JERUSALEM QUARTERLY

99
Autumn 2024

JQ 99 – Food and Foodways (Part 2)

Food and the Transmission of Culture: Linking Past, Present, and Future
Christiane Dabdoub Nasser

Binding Identity: Chilean Palestinian Cookbooks and the Formation of a Diasporic Cuisine
Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley and Jessica Schwalb

From Wasteland to Eden: Environmental Territoriality and the Remaking of the Political Ecology of East Jerusalem
Yair Agmon

How Dough Rises in Gaza: Palestine's Foremothers and Recipes against Genocide
Lila Sharif

From Kitchen to Community: Food and Palestinian Marriage Rituals in the Ethnography of Hilma Granqvist
Mona Dorani

When the World Collapses in Palestine
Benjamin Kaplan Weinger

The Gaza Soup Kitchen: Generosity amid Genocide
Hani Almadhoun

INSTITUTE OF JERUSALEM STUDIES

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* (*JQ*) is the leading journal on the past, present, and future of Jerusalem. It documents the current status of the city and its predicaments. It is also dedicated to new and rigorous lines of inquiry by emerging scholars on Palestinian society and culture. Published since 1998 by the Institute for Palestine Studies through its affiliate, the Institute of Jerusalem Studies, the *Jerusalem Quarterly* is available online in its entirety at www.palestine-studies.org/en/journals/jq/about.

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* follows a double-blind peer review process for select contributions. Peer reviewed articles are indicated as such in the table of contents.

This journal is produced with the financial assistance of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung Palestine/Jordan. The views expressed herein are those of the author(s) and therefore do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Heinrich Böll Stiftung, nor those of the editors or the Institute of Jerusalem Studies.

Email: jq@palestine-studies.org
www.palestine-studies.org

ISSN 2521-9731 (print version)
ISSN 2521-974X (online version)

Jerusalem Quarterly

Autumn 2024 — Issue 99

For submissions to JQ*, send email to:*
jq@palestine-studies.org

For local subscriptions to JQ*, contact:*
The Institute of Jerusalem Studies
P.O. Box 21649, Jerusalem 9121501
Tel: 972 2 298 9108, Fax: 972 2 295 0767
E-mail: sales-ijs@palestine-studies.org

For international or U.S. subscriptions, contact:
The Institute for Palestine Studies
3501 M Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20007

Or subscribe at the IPS website:
www.palestine-studies.org/en/journals/jq/subscription

Jerusalem Quarterly
Autumn 2024 — Issue 99

JQ 99 – Food and Foodways (Part 2)

EDITORIAL
Refusing Extermination **3**

INTRODUCTION
Food and the Transmission of Culture: Linking Past, Present, and Future **6**
Christiane Dabdoub Nasser

* **Binding Identity: Chilean Palestinian Cookbooks and the Formation of a Diasporic Cuisine** **14**
Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley and Jessica Schwalb

* **From Wasteland to Eden:**
Environmental Territoriality and the Remaking of the Political Ecology of East Jerusalem **33**
Yair Agmon

How Dough Rises in Gaza: Palestine's Foremothers and Recipes against Genocide **56**
Lila Sharif

From Kitchen to Community
Food and Palestinian Marriage Rituals in the Ethnography of Hilma Granqvist **73**
Mona Dorani

When the World Collapses in Palestine **85**
Benjamin Kaplan Weinger

The Gaza Soup Kitchen: Generosity amid Genocide **101**
Hani Almadhoun

REVIEWS
Ottolenghi and Tamimi's Cookbook, *Jerusalem*: Israel as Frame and Palestine as Subject **106**
Review essay by Reem Farah

Cultivating Catastrophe **116**
Review by Tom Selwyn

Musical Narratives of Resistance: An Ethnomusicological Review **122**
Review by Ruba Totah

