘d: they formed a taxi drivers’ collective. The group that started the collective noticed that once the checkpoint blocked the road leading from Shaykh Sa‘d to Jabal al-Mukabir and people could no longer drive their own cars into Shaykh Sa‘d, some of the people crossing the checkpoint on foot needed a ride to their homes or other places. As a result, they decided to start driving people from the checkpoint to their destination in the village or, via the unpaved road, to nearby West Bank villages.

The collective began with just a few drivers who sat at the checkpoint and waited for people to come and request a ride.<sup>24</sup> Every day they made a list of the drivers’ names in pencil on the back of a cardboard box. When a driver picked up a fare, the collective

crossed off his name and added it to the bottom of the list so that each driver would be given equal access to work. A relative's arrival is the only occasion when drivers drive out of order, to give their relative a lift. Over time, as more young men graduated from high school, had no other future prospects, and did not want (or could not afford) to attend university, they joined the collective and become village taxi drivers. Eventually the daily list expanded to approximately thirty men, most of whom were in their twenties, who drive taxis in the village to make a living. There is no official leader in the collective, which operates along a horizontal model, although there are unofficial leaders whom the younger drivers address with questions or concerns.

The condition of drivers' cars is critical to their work, and thus to their livelihood, but most drivers cannot afford expensive maintenance. One driver explained: "My car is broken . . . but I can't fix it because I have no money."<sup>25</sup> He then opened the ashtray in his car, where most drivers keep their money and wages for the day, and told me he only made fifty shekels that day, and it was already late in the afternoon. Every driver dreads his car breaking down, and especially needing to buy a new car, because it is so difficult to find the sum needed for such a purchase. Many will have to borrow money from relatives if they need to buy a new car.

To feel more legitimate, many of the taxi drivers place stickers and decals on their cars with their names and phone numbers, creating a pseudo-official "taxi company" named after themselves. One driver has a red sign with white writing that he places on his dashboard with the word "taxi" written on it, visible for all to see, while other drivers put large decals on their back windshield with their names, "taxi service," and cell phone numbers on it. As numerous drivers told me, the perceived legitimacy that they feel, and that others see when viewing these decals, is important to the drivers' sense of self-worth and accomplishment. These stickers are one way to represent their work as more professional.

While the checkpoint decimated Shaykh Sa'd's economy in most ways, the drivers developed a new economy that emerged as a direct result of it. In this regard, the Shaykh Sa'd checkpoint has become what Helga Tawil-Souri calls a contradictory space – a place of unequal power relations that asphyxiates the community, but which is also a center of economic and social relations.<sup>26</sup> The taxi drivers' collective exemplifies the ways in which the Shaykh Sa'd checkpoint has become an important center of life, despite the fact that it chokes the village. These young men transformed the checkpoint into a local business opportunity, and helped make the checkpoint into a public social and communal space where men gather to smoke cigarettes, drink coffee, and simply converse. The drivers turned the checkpoint into a place where people share experiences with others and where they themselves have been able to find direction, meaning, and purpose in their complicated lives.

In the myriad hours I spent with drivers inside the checkpoint and in their cars, I came to understand the importance of the reconfiguration of space and power at the checkpoint, or the unofficial "taxi stand." The drivers often interlace their hard work and temper their frustrations with humor and personal interactions. They constantly joke around

with one another, injecting energy into the monotonous hours of waiting for passengers. Though to many in the village it seems like a humdrum job, the drivers have learned how to have fun as they pass the time. They constantly shift positions – from sitting in the car to a rock nearby, then on top of the cars. They smoke, drink coffee, talk on the phone to friends or family, and engage in playful banter. One of the first times I hung out with the drivers at the checkpoint, as they made the list and cemented their driving rotations, they joked and argued, with much laughter and yelling, over who would drive when – an interaction indicative of the social and economic contradictions found in such a “contradictory space.”

But the drivers’ mood was not always light. Over time it became apparent that many are deeply unhappy with their work, alienated by a situation that prevents their freedom of movement and access to a different, and perhaps better, life. Despite having made the checkpoint a hub of economic and social relations, drivers struggle to make a living wage, nearly undermining the purpose of forming the collective in the first place. They express deep feelings of alienation and isolation due to the low wages and long hours of difficult work. Many drivers show up to the checkpoint by 6:00 a.m. when it first becomes busy with school children and day laborers, and do not go home until 8:00 p.m. It is not unusual for a driver to work fourteen hours a day, including hours waiting at the checkpoint for passengers. Despite the long hours, most drivers report making only fifty to one hundred shekels in a day, far below what they need to subsist, let alone save any money.

One driver, Ziyad, compares his work to begging for money. “I don’t like my work as a driver because it’s like you’re begging for money in reverse,” he told me one cold winter day waiting at the checkpoint. He made a gesture turning his hand around from the driver’s seat to the back seat asking for money from the non-existent passenger, inverting the typical gesture of begging for money, hand stretched out in front of you. “If the world isn’t going your way, you go its way,” he then said reluctantly.<sup>27</sup> Even though he did not want to become a driver, and even though he feels like he is begging for money as he works, Ziyad is a driver out of necessity.

Many drivers detest their job, but they feel it is their only opportunity to make money in a dignified way that does not subject them to Israeli control or the corruption of Palestinian bosses. Jamal explains the complex position in which many drivers find themselves. With deep sadness and worry, he says, “I have a wife and a young kid and another one on the way. I can’t pay for anything. It’s terrible.”<sup>28</sup> He said that sometimes his wife wants something but he cannot buy it for her because he does not have enough money. Before Israel constructed the separation wall and isolated Shaykh Sa’d, Jamal worked in construction in Jerusalem, making between 150 to 300 shekels in a day. Now he makes one-third as much as a driver. Most of the day Jamal sits around at the checkpoint with nothing to do until it is his turn to drive; he makes a bit of money, but he finds it boring and deeply unsatisfying.

I won’t work in construction in the West Bank because the bosses are corrupt and bad people. They say they will pay you tomorrow and when tomorrow comes they don’t pay you and they say tomorrow. And this goes on for days

and weeks and months and they don't pay you. They get rich and we don't get paid for our work. So I won't work there . . . [But as a driver], life is not good. I am not happy. Everything is hard. I work hard as a driver and make 100 shekels a day, but I have to pay 50 shekels for gas. This is not work for a man; this is work for a child.<sup>29</sup>

Jamal holds his honor dear and finds it humiliating to work as hard as he does without making much money at the age of twenty-seven. He can no longer work in Jerusalem because he has a green ID and he is ineligible for a Jerusalem work permit. He detests his work as a driver but he has no other option. Jamal admits feeling stuck.

Other drivers also admit to hating their work. "We don't like our work as drivers," says one young driver. "It's work. We do it so we can eat. Sometimes we barely make twenty shekels a day. We can only live because we live with our families. No one lives alone. We all group together to buy food. We can't live alone because it's too expensive."<sup>30</sup> They are able to survive, despite complicated and compromising circumstances, by adopting a communal lifestyle, supporting each other so that all can eat.

Many do not want to be drivers, but see no other choice. Since the wall was constructed, they cannot go to Jerusalem, nor do they have connections in the West Bank. Hussam's frustration was palpable one rainy winter morning when I spent a few hours with him near the checkpoint.

I don't like my work as a driver, but I have no other choice. It isn't work. If you pay for gas you have only five shekels left or if you get a flat tire you have to pay more. And there are thirty drivers. Some people give up and go home to sleep or get a permit. It gets boring but you have to do it because you need to support your family. My age group, we manage to go out and make money. But the younger people have no chance. If you put them on Jaffa Street [in downtown] Jerusalem they have no chance to survive. The reason we have it hard here is because our families were always working in Jerusalem and in Israel or in this area and we never had a connection to Sawahira or Abu Dis or other West Bank areas. Our fathers worked [in Jerusalem] and we worked there. Suddenly, I'm twenty-four and there is this fence and I have to start over but I have no connections anywhere in the West Bank. All of our connections . . . are in Jerusalem. What am I going to do to start a business? It happened so fast that we found ourselves on this side of the wall. I have no future to look forward to. The kids' future here is gone.<sup>31</sup>

For Hussam, like others in Shaykh Sa'd, a future is in Jerusalem, and without Jerusalem and the connections there – cultural, economic, and family – he sees no future. Hussam was one of the founders of the taxi drivers' collective and has gained respect from others in the village, including many younger drivers who look up to him for advice. For this reason, he has refused to give up on providing for his family and making his community better, on whatever small level he can. Though he doesn't like what he does on a daily

basis, he knows what it takes to survive, which is why at the end of our interview he gazed at me with a deep seriousness in his eyes and said that he continues to work because “there is no choice but to live.”<sup>32</sup>

There are external factors that determine whether or not the drivers will find work on any given day, the most common being interactions with soldiers and student strikes. One day there was a strike at al-Quds University, which negatively impacted the drivers. When I arrived in Shaykh Sa‘d, the checkpoint area was abnormally quiet for that time of day. Only two drivers were there and even the shop immediately next to the checkpoint, almost always open in the early afternoon, was closed. I visited a friend in the village and returned a few hours later and found only a few more drivers at the eerily quiet checkpoint. The drivers complained that there was no work because of the strike at the university, meaning that no students needed a ride that day. Unfortunately for the drivers, student or teacher strikes at the university are relatively regular occurrences.