*** Peer reviewed article.**

EDITORIAL

Refusing Extermination

This issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* is being released more than one year after 7 October 2023. As this grim anniversary came and went, the U.S.-Israeli campaign of genocide in Gaza has metastasized to include an invasion of southern Lebanon and air bombardments targeting Beirut, Tyre, Sidon, and the Biqa‘ Valley, among other areas of Lebanon; continuing strikes on Syria and Yemen; and exchanges of missile and drone attacks with Iran. The official death toll in Gaza since October 2023 until this writing now exceeds forty-four thousand Palestinians, including seventeen thousand children, with well over one hundred thousand people wounded. These figures do not include thousands who are missing, including those buried under the rubble (at least ten thousand in many estimates). Each day brings new reports of dozens more Palestinians killed in Israeli attacks on hospitals and schools where displaced families and the injured have sought treatment and shelter. In Lebanon, Israel has killed more than 3,600 people, injured more than 15,400, and displaced more than 1.2 million over the past year, with the war sharply intensifying since September 2024. In a period of less than a month, Israel assassinated longtime Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah, Nasrallah’s presumed successor Hashim Safi al-Din, and Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in Gaza and chairman of the movement’s political bureau, having succeeded Isma‘il Haniya after his assassination in July. Even as fears of a regional war have come to fruition, the violence threatens to expand and intensify.

In the West Bank, Israeli raids and assassinations proceed with very little international attention. Israeli forces

have killed more than eight hundred Palestinians, including 166 children, in the West Bank over the past year, injured 6,500, and arrested more than five thousand. In early October, for example, Israeli employed fighter jets (used in the West Bank for the first time since the second intifada) to kill Zahi Yasir ʻAwfi, leader of Hamas's ʻIzz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades in Tulkarm, alongside seventeen others in a busy café; later in the month, Israeli forces gunned down his successor, Islam Jamil ʻAwda. West Bank settlers continue to terrorize Palestinians, with the tacit or open support of the Israeli military and political establishment. The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian affairs documented more than 1,400 incidents of settler violence against Palestinians since October 2023, an average of four incidents a day. Recent attacks have targeted Palestinian villagers in Area C, from Khirbat al-Rahwa in the south Hebron Hills to al-Muʻarrajat and ʻArab al-Kaʻabna in the Jordan Valley. The production of this issue coincides with the olive harvest in Palestine, which has been disrupted by Israeli settlers and the military who burn and bulldoze trees, deny access to lands, steal olives and farming equipment, and attack those harvesting olives. In mid-October, an Israeli soldier shot and killed fifty-nine-year-old Hanan ʻAbd al-Rahman Abu Salama as she harvested olives on her land in Faquʻa, northeast of Jenin.

Meanwhile, Israel is forging ahead with efforts to expand its settlements. The Jerusalem municipality recently recommended that the regional committee approve "urban renewal" plans that would add 1,300 residential units, the vast majority in the settlements of Gilo and Ramot. Far-right elements of the settler movement have begun mobilizing support for resettling Gaza and expanding settlements into southern Lebanon. The Knesset also passed two bills that will prevent the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) from operating inside Israel, shutter UNRWA's headquarters in annexed East Jerusalem, and declare the agency a terrorist group, banning any direct interaction with the Israeli state and effectively denying work and entry permits to UNRWA staff operating in Gaza and the West Bank. These laws seek to cripple the agency, undermining its work throughout Palestine and in particular its vital relief efforts in Gaza. The degree to which UNRWA is already hamstrung is made clear by Hani Almadhoun, UNRWA USA's senior director of philanthropy, who in this issue recounts working outside its structures to feed starving Palestinians in Gaza.

The starvation that Israel is imposing on Gaza provides a disturbing backdrop to the contributions to this second of two special issues of *JQ* devoted to food and foodways. The pittance of aid that Israel has allowed into the Gaza Strip has further dwindled. In September 2024, aid organizations noted that 83 percent of required food aid did not make it to the needy Palestinians of Gaza, while in October 2024 Gaza's Government Media Office announced that Israel had in the previous year blocked one-quarter of a million aid trucks from entering the Gaza Strip. In northern Gaza, Israel has intensified its ethnic cleansing, forcibly evicting thousands who had remained there despite the year-long assault, and subjecting the hundreds of thousands who remain to an ever-tightening noose of deprivation and air attacks. UNRWA staff in the north reported that "the smell of death is everywhere." In addition to the forty-four

thousand killed in Gaza over the past year, a group of U.S. health care workers noted that a further sixty-two thousand had likely died of starvation in this period. It is a staggering number. Gaza's resilience, described so powerfully in Lila Sharif's essay "How Dough Rises in Gaza," is not limitless.