Soldiers can also impact drivers’ ability to work, especially because drivers park their cars just inside the checkpoint in full view of the soldiers stationed there. ‘Ali recounted an experience one morning that demonstrates the struggle:

Yesterday, I sat at the checkpoint in the morning when it was very crowded. All the people who drive from al-Sawahira come and park their cars there, so there was no room for me. So I parked in front of the checkpoint gate. I was going to give a few girls a ride to Abu Dis, but the soldiers told me to move my car. But I couldn’t move it, there was no room to move it anywhere. The soldier told me again that I had to move the car and then he asked for my ID and the keys and told me to come back in an hour. He came back and gave me my ID, but kept the keys and told me to come back again in an hour. So I did and got my keys back. I could have gone home to get an extra key, but I didn’t. I lost 50 shekels wages because I couldn’t work during that busy time. And I don’t argue with the soldiers because I don’t want any problems. I could have argued, but the last thing I want is to cause problems. I told the soldier, “You know me. I sit here every day and I just try to make 5 or 10 shekels.”<sup>33</sup>

While many of the drivers truly do not like their work, the collective is a critically important project in Shaykh Sa‘d that enables both individual and communal survival. Members of the collective have managed to transform the checkpoint into an active, if limited, public space, organize collectively despite state policies that seek to prevent collective action, inspire youth to participate in the everyday life and decisions of the community, and develop new forms of economy in a situation badly damaged by the occupation and isolation of the village. The collective is a strategic intervention that asserts the agency of individuals and the community, a form of resistance that refuses to acquiesce to the status of victimhood and suffering. As a collective, the drivers assert that Shaykh Sa‘d is home and not a place where they can be reduced to bare life.<sup>34</sup>



The village youth exhibit creativity and the power to live and to survive via the collective. Although the strategies of occupation that the Israeli authorities employ in Shaykh Sa‘d (as elsewhere in Jerusalem and Palestine) are intended to make life so hard for Palestinians that they will leave their homes, the collective shows that Palestinians will continue to creatively devise strategies of survival, carving out counter-hegemonic spaces of resistance to occupation and isolation in order to remain in place.<sup>35</sup>

## ***Sumud* and Everyday Resistance in Shaykh Sa‘d**

*Sumud* refers to the resilience, perseverance, and steadfastness that Palestinians employ in their daily struggle against Israeli policies of occupation.<sup>36</sup> A popular Palestinian slogan that symbolizes *sumud*, “to exist is to resist,” is exemplified in profound ways in Shaykh Sa‘d, where everyday life serves as a response to institutionalized separation and state policies of exclusion.<sup>37</sup> It is the single most important method of popular nonviolent resistance used by Palestinians in Jerusalem and, as a tactic of resistance, *sumud* is a pivotal aspect of Palestinian culture and self-identity.<sup>38</sup> Palestinians in Jerusalem refuse to leave the city because land, village, and family are quintessential elements of their Palestinian identity. By remaining steadfast in the face of tremendous oppression and refusing to leave Jerusalem (and Palestine), the Palestinian community is staking its own powerful claim to the land. *Sumud* is a Palestinian way of refusing to acquiesce to the impact of state power. To survive on one’s ancestral land is an act of defiance against the policies of the occupation.

In Shaykh Sa‘d, survival is a daily struggle that requires negotiations with economic, familial, social, geographical, and political factors. Yet, as Hussam said, “there is no choice but to live.” Put another way, “merely surviving is sometimes the best resistance possible.”<sup>39</sup> One recently adopted method that residents of Shaykh Sa‘d use as a distinct method to survive in everyday life is compliance to the orders of the soldiers and border police. While compliance can indicate despair and submission, for many village residents it is integral to their strategy of survival and is a strategic intervention in their increasingly dire circumstances. In this context, since survival is a powerful method of resistance and compliance is sometimes necessary for survival, compliance could also be interpreted as part of the resistance strategy for Shaykh Sa‘d residents. Compliance in Shaykh Sa‘d therefore functions in three key ways. First, it enables village residents to grapple with the ways in which they both create and are shaped by the society they inhabit. Second, it allows residents to express free will, giving them the opportunity to make choices that will impact their lives. The conditions of occupation do not always afford Shaykh Sa‘d residents the opportunity to make choices about their everyday lives, but by acting with compliance they are not meekly acquiescing to the soldiers demands but rather making the choice to do so, not out of despair or submission but out of the necessity of survival. Finally, compliance is a response to conditions of occupation that may open up other opportunities for disrupting Israeli control in Shaykh Sa‘d and beyond.

Shaykh Sa'd's residents practice compliance every day at the checkpoint. Nadia, a community leader, explained the strategy used in Shaykh Sa'd since the wall was constructed. She said:

Recently, what I have told the people to do – we actually started following this approach for a year – the people at the checkpoints are humans, they are doing their work, so we have to be nice to them. We just say, good morning, how are you, how is your day, and so many people are following that approach. We come to the checkpoint: *sabah al-khayr* [good morning, in Arabic], *boker tov* [good morning, in Hebrew], how are you today? “You are going to your work today?” That is what they usually say. “Ok,” and sometimes they don’t even see the IDs, “*khalas* [enough, in Arabic], we know you.” This is the new approach that we are following now. They [the soldiers] are human and they are doing their work and they have kids like you do, they have families like you have, so let’s not give them a hard time and they won’t give us a hard time. This makes it easier not only for me, but for others as well. Even for the kids. Wow! It’s a very successful approach.<sup>40</sup>

Nadia boasts that both the villagers and the soldiers have felt the success of this approach. Tensions are no longer consistently high at the checkpoint and village residents feel little hostility when crossing the checkpoint. Those in the village with freedom of movement are starting to feel as though crossing the checkpoint is a slightly less complicated task, though it still requires them to come into contact with the apparatus of the state.

According to Nadia, this approach is successful because the people are confident that it will help shift their everyday realities and because they renounced the use of violence from the beginning of their struggle.

We don’t like violence. Keeping quiet . . . was our agreement. That was how we began, that was our approach from the beginning. Let’s prove our point that peace can prevail, that we can do things with peace. And this is what we did at the beginning when we started bringing foreigners and Israelis to protest the wall. If we didn’t do all this stuff, I think that . . . they would have closed the checkpoint. But just because we are following this approach and being peaceful, being quiet, not following violent acts, we have this checkpoint, which I think is a very peaceful checkpoint. [If we did things differently] they would treat us differently. . . Now we have a different approach. [The soldiers] are standing at the checkpoint because they are doing their work. They are humans just like we are humans. They have families. We have to be very nice with them. If we are nice with them they treat us nice reciprocally.<sup>41</sup>

Most residents believe that if they are quiet and cooperative, then perhaps Israel will decide

to move the wall to reunite Shaykh Sa‘d with Jabal al-Mukabir and the rest of Jerusalem. “This is a quiet and peaceful village and we have quiet and peaceful resistance here,” Salim said one morning, while we sat together near the checkpoint. He was making a case for the value of the Shaykh Sa‘d residents’ decision to not engage in violent or popular resistance. Like many others, Salim believes that since the villagers never engaged in violence against the soldiers and do not demonstrate weekly, like other villages do, they may be rewarded for being quiet. Salim still believes that Shaykh Sa‘d residents engage in both *sumud* and *sabr* (patience). For him, *sabr* is short-term patience while *sumud* is a long-term project. Initially, the people in Shaykh Sa‘d exhibited *sabr*, but it has transformed into community-wide *sumud* because they keep waiting patiently for the wall to be moved while continuing to live their everyday lives in its shadow. They believe that their strategy of *sumud* is paying off. Salim explains the quiet form of daily resistance:

We don’t want any problems here. Maybe, because we have been quiet for so long, one day they will open the wall. We don’t make problems here. We just want to work in Jerusalem. We would take blue IDs and even Israeli citizenship, but none of that matters to us. We just want to be able to work in Jerusalem.<sup>42</sup>

One Jewish Israeli activist from Jerusalem who is intimately connected to the city’s official political process confirmed that these tactics might have a positive and long-lasting impact in the near future. He agreed with Nadia and Salim that compliance could open the possibility that one day Israel will move the wall to include the village in Jerusalem again. He said this method gives Shaykh Sa‘d the possibility of inclusion, which is denied to villages such as Bil’in because of their methods of weekly demonstrations and resistance against the wall.<sup>43</sup> Demonstrations in Bil’in, which is a strategic area for Israel that has experienced extensive land confiscations, and other villages like it, have garnered widespread international attention, which Shaykh Sa‘d residents believe make it less likely that the wall will be completely removed from their village.

Though separation and isolation has dire physical and psychological impacts on those who live in Shaykh Sa‘d, the residents are nonetheless resilient in their quiet resistance, another embodiment of *sumud*. They truly believe that in the future things will change and they will be reunited with their families and the city that once sustained them. In fact, a rumor persists in the village that the state is planning to change the route of the wall to the east of Shaykh Sa‘d in order to include the village within the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem. Rumors are often a profound coping mechanism used by oppressed and marginalized groups that enable them to hold on to some sort of hope for a better future while simultaneously improving the present.<sup>44</sup> Countless times in Shaykh Sa‘d people told me that they heard that the Israeli army was planning to move the route of the wall. But not everyone who hears the rumor believes it to be true, as evidenced by the response of one woman who lives in Shaykh Sa‘d. When I asked her about the rumor she responded, *bukra fil mishmish*, an Arabic idiom that essentially means “in your dreams.” Regardless of

the truth to this rumor, the fact that it circulates prominently enables villagers to maintain hope that their strategy of quiescence is successfully working towards their ultimate goal to be reunited with the rest of Jerusalem.

As in other Jerusalem locations, and throughout Palestine, sumud is an integral aspect of everyday life in Shaykh Sa'd and is a creative strategy of resistance used by the village residents. When I asked an old man that lives in Shaykh Sa'd if there is sumud in the village he smiled and replied, "of course there is sumud here. Where else would we go?"<sup>45</sup> The nonchalance with which he replied, and the fact that nearly every person with whom I spoke in Shaykh Sa'd also said that village residents practice sumud, exemplifies that while sumud exists, it emerges as a quiet, subdued, and patient resistance that is present every day. While other West Bank towns and villages forced to confront the imposing separation wall on their land demonstrate against the wall every Friday, in Shaykh Sa'd there are never demonstrations, nor have there ever been. The people do not want to demonstrate and they do not often discuss politics. According to Hussam, "you'll see that the people here don't talk politics because they are busy surviving."<sup>46</sup> Widespread community resistance is barely possible for people in Shaykh Sa'd. Life and survival under occupation requires such incredible energy that resistance, in a sense, becomes a privilege. And in Shaykh Sa'd this is a privilege that cannot always be afforded.

The simple act of remaining "in place" is an oft-practiced but little acknowledged Palestinian strategy under Israeli rule.<sup>47</sup> Remaining in Shaykh Sa'd in the face of tremendous hardship and pressure is an important part of everyday life for village residents; refusing to leave is refusing to capitulate to the strategies of occupation that seek to exclude, separate, control, and ultimately displace and expel. Approximately half of the homes in the village are empty because people have left the village, but those who remained are deeply committed to maintaining an active presence in the village. A key strategy of occupation, and the separation wall in particular, is to sever the Palestinian connection to Jerusalem. But the residents of Shaykh Sa'd know Jerusalem as the city that sustains their lives and the place where their families live. One Israeli report on the impacts of the separation wall in Jerusalem claims, "No efforts to prevent the entrance of Palestinians lacking Israeli identity cards will succeed in weakening their attachment to the city."<sup>48</sup> This could not be more evident than in Shaykh Sa'd, where the attachment to Jerusalem is only being strengthened as a result of their separation and exclusion from the city.

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## Endnotes

- 1 Author interview, February 2013.
- 2 James Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil* (Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 3 Kufr 'Aqab is a Palestinian village in Jerusalem that is often compared with Shaykh Sa'd because it was also excluded from the city by the route of the Separation Wall. See Doaa Hammoudeh, Layaly Hamayel, and Lynn Welchman, "Beyond the Physicality of Space: East Jerusalem, Kufr 'Aqab, and the Politics of Everyday Suffering," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 65 (2016): 35–50; Noura Alkhalili, Muna Dajani, and Daniela De Leo, "Shifting Realities: Dislocating Palestinian Jerusalemites from the Capital to the Edge," *International Journal of Housing Policy* 13, no. 3 (2014): 257–267.
- 4 B'Tselem, *Facing the Abyss: The Isolation of Shaykh Sa'd Village Before and After the Separation Barrier* (Jerusalem: B'Tselem, 2004), online at [www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/2/200402\\_facing\\_the\\_abyss\\_eng.pdf](http://www.btselem.org/sites/default/files/2/200402_facing_the_abyss_eng.pdf) (accessed 18 March 2018); Mohamad Aqel Halaseh, *Sawahirat al-wad fi Bayt al-Maqdis wa aknafih* (Jerusalem: self-published, 2010).
- 5 Noam Leshem and Alasdair Pinkerton, "Re-Inhabiting No-Man's Land: Genealogies, Political Life, and Critical Agendas," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 41, no. 1 (2016): 41–53.
- 6 The key methodologies used for data collection for this study were participant observation and semi-structured interviews with village residents with oral consent of participants according to the Human Research and Review Committee at the University of San Francisco. Identities of participants were kept confidential; pseudonyms have been used here.
- 7 B'Tselem, *Facing the Abyss*; Ir Amim, *Shaykh Sa'd and the Separation Barrier: Trends in Jerusalem* (Jerusalem: Ir Amim, 2004) online at [sawahreh.wordpress.com/2009/11/12/sheikh-saad-and-the-separation-barrier-trends-in-jerusalem/](http://sawahreh.wordpress.com/2009/11/12/sheikh-saad-and-the-separation-barrier-trends-in-jerusalem/) (accessed 18 March 2018); Halaseh, *Sawahirat al-wad*.
- 8 ARIJ (Applied Research Institute Jerusalem), "Ash Shaykh Sa'd Village Profile" (Jerusalem: ARIJ, 2012) online at [vprofile.arij.org/jerusalem/pdfs/vprofile/Ash%20Sheikh%20Sa'd\\_EN.pdf](http://vprofile.arij.org/jerusalem/pdfs/vprofile/Ash%20Sheikh%20Sa'd_EN.pdf) (accessed 18 March 2018).
- 9 B'Tselem, *Facing the Abyss*.
- 10 Ir Amim, *Shaykh Sa'd and the Separation Barrier*.
- 11 Yael Stein, *The Quiet Deportation: Revocation of Residency of East Jerusalem Palestinians* (Jerusalem: HaMoked and B'Tselem, April 1997), online at [www.hamoked.org/items/10200\\_eng.pdf](http://www.hamoked.org/items/10200_eng.pdf) (accessed 16 June 2016).
- 12 B'Tselem, *Facing the Abyss*; Ir Amim, *Shaykh Sa'd and the Separation Barrier*.
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From Jerusalem

## Um Hani

### To Live and Work in Jerusalem

Penny Johnson and

Diala Shamas



Um Hani in her office, behind her a photo of the first NET office, January 2018. Image courtesy of Um Hani.

Only on Saturdays can one pay a daytime visit to Um Hani, Wedad Abu Dayyeh, in her pleasant old house on the Mount of Olives, sandwiched between the Mormon University and the Vatican representative's office. Otherwise, Um Hani, who is ninety-two years young, is busy with the accounts at the office of the Near East Tourist Agency (NET). "If you sit at home," she tells us, her eyes sparkling, "your mind goes."

Today NET is a highly successful enterprise with offices in five countries, but it began as a nameless business run from the modest refugee dwelling of Wedad and her husband Emil Abu Dayyeh after they were forced out of their home in western Jerusalem in 1948.

We had come to explore with Um Hani how Palestinians working in tourism and pilgrimage in Jerusalem attempted to begin again after their losses in 1948 and how they fared in the period of Jordanian rule. As usual with Um Hani, the conversation spanned and provided insight into much more, as she patiently and unassumingly walked us through her journey from the small village of Bayt Jala, just outside Jerusalem, to her home on the Mount of Olives.

## Fleeing Bayt Jala

Um Hani, born in 1926 in Bayt Jala, grew up a bright and ambitious girl in the large and at times restrictive Makhlouf family. With no opportunities for secondary school education in Bayt Jala, one of her brothers successfully lobbied her father to allow her to attend school in Jerusalem. Wedad, who took the bus from Bayt Jala to its Jerusalem stop and then walked the rest of the way every day, marveled at the world she found in the city. “Jerusalem had a different life,” she says, and one she was determined to make her own. At first, she enrolled in the ninth grade class at the Schmidt Girls’ School. Coming out of the Bayt Jala government school which did not teach English, she found the level of English to be challenging and still castigates the authoritarian rule of the nuns at Schmidt’s. She switched to the English school after a year, where she relished the more open atmosphere and where the teachers were more willing to work with her level of English. She did very well, and completed two years there.