Israel's genocide in Gaza is accompanied by ecocide, as munitions, shrapnel, and the pulverized remains of residences and infrastructure poison Gaza's land, air, and water. Israel's starvation of Gaza has not only entailed the prevention of aid from entering, but the destruction of conditions that give nourishment to human and non-human life. Several contributions to this issue focus on matters of the environment closely linked to food and foodways. After all, as the articles, essays, interview, and reviews in *JQ* 98 and *JQ* 99 make abundantly clear, Palestinian food and foodways are intimately and inseparably intertwined with Palestinians' relationship to the land and the non-human forms of life it sustains. Meanwhile, various Zionist efforts have claimed Palestinian misuse of nature to justify their expulsion from the land. Tom Selwyn's review of Tamar Novick's *Milk and Honey* illuminates the environmental destruction caused by a settler modernity that suggested, whereas Palestinians had squandered Palestine's natural resources, Zionists were better stewards of the land, plants, and animals whose production, through science, they maximized. Yair Agmon's article about the "Farm in the Valley," part of the City of David settler project in Silwan, offers insight on another kind of settler imaginary, which seeks a return to a premodern biblical idyll. Both settler modernity and messianic nostalgia present environmental "solutions" incompatible with Palestinian presence on the land. By contrast, Benjamin Kaplan Weinger in "When the World Collapses in Palestine" offers an ecological reading of Palestinian literature by the likes of Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmud Darwish, and Edward Said, in which he finds a rich archive for thinking and rethinking climate catastrophe and the politics of environmentalism in and beyond Palestine.

Thinking beyond Palestine is, of course, necessary given Palestinian conditions of displacement and diaspora. Louis Brehony's *Palestinian Music in Exile*, reviewed here by Ruba Totah, explores how music, like food, helps sustain identity and community among those dispersed by ethnic cleansing and its supporters on the world stage. Meanwhile, Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley and Jessica Schwalb's article on Chilean Palestinian (or "Chilestinian") cookbooks sheds light on how particular forms of collecting and presenting recipes are linked to transformations within the Palestinian community in Chile, while they also respond to conditions in Palestine itself. These cookbooks' affirmation and assertion of their Palestinianness is worlds apart, meanwhile, from *Jerusalem*, the cookbook co-authored by Israeli Yotam Ottolenghi and Palestinian Sami Tamimi and subject of Reem Farah's critical review essay in this issue. Farah decries *Jerusalem*'s claims to be free of politics, a way of appealing to a liberal Western audience that obscures the settler-colonial power dynamics on the ground in Palestine and between the book's authors. In moments like this, as we bear witness to genocide, unchecked violence, and mass starvation, the politics of cool disinterest are revealed as the politics of cruel indifference.

INTRODUCTION

Food and the Transmission of Culture: Linking Past, Present, and Future

Christiane Dabdoub Nasser

The transmission of food culture is a long, slow, organic process, an immersive experiential learning communicated across generations and across frontiers, with ruptures due to emigration, war, and displacement. The contributions to this second special edition of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* devoted to Palestinian food and foodways draw attention to the role of women, men, and children in securing this transmission, and the deliberate interference in this transmission to serve political agendas. From traditional wedding celebrations in early twentieth-century Palestine to contemporary cookery books and vlogs, transmission is examined through the lenses of Palestinian and diasporic identities, settler colonialism, commodification, resistance, survival, and "gastro-diplomacy." Lifestyles become an embodiment of food practices interwoven with relationships and identities, with the Gaza Food Kitchen as a poignant example of community mobilization and documenting "the heartbreaking [current] realities on the ground." Social media posts and reels show the preparation of traditional dishes while bombs are being dropped on Gaza, familiar existential images as the war enters its second year, confirming how sheer survival is a form of resistance. Settler colonialism is scrutinized as an agent of rupture that unsettles age-old practices, denies Indigeneity, tampers with memory, and alters history in the service of a triumphant Zionism keen on constructing a narrative to support its colonizing claims to Palestine.