Wedding party at Makhlouf house, Bayt Jala, c. 1944. Family album.



However, she was not allowed to complete her schooling. Um Hani's ambitions and marked tendency – which she maintains to this day – to criticize and battle the status quo did not sit easily with her family. When fifteen-year-old Wedad took issue with her village's practice of having young brides sign away their inheritance when they married, family members gave her an ultimatum. "No school," they told her, "you either stay at home or get married." With her brother abroad and no one else ready to defend her, she was brought back to Bayt Jala by the women in her family, a salutary reminder that is not always men that reinforce patriarchy. The proposed husband-to-be, Emil Abu Dayyeh, was thirty-two and had never finished school. Wedad was only fifteen but early marriage and a large age gap between husband and wife were not uncommon at the time. What was unusual was the rebellious girl's condition for marriage: to live in Jerusalem. She decided to accept her suitor, attracted by the fact that he both lived and worked in Jerusalem.

## **In a War with a Studebaker**

And live in Jerusalem they did, settling in Musrara, near where her new husband worked with his brother Hanna Atallah, who had established a tourist and pilgrimage business, the Jerusalem Orient Express, in Jerusalem's Mamilla neighborhood in 1932. Um Hani makes sure to note that the original investment for opening Hanna Atallah's office was provided by his sister Sirriyyeh, another very strong woman. Sirriyyeh was widowed at a young age and did what she had to do to provide for her young daughter, leaving her child in Bayt Jala and travelling to Peru, where, Um Hani says, "she worked like the men." Sirriyyeh was eventually able to return and support not only her daughter but also her brother, part of a pattern of unusual and industrious women in the Abu Dayyeh family. Um Hani would fit right in.

Abu Hani began his career at the Orient Express in 1932: with little interest in school, his family had sent him as a young man to learn car mechanics. He became a driver and facilitator for visitors to Jerusalem and the Holy Land. At the time, the foreign visitors "were professors and archaeologists," Um Hani remarked, with a shake of her head at the current crop of tourists, "and Abu Hani learned from them." Abu Hani picked up English and some German, and became familiar with the many archeological sites sought out by these learned tourists during their visits, which would oftentimes last for months. Abu Hani's gregarious, "close to the heart" personality, according to Um Hani, served him well with these foreign visitors.

Abu Hani's driving skills came in handy during the World War II period as he began work with the British Army, ferrying soldiers from Cairo to Jerusalem for periods of rest and recreation. "He wore an army uniform throughout the war so he would not be stopped at checkpoints," says Um Hani, reminding us that Palestinians and checkpoints have a long and arduous history. When the war ended, the British forces rewarded Abu Hani by allowing him to obtain a prized taxi license at the standard rate – thus avoiding the black market where licenses were sold for "thousands, millions." Um Hani does not recall the details of that arrangement, just that this was a coveted privilege – so much

so that in exchange for a share of his taxi license, Abu Hani's brother bought him a car, which he drove for the small family business: a light green, brand new Studebaker.

That Studebaker came in handy when disaster struck in 1948 and the couple, with two young children, began a long trek. They fled the Musrara neighborhood after the Jewish forces demolished three houses in their neighborhood but not until Abu Hani had evacuated their neighbor, a Jewish lady – a widow – and her children, to safety. The family first stayed in Bayt Jala for a few months and then, when bombs began to fall on that village, headed to Jericho, where they rented a small room in a mud house and remained for nine months. “We stayed in one room with a family. We had no money,” says Um Hani, “but at least we had a car.” With so many Palestinians fleeing to Jordan, the young family reasoned that Abu Hani would be able to work as a taxi driver with his car, ferrying refugees to Amman. Abu Hani began to drive his taxi from Jericho to Amman, but there was still no school open for the children, and the conditions were difficult. Um Hani remembers the flies and the sweltering heat in that house most vividly.

As the 1948 war commenced, Abu Hani's brother Hanna Atallah had garnered a small piece of luck from a British official who had overseen the Garden Tomb during the Mandate. The Tomb is a peculiarly British site “discovered” by General Gordon of Khartoum fame when he spotted a skull-like formation from the rooftop of the American Colony and decided it must be Golgotha. When Hanna Atallah had to flee his home, he asked the warden of the Garden Tomb, whom he knew from his work as a guide, if he could stay in the empty house on the property until the fighting quieted down. The warden allowed him to stay. But the warden didn't last, according to Um Hani, as the war dragged on and he realized that the conflict “was not a joke,” and that the British role in the creation of the state of Israel was widely resented. He turned over the care of the site to Hanna Atallah, who was able to sit out the war in the relative safety of a religious site. Abu Hani used to travel from Bayt Jala to Jerusalem and stay there with his brother occasionally. Um Hani chuckled as she remembered that before he fled, the warden, a British man, complained about Abu Hani's frequent visits. Abu Hani – who stood tall and was a big man – picked up the warden, a much smaller man, and told him, “Don't think that just because you're British you can tell us what to do. I'll throw you in the well.” The complaints ceased.

## **Rebuilding with a Typewriter, a Dictionary, and Ka'q bi Simsim**

The young family had another turn of luck, again stemming from troop withdrawals. When the British troops evacuated the area, their former army barracks in the Augusta Victoria church-hospital complex on the Mount of Olives became empty. The Lutheran World Federation began offering these small rooms to Palestinian Lutheran families who had been displaced during the war, and Um Hani and her family were then able to move back to Jerusalem, this time in the city's eastern neighborhoods, where they would build their life again.



Passport photographs of Wedad and Emile Abu Dayyeh, 1955. Family album.

A family on the move, scratching for a living, searching for any opportunity for a livelihood reminds us not only of the fate of Palestinians in the *naqba*, but of refugees and families displaced by war and conflict today. Working from their house to build a nameless business with only a post office box, Abu Hani went out to look for work. He soon met Dr. James Kelso, an American Biblical archeologist, who needed a driver and hired him for his digs. “He was a nice, straightforward person,” remembers Um Hani. She observed that after the war it was generally Americans who would come. “After the war, the British wouldn’t dare come,” Um Hani says with a look of disgust, “because they knew they were *‘asel balana*, the source of our troubles.”

Dr. Kelso referred his colleagues to Abu Hani as a trusted driver and a guide. Many of these academics were affiliated with the American School of Oriental Research, or perhaps were “spies,” as Um Hani wryly comments. Before returning to the United States, Dr. Kelso gave his typewriter to Abu Hani, “for your wife,” he said. Um Hani enrolled in typing classes on al-Zahra Street, and thus her own career began, handling all the correspondence and making her trademark precise accounts. “For the first few years we were not licensed and it was chaos,” she remarks. After Jordanian law began to operate, Abu Hani became a licensed guide. “It was illegal to both be a guide and run a tourist agency,” says Um Hani, an invisible one-woman agent for bookings in the four hotels (National, al-Zahra, American Colony – for the wealthy – and Mount Scopus after it opened in 1964). She would confirm the bookings in writing, after Abu Hani went to request the reservations in person.

Um Hani was pregnant with her third child, and was initially unhappy with the pregnancy given the family's difficult financial situation. She recalls that an American woman tourist in one of the groups asked her what she had prepared for the upcoming baby. Um Hani replied, "Nothing." The Lutheran World Federation was distributing assistance to refugees at the time and Um Hani assumed she would have to count on these basic baby supplies. A few months after the American woman returned to the U.S., Um Hani received baby clothes and supplies for her newborn girl, making her beloved daughter Maha "the best dressed baby in all Jerusalem."

With some income, the family rented a room in the Mount of Olives house she now lives in. Abu Hani would be absent for long stretches of time, leaving Um Hani with the children, the finances and the correspondence. Abu Hani traveled to meet the tour groups where they would land, in Beirut and occasionally in Egypt. The usual tour began in Beirut for several nights, proceeded to Damascus for a day to visit the mosque and the market, then to Amman, and on to Jerusalem. The young couple arranged hotels for all of the destinations. Um Hani managed the home front and tended to all administrative matters – her name, however, never appeared on any of the correspondence. The requests came in English, and Abu Hani had limited English – as did she at that time, she insists. But when there were words she didn't know, she would look them up in the dictionary. In a pinch, she hit the road herself, travelling once in the 1960s to Damascus to accompany a group to Jerusalem. Um Hani's exposure to so many foreigners gave her a perspective and experiences that were a far cry from her Bayt Jala roots. She recalls being one of the first women in Jerusalem to don a pair of jeans, having been gifted them by one of the American women who came to visit.

Frequently, tourists would travel through the Mandelbaum Gate to West Jerusalem to continue to other holy land sites inside Israel. Preparing and submitting the lists of these visitors to the relevant Israeli authorities was the only contact Um Hani had with the new state that had replaced Palestine. That would change of course, and drastically, after 1967. But one thing would not: Um Hani continued to live and work in Jerusalem.

The business did not have buses for the groups so they would use cars, renting several at a time, and Abu Hani would impart his information from car to car at all the sites. She recalls one logistically challenging group with a doctor who shipped a bus from the U.S. to Turkey. Abu Hani went to Istanbul to pick up the bus, then drove the American group from Turkey to Syria to Lebanon and to Jordan, then to Jerusalem. Because they couldn't take the bus into Israel on the final leg of the group's journey, it sat in front of their house for a whole year until they were able to sell it, a favor that Abu Hani did for the American doctor. (Tour buses didn't arrive until years later. Um Hani recalls "Jett buses" was the first bus company and Abu Hani bought shares in the company.)

Slowly, more religious pilgrims began to come, from colleges, churches and Christian groups. The house on the Mount of Olives became a tourist destination in itself, with itineraries reading "visit a home on the Mount of Olives" where pleased tourists found Um Hani serving coffee and Jerusalem's distinctive oval-shaped sesame bread (ka'q bi simsim) that still beguiles travelers and locals alike. "What was your biggest group?" we asked and the answer came quickly. In 1955, the Baptist Convention descended on Jerusalem

and its fifty members were guided by Abu Hani and invoiced by Um Hani, with her detailed lists of accommodation fees, entrance fees to holy sites, transport and the like. In the wake of this success, the couple finally opened a small office on al-Zahra Street which they continued to rent for years. Soon after, however, the 1956 Suez crisis affected the small office with what became characteristic of the tourism and travel business in Palestine: significant drought periods due to the ever-changing political climate. “We ate the wind,” Um Hani says. It was not the only time crisis sent NET and other Palestinian businesses spiraling downward.



Um Hani in her house, January 2018. Family album.

The tours guided by Abu Hani during the Jordanian period ranged over the West Bank (from Jerusalem to Hebron, Bethlehem, Jericho and Nablus), to the broader region. They all focused on holy sites and were billed as pilgrim tours. The family’s identity as Palestinian Christians was an attractive feature to Christian tourists, especially Protestants, seeking authenticity, an aspect the nascent NET discovered early on as they largely attracted Protestant groups. Although as Um Hani notes, she herself was “never religious,” did not feel a member of the Palestinian Christian community, and spent whatever little free time she had with her Muslim friends and neighbors – her chosen community – which she created away from her family in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, Um Hani notes that she had little knowledge of Muslim pilgrims and visitors during this period. If they came, it was not through NET.

Today, Um Hani’s two sons and their children run the business that she started with her husband and a typewriter out of a room in the Mount of Olives, although Um Hani still keeps a sharp eye on the accounts. The only time her eyes cloud over is when she is lost in the memory of her beloved daughter, Maha, who died in January 2015. A leading women’s and human rights activist, Maha often cited Um Hani’s strength as an inspiration, and Um Hani talks softly of Maha as a “light” from the moment she was born.

The same feisty spirit that led her to flee Bayt Jala shines through as she shares her insights on the most recent political developments, fed by her daily reading of *al-Quds* newspaper from cover to cover. She folds the newspaper, ready for another day in the office. To live and work in Jerusalem continues to be her watchword.

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# Mechanisms of a Settler Colonial Architecture in Larissa Sansour's *Nation Estate* (2012)

Film Analysis by Carol Que

The dystopian scenario visualized in Larissa Sansour's *Nation Estate* (2012) became too close to life on 6 December 2017 when Donald Trump decided to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. In the past week, images of Qubbat al-Sakhra (Dome of the Rock) as the defining architectural icon of Palestinian Muslim and Christian identity have been rampantly circulated in connection with Trump's announcement to move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Yet this is the logical conclusion of Israel's efforts, through consistent hammering of media propaganda and policy, in proclaiming Jerusalem as their "eternal, undivided capital" since 1967.

In the *Nation Estate* project, Sansour extends Palestine's one-state reality through an architectural and spatial optic, to shed light on the slow violence of militarization and capitalist production that is built into the settler-colonial environment. Conceived in the wake of the Palestinian bid for UN membership, *Nation Estate* is in two parts: a nine-minute satirical sci-fi video essay, and a photographic series, offering a vertical solution to Palestinian statehood that is confined entirely within a skyscraper. Despite the glossy first impression of technological advancement and comfortable living conditions, the architecture in Sansour's high-rise is both weaponized and commercialized to implement the power relations of settler-colonial ideologies. The title of the work conflates nationhood and property, and the use of "estate" implies that the building is no longer something to use, but to own – with the hope of increased asset value, rather than use value, over time. Naturally, Sansour's film finds its basis in real life, where the neoliberal state-building program of the Palestinian Authority (PA) turns history on its head by presenting it as the only means to end occupation and achieve statehood

while promising high economic growth and prosperity.<sup>1</sup> Such is the contradiction of the freedom that is associated with Palestinian nationhood, and its physical geography being reduced to commercial land, as easily co-opted by settlers as it is by the United States.

Adila Laïdi-Hanieh notes how the history of landscape painting and landscape photography may have been tied to the history of capitalism, through recording landed gentry's property or commodifying an idealized version of a pristine landscape in an industrializing society.<sup>2</sup> In fact, this was precisely the driving impetus for Franz Krausz's original poster (figure 1), for which the paramount paradigm at work was the representation of landscape as memento mori before its actual disappearance or expected appropriation.<sup>3</sup> In *Nation Estate*, the representation of architecture as memento mori beckons the question of further expropriation in the future, and how that may be possible when there is nowhere else to go but up.



Figure 1. Historical Zionist poster, by Franz Krausz, issued by the Jewish Agency in 1936.

## Sansour's Practice in Context

From one generation to another, Palestinian artists have depicted narrative scenes of historical moments that metaphorically comment on the lived experience under British colonial rule, and today under Israeli settler colonialism. They have continued to explore how memory is embodied in the lived moments of history that have crucially marked their experience of exile post-1948.<sup>4</sup> As Tina Malhi-Sherwell contends, it is important to note that much of the history of pre-1948 Palestinian art was erased as a result of the war that saw the establishment of the State of Israel.<sup>5</sup> Today, the overwhelming responsibility to represent a reality that is fraught with violence and trauma is bound up with the immorality of over-aestheticizing a current oppression, an imperative which typically produces a mirror image of reality but leaves little space for imagining solutions.

This is evident in the case of Palestinian photography: Laïdi-Hanieh observes that its history has been an almost consistent practice of quasi-exclusively documenting the inscription of the occupation on the landscape.<sup>6</sup> The documentary imperative to precisely reflect reality was an issue for Larissa Sansour, whose artistic oeuvre began with documentary footage in *Tank* (2003) and *Rotor Blades* (2004). Expressing her frustration with the limited critical engagement that documentary perspectives provide, she began to

incorporate humorous, kitschy narratives in *Bethlehem Bandolero* (2005), sitcom theme music in *Happy Days* (2006), and filmic references to Stanley Kubrick in *Sbara* (2008), moving into a marked aesthetic that straddles absurdity and reality.

Born in East Jerusalem, Larissa Sansour is a London-based Palestinian artist who works across video, photography, sculpture, and installation. Sansour is now part of a generation of Palestinian artists that has made significant inroads in the international art scene, showing in galleries, museums, and biennales. Her foray into sci-fi began in 2009 first in collaboration with interdisciplinary artist Oreet Ashery in the creation of a graphic novel, *The Novel of Nonel and Vovel* (2009), and the production of *Space Exodus* (2009). Sansour is perhaps best known for her sci-fi aesthetic, although it was not a genre she began with.<sup>7</sup> While *Nation Estate* is deeply involved with current Palestinian politics, the video essay inevitably takes influence from the 1970s Arab Surrealist Movement and the burgeoning wave of Arabfuturism – specifically, a pan-Arabist engagement with sci-fi aesthetics.<sup>8</sup> Lama Suleiman reflects upon how Palestinian narratives of loss, dispossession, and catastrophe have to be seen as part of wider Arab narratives and from within a pan-Arabist perspective.<sup>9</sup> She explains that this has recently manifested in an emerging Arabfuturism, expressed in not just contemporary art, but also recent literature and film.