The contributions to this issue foreground cases from Chile, Palestine,

and Britain, and engage in a dialogue that reflects steadfastness (*sumud*), imaginative involvement, openness, and resonant listening to consider how traces from the deep past are mediated and activated in the present or suppressed and obliterated in a deliberate act of annihilation. They show us that transmission is complex; that it can be deliberate and structured or spontaneous; that it occurs as an intimate process or a public one; and that it happens through performance, participation, and recollection that combine mind and body.[1] Whether conscious or unconscious, transmission links past, present, and future and is at the heart of preserving cultural practices, shaping identities, and reproducing ways of being. As a visceral identity shaper (both literally and figuratively), it ensures continuity and is sublimated into an act of *sumud*.

An Organic Process: Performance and Continuity

Mona Dorani's essay "From Kitchen to Continuity" uses Finnish anthropologist Hilma Granqvisk's descriptions of wedding celebrations in the village of Artas to analyze food-centered rituals in early twentieth-century Palestine, providing outstanding examples of transmission in action, and of performance as experiential learning, the backbone of transmission. Dorani presents codified roles, food practices, gestures, and songs as living expressions of an ancestral culture transmitted from generation to generation that create meaning for this community and provide them with a sense of identity and continuity. Through repetition and standardization, the celebrations enact heritage for posterity, echoing Claude Lévi-Strauss's assertion about food being implicated in social interactions, cultural reproduction, and heritage.[2]

Oral transmission is the most common way, and until recently perhaps the only way by which one could learn to cook Palestinian food: "Each household has a family dish that it is extremely proud of and is part of the family's identity," writes Joudie Kalla, a British-Palestinian chef, which finds echo in Reem Kassis's *The Palestinian Table* and her statement that for "every recipe there was a story, a snapshot of life, history, and family."[3] In their article "Binding Identity," Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley and Jessica Schwalb tell us of recipes passed down across generations of Palestinian immigrants to Chile "in the form of embodied knowledge, passed on between individuals in home and restaurant kitchens through multiple demonstrations and constant practice of different techniques and flavor adjustments." By the publication of cookbooks and content on online platforms, this knowledge undergoes a "dual shift": it crosses from "a predominantly oral medium to a written/visual one" and shifts from an organic process unfolding in the intimacy of the domestic sphere to commodification and accessibility for a global audience.

During times of war, creativity and improvisation become the norm. Lila Sharif tells us of ten-year-old Renad's vlogs as performances in which she shares for an English-speaking audience recipes for "war maqluba" and other dishes adapted to the deprivation in Gaza. Renad's "tutorials" are her means to survive "one dish at a time," and to transmit Palestinian food culture for posterity. In the context of war and

risk of annihilation, the Gaza Soup Kitchen, established by Hani Almadhoun and his family members in Gaza, is not just about feeding the hungry, but about, in his words, "preserving the dignity and humanity of our community." Almadhoun's brother has no qualms about braving the dangers of war to which Gazans are exposed and using his personal resources to operate a community soup kitchen. According to Hani: "If he runs out of food, he gives whatever he has available, whether it's dates, milk, or even a shirt … he found strength in the solidarity of his community, propelling him forward in his mission to alleviate suffering and bring hope to those in need." Almadhoun confirms to us that through this help "we lifted the voices of those we served, telling their stories and sharing their steadfastness with the world."

By contrast, in Israeli Yotam Ottolenghi and Palestinian Sami Tamimi's bestselling 2012 cookbook *Jerusalem*, transmission is obliterated in the anonymity of references to Palestinian recipes and the absence of citations. As Reem Farah writes in her review essay in this issue: "It may seem like a circumstantial or trivial charge, but how dishes are cited and sourced is the process by which food histories are created." Farah's main criticism is directed at *Jerusalem*'s pretense of taking an "apolitical stance" to whitewash a political history, ultimately producing a "fabrication of transmission." What *Jerusalem* presents is not even a contestation of identity but an example of what Ilan Zvi Beron and Galia Press-Burnathan refer to as "gastro-diplomacy."[4] Farah identifies *Jerusalem*'s normalization operating at three levels: first, by uniting two chefs, one Jewish Israeli and one Palestinian; second, by promoting normalization as a conduit for peace; and third by offering the appearance of coexistence. Transmission thus becomes a tool for appropriation and deception. *Jerusalem* covers up the duplicity of the Zionist project: beneath the narrative, settler-colonial history is brushed over and the conditions that it produces on the ground are seen as natural, matters of diversity rather than dispossession. This deception is seen more bluntly in Israel's repeated denials of genocide or forced starvation of the population of Gaza.

Tom Selwyn, in his review of Tamar Novak's book *Milk and Honey*, draws our attention to the theme of transmission on a macro scale where the notion taken of the land "flowing with milk and honey," becomes a trope for the Zionist project's assumptions of Palestine and informs decisions on how to transform it. Selwyn's review projects a sense of transmission gone awry – the destruction of well-established and sustainable systems of agriculture and animal husbandry to make way for new systems based on the production of plenty, "a veritable triumph of Euro-American capitalism." The examples Selwyn cites are framed by an overarching (Christian and Jewish) Zionist vision of the Holy Land that denies Indigenous memory and "involves the violent displacement of not only Indigenous peoples and their nature, but also of Indigenous' enmeshment with nature."[5]

Against these attempts to displace and erase, transmission provides a framework for creativity and renewal. At its most extreme end, in the absence or scarcity of ingredients, Renad has to invent her "war recipes" and Hani Almadhoun's sister "grind[s] animal feed to make a bread-like substance." But even in less dire circumstances, Bascuñan-Wiley and Schwalb note that cuisine is constantly shaped

and reshaped by a "coexisting tension between tradition and evolution," adopting and adapting preexisting tastes and methods in new and different circumstances. Among fourth-generation Chilean Palestinian cookbook authors, cooking not only affirms their Palestinianness, it also "binds" their Palestinian identity with their Chileanness, blurring the frontiers between what is strictly Palestinian food and what is Chilean. It also affirms a specific diasporic culture that stands on its own, separate from national Palestinian or Chilean cuisines but related to both (and identified sometimes as Chilean-diasporic or as part of Arab cuisine or global cuisine). This process of acculturation and osmosis unfolded over three generations before finding its most recent expression among Chilean Palestinians. The road is long, but the link between food and identity is one key to thinking one's relationship with the "other."[6]

Memory, Gender, and Sumud

Paul Connerton affirms that our experiences emerge largely from our knowledge of the past, and our images of the past serve to legitimate a present social order, and that both these experiences and images are conveyed and sustained by performances.[7] Food involves embodied connections, constantly mediated through daily cooking, forging shared memories, the "social frames of remembering," that link participants in any social order.[8] In his essay *Les festins de l'exil*, Malek Alloula, an Algerian poet born in Oran and living in Paris, raises the question of the relationship between taste, memory, and childhood and explains that if an exile can never carry his country in his rucksack, he still stores within him the memory of its culinary flavors.[9] Stanley Tucci, in an interview on "love, grief, and pasta" and his recently published culinary diary, *What I Ate in One Year*, acknowledges: "You start writing about a piece of sausage, suddenly this whole other memory unfurls."[10] These declarations will probably not dethrone Proust's famous madeleine, but they communicate effectively the power of memory and embodied connections in food transmission.