Suleiman discerns that there is a persisting aesthetic disparity in Arabfuturism between diasporic and native futuristic expressions. In the Palestinian context, this disparity is sharper than in the rest of Arab culture.<sup>10</sup> The examples of Europe-based Palestinian artists, such as Sansour herself, Jumana Manna, and Taysir Batniji, demand deeper examination of such discrepancies, as do also Palestinian artists practicing in West Bank and Gaza, such as Jumana Emil Abboud and Khaled Jarrar. This includes understanding what resources are available for cultural production. For instance, Sansour’s aesthetic is slick and refined, but with high production costs that she fundraises for. Her works have largely been shown in an international context, but also in Palestine.<sup>11</sup> She notes that various gallery and museum directors have considered her work as “not Palestinian enough”:

At one point, a curator told me they really wanted to include me, but my work is too highly produced . . . they wanted gritty, guerilla-handheld camera work from the Middle East. I do spend a lot of energy and time fundraising to make very slick, highly produced films, because I want to break that cliché of what is expected of Middle Eastern artists . . . that’s one of the biggest reasons why I work like this.<sup>12</sup>

On the other hand, *Nation Estate* has been accused of promoting an agenda that is too “pro-Palestinian,” by the CEO of Lacoste who requested Sansour’s withdrawal from a competition sponsored by the company.<sup>13</sup> This speaks to the constant struggle that Palestinian artists face in neoliberal capitalist art systems: specifically, to have public platforms, forums, audiences, and financial support, but also to manage and prevent the hijacking of their culture and politics within preordained checklists of what it means to produce marketable Palestinian art. This ignorance persists in the thinking that sci-fi is



something novel or strange to Arab culture.<sup>14</sup> Hence the significance of Sansour's sci-fi aesthetic exists not only in challenging the popular imagination that assumes all Palestinian art to be marked by the mantle of militancy and/or suffering, but also in continuing the lineage of science fiction narrative tradition in pan-Arabist history.

## Art History through a Settler Colonial Analytic

One of my key intentions is to propose a model for writing an art history that will actively grapple with the impact of settler colonialism for artistic practices and art historical narratives, by following Patrick Wolfe's frequently cited definition: settler colonialism understood not as a singular event, but as a structure that facilitates the logic of elimination.<sup>15</sup> Using settler colonialism as a framework of analysis retains a specificity when describing its impact, to challenge the normalization of dispossession as a "done deal," relegated to the past rather than ongoing.<sup>16</sup> For instance, the Nakba could be understood as an ongoing process that is manifested today in the continuing subjection of Palestinians, instead of an isolated historical moment of catastrophe marking the 1948 Palestinian exodus, or simply as a precondition for the creation of Israel or the outcome of early Zionist ambitions.

Subsequent to J. Kēhaulani Kauanui's positioning of settler colonialism with the analytic counterpart of "enduring indigeneity," this essay will clarify that Wolfe's definition of settler colonialism is also a structure which indigeneity and the existence, resistance, and persistence of indigenous peoples persists against – that indigeneity itself is enduring.<sup>17</sup> Sansour's impetus to create a transformative, liberatory, self-reflexive artistic agenda through the film deems it necessary to analyze Zionism's structural continuities and the ideology that informs Israeli policies and practices in Israel and toward Palestinians everywhere. Yet it is not enough simply to classify Israel as settler-colonial on the basis of its manifest instantiation of the logic of elimination. Wolfe argues that while its essential feature is its sustained institutional tendency to supplant the indigenous population, the techniques of dispossession differ significantly, despite the eliminatory outcome that has remained constant.<sup>18</sup> *Nation Estate* exposes the systems of settler colonialism and the nature of Zionism in Palestine, through which elimination of the native is bound by separation rather than expulsion because of international human and civil rights.<sup>19</sup>

This text, then, is my initial attempt at understanding what decolonization might mean from my position as implicated in Australian settler colonialism, and to contribute to anti-colonial, anti-imperial, and anti-racist solidarities. Within academic settings, I have noticed that Sansour's work is usually featured as a case study within broader artistic and cultural movements of Palestine, or within the wider Arab context. This points to the necessity for measured but urgent engagement with her video essays as the central subject through ekphrasis and political analysis. Understanding that the academic industrial complex benefits from communities of overstudied Others, I intend to fully respect and learn from the wisdom and desires in Sansour's work, while refusing to portray/betray

her to the spectacle of the settler-colonial gaze. In this case, I have obtained permission from Sansour to write on her work, and will continue to think of and implement a working process attentive to power and responsibility. In turn, this essay will point to *Nation Estate*'s architectural and lived form as the visual embodiment of settler colonialism. I will examine the ideas embodied in the layout and fabric of the building, studying it in the context of its historical, physical, and intellectual cultures, and as a space that houses its nationalist symbols. It is in this regard that I seek to investigate and propose a framework for considering Sansour's work.

## Imaging Carceral Logics of Architecture

The highrise of Larissa Sansour's *Nation Estate* (2012) appears to record particular hierarchies of memory. Located in Jerusalem, the building contains its own internalized intellectual system, its own schema that deals with presence and absence. As Sansour turns to look at the towering reproduction of Franz Krausz's *Visit Palestine* tourism poster (figure 2), the viewer realizes that it does not serve the image's original promotional purposes (figure 1).<sup>20</sup> Nor does its placement show any indication of the image's history as a symbol of Palestinian nationalism in the 1990s.<sup>21</sup> Instead, its current presentation mimics the display of an artwork in a white cube space, re-appropriated as a mockery of the Palestinian nationhood and its current state of containment. By visually supplanting Qubbat al-Sakhra on the poster (figure 3), the superstructure attests to a new regime of neoliberal capitalist worship present in a Palestine that subordinates the goals of national liberation for international recognition, institution building, and good governance.<sup>22</sup> In the words of Raja Khalidi and Sobhi Samour, it is needless to say that a neoliberal "liberational" strategy runs counter to the actual experience of successful decolonization.<sup>23</sup>

The first scene situates the viewer gliding along the bend of an underground train tunnel. Evocative of a bunker, this concrete tunnel bears no vestige of past wars. Yet,



Figure 2. Sansour looking at the *Nation Estate* poster, *Nation Estate* (2012).



Figure 3. *Nation Estate* poster (2012).



Figure 4. Escalators from the Amman Express, *Nation Estate* (2012).



Figure 5. Identity authentication, *Nation Estate* (2012).

a feeling of being immediately crushed is apparent. The tunnel passage fades to show the reflection of our protagonist, a lone traveller performed by Sansour herself. Upon disembarking from the Amman Express, Sansour ascends two escalators in a sequential manner, directed by the built environment to move forward and upward (figure 4). The imperceptible spatial control that guides human movement is especially evident when Sansour encounters the security check, which effectually blocks her from going further until her identity is matched with an identity code through eye and fingerprint scanning (figure 5). This is not dissimilar to the color-coded ID card system existing today in Palestine since 1967, each of which has a number that indicates region, and the more recently implemented magnetic card with biometric information, that informs Israeli military personnel of the person's past record.<sup>24</sup> In Sansour's dystopia, this system has taken a turn for the hi-tech and biological with a security scheme implanted within walls, automated and ever-present.



Figure 6. Atrium, *Nation Estate* (2012).



Figure 7. Palestinian flag-altar, *Nation Estate* (2012).

After identity verification, the scene switches to an eerily silent atrium (figure 6). Sansour's footsteps resound through the vast space, backed by faint gusts of air-conditioning that magnify the overwhelming space. The atrium is postmodern in design, reminiscent of an airport lobby for its cavernous but standardized expanse.<sup>25</sup> Uncompromisingly modern and more monumental than necessary, the atrium's architectural overstatement suggests national pride and ambition. Yet for such a grand space, human movement is linear instead of circulatory, channeled one-directionally towards a large-scale, vertically positioned Palestinian flag on a protruding wall. Reminiscent of an altar, its arresting presence in the space is anchored by consecutive plant plinths that lead from the entrance (figure 7). Here, Sansour develops a lightness of breath, and her eyesight seems to be affected by the reflective white surfaces and glare from the extensive glass facades, causing figures and features of the people around her to appear indistinct (figure 8). In *The Architecture of Light*, Mary Ann Steane notes that it is the advent of electric light (with the support of air-conditioning) that has enabled deep-plan buildings and the need for laws to decide what corner of the sky office workers should be able to glimpse from their desks.<sup>26</sup> Although



Figure 8. Sansour entering the atrium, *Nation Estate* (2012).



Figure 9. Elevator directory, *Nation Estate* (2012).

it is unclear what economic system *Nation Estate* runs on (if any), the atrium is also constructed to mimic a corporate lobby, complete with a reception desk under the flag altar and neon tube lights. As a popular architectural feature for office buildings, the glass facades provide a glimpse of the seemingly outdated wall and watchtowers surrounding *Nation Estate*. These paramilitary “Wall and Tower” settlements are described by Sharon Rotbard as a pre-state spatial strategy and technology that made use of fortification and observation – a protective enclosure – that dominated their surroundings by the power of vision.<sup>27</sup> Along with the sanitizing white interiors and harsh artificial lighting in the building, *Nation Estate* implements a form of panoptic surveillance and physiological control based on light and visibility.<sup>28</sup>

Meanwhile, the elevator directory appears to be a tombstone of sorts, made of concrete that is militaristic, inscrutable, resolute in silence and mass (figure 9). The grey concrete resembles the hasty and cheap architecture of emergency edifices, refugee camps, separation walls and control towers. This is set in contradistinction to the shiny white concrete commonly used in the West Bank’s current building frenzy – concrete that is

used to flatten the hills of West Bank, to build settlements over the landscape. Indeed, there seems to be no space in this building for anything that is not necessary for purely sustaining and maintaining the facade of a civilization – its cities, landmarks, and national signifiers. On the elevator directory, Levels 1 to 5 are institutions that regulate Palestinian movement outside the *nation estate* – from diplomatic missions, aid and development, NGOs, government HQ, permits and passport control. Subterranean Palestine includes the train station, the energy and sanitation unit, and the Dead Sea. While there is no sign of water infrastructure on the elevator directory, Sansour confirms the source of the Palestine’s water supply in the lift. An advertisement for the Norwegian Fjords resounds crisply around the contained space, its glowing blue screen indicating the source of this week’s general water supply, and its status as a proud supporter of the Water Pipes for Peace program. The punch line here is a direct jab at the complicity of international foreign aid and their reluctance to challenge Israel’s hold over water and irrigation systems – the punch line being the failure of international attempts at a peace process thus far.<sup>29</sup>

Even the elevator interior is constructed to emphasize its height, stressed by how Sansour and the other two people direct their gaze upwards to watch the changing floor indicator (figure 10). Notably, there is minimal interaction and no spoken dialogue between characters in the film – the only voices audible are the pre-recorded announcement systems in the train and lift, as well as the advertisement voice-overs. *Nation Estate*’s clinical character not only noticeably undermines livability and the very social fabric of its community, but this is a building constructed plainly with a singular purpose. By excluding the Palestinian population via separation and containment, Palestinian indigenous sovereignty is preserved as a stagnant, acquiescent entity within an isolated realm that continues in parallel to the settler one. Chrisoula Lionis observes, “The homeland is reduced to a simulation of real places.”<sup>30</sup> When the elevator doors on the Jerusalem floor open onto a full scale Qubbat al-Sakhra, the shot lingers on the flickering tube lights above the dome, and later, on the slick marble floor that holds the Nativity Church of Bethlehem. Spatialized as simulacra, these sacred sites are displaced to enforce a renewed touristic purpose for the building inhabitants, done so in order to suppress collective memories of their original cultural, historical, and religious meaning.

In the scene where Sansour looks down at the real Jerusalem from her apartment window (figure 11), the politics of surveillance is flipped in what Eyal Weizman calls “the vertical politics of separation and logic of partition.”<sup>31</sup> Within the context of Israeli architecture and urban planning, the phrase marks a reference to settlements strategically built on hilltops to command heights over the land. Weizman demonstrates the reality of spatial logic in his seminal book *Hollow Land*, the protean manner in which Israeli occupation has inscribed its presence on the land. He proposes that unlike historic colonial endeavors, this is not an ordered occupation of space, but a flexible, moving occupation of “structured chaos” where the Israeli state is present and/or absent, and its absence relayed in this process of dispossession.<sup>32</sup> The arsenal deployed includes not only military force but also “illumination schemes . . . architecture of housing, the forms of settlements, the construction of fortifications and means of enclosure, the spatial mechanisms of circulation



Figure 10. Inside the elevator, *Nation Estate* (2012).



Figure 11. Sansour looking down at Jerusalem, *Nation Estate* (2012).

control and flow management, mapping techniques and methods of observation, legal tactics for land annexation.”<sup>33</sup>

Hence it is significant that verticality is no longer a necessary strategy when surveillance within containment is found to be more efficient in *Nation Estate*. Only at the conclusion of the video can we comprehend the physical enormity of this Ballardian highrise and confirm the dual incarceration of the entire Palestinian nation state, first within the architecture, and again within the wall enclosure (figure 12). *Nation Estate* has all the stylistic facets of international modernist architecture, or in Leslie Sklair’s terms, an “icon of capitalist globalization.”<sup>34</sup> The skyscraper isn’t just a symbol of capitalism, it is capitalism materialized in monumental steel, glass, and concrete – these materials that were initially mobilized to convey messages of transparency and democracy now make up the prison and tomb. Here in Sansour’s imaginary, the logistics of the gaze and function of observation is part of how architecture’s carceral logics transforms a self-knowing commercial space into a prison. This calls to mind Ilan Pappé’s description of



Figure 12. External perspective of the building, *Nation Estate* (2012).

present West Bank being an open-air prison, in its propagation as an autonomous zone and resemblance to the idea of a “state.”<sup>35</sup> Sansour’s highrise would be a further elaboration of the mega, high security prison system that performs a false paradigm of peace, even when taken to its logical extreme as a sealed, architectural container.

## **On the Permeability of Land, Bodies, Borders, and Nations**

Yet *Nation Estate* is not constructed without resistance from within. While indigeneity is most obviously conveyed through the known Palestinian symbolism of an olive tree, it is also expressed through an intimate close-up of the soil that the olive tree grows from. To borrow a term from earth sciences, *permeability* is understood as a measure of the ability of a porous material to allow fluids to pass through it. If the ideological dialectic and political strategy of *sumud*, meaning steadfastness, can be encapsulated within soil, *Nation Estate* depicts an enduring indigeneity that connects both olive tree and the soil it is embedded within. The appearance of soil show clearly its dense and resistant properties;



Figure 13. Soil of the olive tree, *Nation Estate* (2012).



through the soil's slow filtering of water, its languid absorbency rate (figure 13), and in the way resilience is embedded in the earth.

Indeed, in a place that reduces Palestinian nationhood to a relic, the olive tree continues as a symbol of enduring indigeneity and indigenous attachment to the land – but one that is still necessarily attended to by a silent maternal figure who continues to provide nourishment. When Mahmoud Darwish's poem "Lover from Palestine" popularized the metaphor of the female body as the ancestral homeland, Kamal Boullata detects the resurfacing of Darwish's verbal metaphor in the pictorial language of Palestinian male artists a decade after the metaphor became a commonplace reference in literature and poetry.<sup>36</sup> As Sliman Mansour explains, it was after the emergence of the armed struggle in the 1960s that "the Palestinian woman with her nice dress, flowing hair and long neck," became a symbol of the revolution.<sup>37</sup> Palestine came to be represented exclusively by idealized depictions of women with generous curves, representing the well-known trope of land as mother earth.<sup>38</sup> Across Palestinian artistic culture, this imaginary comes to constitute a gendered variant of the landscape, by which patriarchal property enforces the confinement of women as well as the colonized. After watering the tree, Sansour



Figure 14. Sansour watering the olive tree, *Nation Estate* (2012).



Figure 15. Sansour's pregnancy, *Nation Estate* (2012).

is positioned to look down at the horizontal sprawl of Jerusalem from her highrise apartment prison. This is also the first time that Sansour is revealed to be pregnant, as she gingerly places her hand over her belly while looking out her window (figure 15). If Israeli population policy today continues to encourage Israelis to have more children and Palestinians to have fewer, the politics of reproduction cannot be disentangled from the ongoing history of settler colonialism.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, the womb remains to be a political site since the pairing of reproduction and nationalism post-Nakba.<sup>40</sup>

The visual compliment of the nationalist discourses that posited women as responsible for reproducing the nation, thereby inscribes women's fertility with the political significance of patriotic obligation. In nationalist discourses not only were women perceived as giving birth to future generations, they were also held responsible for reproducing the boundaries of the nation.<sup>41</sup> Bound up in a place that continues to assert an essentialized Palestinian identity, Sansour as the protagonist can only communicate her dread for future generations through her eyes (figure 16).



Figure 16. Sansour looking directly at the camera, *Nation Estate* (2012).

While *Nation Estate* contributes to the canon of images under ongoing and brutal Israeli settler colonialism, it navigates the risk of self-victimization through remedying the weight of ethnography vis-a-vis a science-fiction imaginary. Yet the perverse logic that has Palestinians bearing both the responsibility and burden of explanation still prevails. Sansour is aware of and refuses to appeal to her international, mostly Western audience that has grown more familiar with and become desensitized to the codification of Palestinian dispossession. Although her cinematic language of imposing Palestinian symbols does not fulfill the expected narrative marked by pathos and suffering, Sansour consigns them to the status of relics. The artist remains indebted to Palestinian visual culture for iconography, but she deploys it in a way that shows its nationalist underpinnings as easily co-opted by neoliberal settler colonialism. While the quandary of statelessness is real, the “solution” – a nation state – risks cementing the outcome of Palestinian liberation within

the very political structures that first orchestrated its persecution. In her *Funambulist* article “Palestine made flesh,” Sophia Azeb asks some pressing questions: When has the nation-state functioned as a tool of liberation? When has the nation-state escaped the confines of its origins in enslavement, imperialism, exile, and settler colonialism?<sup>42</sup> Indeed, Hannah Arendt’s criticism in *Jewish Writings* (2007) can attest to a similar critique. Arendt shows how nationalism mirrors nineteenth century imperialism is based on the very idea of how the Jewish state was a misguided response to European anti-Semitism and would become, when realized, a product of the colonialism and anti-Semitism it sought to resist.<sup>43</sup> In turn, Azeb recognizes that the geographical nation-state of borders and laws – that sovereign entity which categorizes and determines who receives citizenship and why – “that nation-state is conquest and the root of occupation itself.”<sup>44</sup>

Sansour helps us see that the systemic problem of nation states continues to perpetuate a choice between second-class citizenship or expulsion. Architecture is part of the performance of politics and in *Nation Estate*, it is being used to describe a different kind of proclaimed imagination – one that is both a consequence of settler colonialism and global capital. The fictional highrise is both an image of Palestine enmeshed in the colonizing practices of Israel from one side, and on the other by capitalism’s ruthless cultural logic. If settler colonialism and indigeneity is viewed as a bipartite frame of reference for understanding the political reality and terrain of injustice in Palestine, decolonization becomes the logical necessity – decolonization in settler-colonial contexts that prioritizes indigenous peoples “living under political arrangements to which they have consented.”<sup>45</sup> Here, *Nation Estate* is developed as an intellectual exercise that not only points to the myth of the traditional two-state solution as the only viable option and realization of rights, but also reiterates the one state reality that Palestinians currently live under. In this sense, the film points plainly at the one-state reality that is the State of Israel, insinuating that any analysis of the conflict should first begin there.<sup>46</sup>

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# Neoliberalism under Colonialism

## A Compounded Devastation

*Palestine Ltd.: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, by Toufic Haddad. London: I. B. Tauris, SOAS Palestine Studies Series, 2016.

Reviewed by Samia al-Botmeh

After the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993, the bulk of scholarly literature on the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) was devoted to neoclassical economic analysis, which predominantly focused on policy formulation with a view towards fostering the economic wellbeing of the Palestinians under colonial conditions. Few scholars engaged in examining the developments taking place in the OPT from a rigorous political economy perspective. Toufic Haddad's book, *Palestine Ltd.: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, is the most recent in a relatively new line of critical academic research on the political economy of the OPT. The author, who received his PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) at the University of London, powerfully examines and analyzes the structural linkages between political economy ideologies, as represented by neoliberalism, and economic and political outcomes on the ground in the OPT. More specifically, the book focuses on assessing the extent to which neoliberal conflict resolution and statebuilding endeavors in the post Oslo accords period were successful in inducing the forms of political, economic and social transformation that its designers intended amongst targeted Palestinian constituencies.

Drawing on a vast array of literature, Haddad meticulously investigates how Palestinian society, its political and economic elites, and various social classes, negotiated neoliberal interventions as they unfolded across the OPT. No less meticulous is his analysis of the contours of neoliberal conflict resolution and state building in the OPT as it emerged in

the development policies of Western donor governments and international financial institutions from 1993 to 2013. Haddad manages to trace the genesis of some of the defining moments building up to the Palestinian Authority's adoption of neoliberalism in the OPT as a hegemonic ideology, while painting a vivid picture of the machinations that drove the formulation of economic policies and the predicaments of the state-building endeavor.

Haddad's contribution is visible not only in his choice of an analytical political economy perspective, which focuses on the link between ideology and its implications on the ground, but also in the form of his narrative. He skillfully injects the analytical aspect of his writing into the descriptive chronological narrative. This is clear in his breakdown of the periods under investigation into the planning period (before 1993), neoliberal peacebuilding (1993–2000), good governance reform, and then neoliberal statebuilding.

Haddad's creative use of the term "Palestine Ltd." serves a dual signification, economic as well as political. The first reflects a delimited version of the Palestinian state, located in only parts of the OPT and with highly restricted political and economic powers. The second connotation relates to the institutional composition of this delimited version of Palestine, as imagined by those who embrace and propagate it. He describes it as the operational endgame of Western donor development/peace-building/state-building interventions with this entity functioning as a variant of a limited shareholding company (Ltd.) with international, regional and local investors of one type or another. While the dividend of this investment is both direct and indirect financial gain, the primary motivation is to reap political, administrative, and security returns for its investors.

The book's argument is clear: neoliberalism's impact on the Palestinian national liberation movement's quest for self-determination reflects features common to the impact of neoliberalism elsewhere, albeit its own specificities make these features more "negatively" extreme. Haddad illustrates how, under neoliberal policies, donors planned and actively sought to manipulate Palestinian powers and social relations in ways that advanced undisclosed political agendas which contributed towards a weak, fragmented, and de-developed political arrangement conducive to Israeli influence. Relying on the notion of positive peace, his analysis reveals that there is no serious indication that neoliberal conflict resolution and statebuilding have demonstrated traction in inducing any significant section of Palestinian society toward leaning in this direction. However, it has made gains in restructuring social relations and economic interests around dynamics of a negative peace. Positive and negative peace are differentiated by the extent to which they address the root causes of violence and whether a genuine reconciliation takes place including in structural terms.

Some of the arguments in *Palestine Ltd.: Neoliberalism and Nationalism in the Occupied Palestinian Territory* are not new, as other scholars have earlier explored neoliberalism in the OPT and its political and economic repercussions. This includes the work of Khalidi and Samour, as well as Hanieh and others.<sup>1</sup> However, Haddad's addition to these established debates through his exploration of the power dynamics between the various "agents" engaged in articulating the policy directives within the

OPT, including the international financial institutions, donor countries, and the Palestinian Authority, is methodologically compelling. Tracing the impact of these neoclassical policy directives on the Palestinian population's economic and political reality is equally robust and thorough. It is noteworthy that he does not simply review the literature, but also conducts an extensive range of interviews and discussions. In addition, he relies on previously undisclosed and classified documents of donors that enable him to highlight contradictions between formal policy and internal donor transcripts.

The book falls short of situating the neoliberal reality in Palestine in the regional and world context. Neoliberalism, the contemporary form of capitalist discourse which swept the world in the shape of internal and external policy directives in 1980s, arrived into the Palestinian context with the signing of the Oslo peace accords in the 1990s. Since then, the Palestinian development trajectory, within the context of neoliberalism, has come to diverge and converge with other countries in the region and worldwide. Situating the Palestinian neoliberal experience within the contemporary capitalist discourse, as well as the world context, would have provided an invaluable contribution to the exploratory power of the book.

Overall, this book is a significant contribution. It will undoubtedly generate a renewed interest in the study of the OPT from a political economy perspective.

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## Women Empowerment in Marginalized East Jerusalem Communities

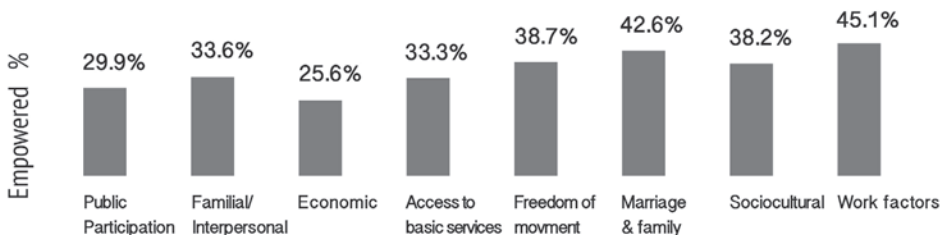
Study sample: 953 adult women (18-68) living in Old city, Tur, Jabal Mukabber, Issawiyya, Ram, and Shufat camp (2017)  
 Study tool: Women empowerment was measured using WHO tool for Women's Empowerment and Leadership

### Background



 **Empowerment**  
 In patriarchal contexts, tight controls are exerted on women in every sphere of their lives

18% of women felt empowered (having at least 5 of the below dimensions of empowerment)



### Editor's Note:

The Policy Recommendations through research on Empowering Palestinian Women from East Jerusalem's Most Marginalized Communities shall be published in a forthcoming issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly*.

# Congratulations!

The Jerusalem Quarterly wishes to congratulate senior Institute for Palestine Studies fellows Salim Tamari and Rashid Khalidi on receiving outstanding awards in their fields of endeavor.

Our heartfelt congratulations to both!

Salim Tamari, Editor of Jerusalem Quarterly and Emeritus Professor of Sociology at Birzeit University, received the State of Palestine National Recognition Award for his collective body of work. Established by presidential decree, the award is the highest honor in the fields of literature, political science, and the arts. It was announced in conjunction with the annual Palestine International Book Fair, held by the Palestinian Ministry of Culture.



Rashid Khalidi, Editor of the Journal of Palestine Studies and Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University, received the quadrennial WOCMES Seville 2018 Award for Outstanding Contributions to Middle Eastern Studies in recognition of “his public role as a prominent voice of the Palestinian cause,” WOCMES said in its announcement. “Khalidi is the highest authority on interpretations of the Arab-Jewish and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts. It is impossible to understand this region and its historical experiences without Khalidi’s works,” the announcement continued.





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