Food cannot be considered in isolation but must be situated in a wider context of movement, travel, and flows across space. "Stuffed grape leaves, *maqluba*, or hummus and falafel have been passed down across generations, traditionally in the form of embodied knowledge in home kitchens" in Chile, which become lived spaces of interaction between people – a theme that unites Bascuñan-Wiley and Schwalb's piece in this issue with Hanine Shehadeh's essay "Nourishing Resilience" in *JQ* 98.[11] At Artas weddings, song and dance associated with food are a means of ingraining memory in the body and strengthening identification with the community, transforming the body into a receptacle of shared experience (Dorani). Renad's Gazan food content creation during the Gaza genocide becomes "a record of presence-making and presence-affirming" (Sharif). The emergence of Palestinian cookbooks on the Chilean scene five years ago is explained partly as the result of "the desire of authors to record family history for posterity; and a drive to promote Palestinian presence in the face of Israeli violence in the West Bank and Gaza" (Bascuñan-Wiley and Schwalb).[12] Here, the concept of "re-membering" invokes more than the cognitive process of

recalling specific events in the form of mental representations. Rather, "re-membering invokes the material, embodied, and emplaced nature of group membership(s), social practices, and engagements through which people re-join or embed themselves within groups and in doing so reproduce culturally-patterned traditions."[13] Whether under the falling bombs (the antithesis of what Durkheim would have qualified as a period of "effervescence"[14] but a marking event nonetheless) or in the lull of ordinary life of Chilean middle-class circles, transmission, or what Halbwachs would describe as "collective memory," keeps "the past … stored and interpreted."[15] As Bascuñan-Wiley and Schwalb write: "For Palestinians in diaspora, memory establishes and validates national consciousness and embodies the ongoing struggles for Palestinian legitimacy on a global scale."

Rosanne Kennedy and Ben Silverstein write: "Memory's claim is not only to be 'faithful to the past'; memory also makes claims in and for the present."[16] Chilean cookbook authors construct new social organizations and assert Palestinian presence in response to the violence that Israel perpetrates against Palestinians thousands of miles away. Beyond cookbooks, cooking classes (both live and online), online videos and reels, recipes distributed in grocery stores, and personal journals become protagonists of memory. Renad and other Gazans defy death through their online presence. Unlike Zakia, the Palestinian villager from Umm Juni who, as Novak recounts in *Milk and Honey*, disappeared from the historical record once she taught a Jewish emigrant from Russia everything there was to know about cow rearing in Palestine, Renad, Nisreen, Inshirah, and others in Gaza whose videos, interviews, and posts Sharif calls the "pedagogy of life making" and an "assignment to learn and speak up," will remain preserved online.

Women have played a central role in the transmission of food habits and recipes. Jerusalem chef and artist Mirna Bamieh tells us:

> There was always the private act of cooking versus the public one, and somehow, the private one was always in the hands of the women – the nurturing and the caring, of family meals, of weddings and funerals – but the one linked to money, to the economy, to bringing income to the family in relation to the act of cooking was always in the hands of men.[17]

Recipes have been passed on through the generations – from grandmother to mother to daughter, from mother-in-law to daughter-in-law – with women playing a central role in this preservation process and not merely as figureheads "caught in the kitchen."[18] In Gaza, "the tabun method of making bread – a tabun methodology – guided and inspired by relations between women and the land, is imbued with lessons from our foremothers," who inspire sumud and survival amid genocide (Sharif). Bascuñan-Wiley and Schwalb describe transmission within the Palestinian community in Chile, where recipes have been "passed down across generations, traditionally in the form of embodied knowledge in home kitchens and frequently between women"; transmission is thus depicted as a strictly feminine process with women the custodians of culinary knowledge. Dorani underlines a pronounced

gender dimension of coded protocols within Artas wedding celebrations, in which men take charge of the cooking: "Food preparation in such a public setting becomes a way to assert power and social standing within the community and is gendered accordingly." With food so closely associated with codes of hospitality, it follows that within a patriarchal system, men would do the honors of cooking in certain ritualized settings. Yet women have always been an essential part of the Palestinian food system, particularly after the Nakba, when they became guarantors of traditions and practices otherwise doomed to disappear, their contributions more discrete and homebound.

In contrast to the long, slow, organic process of transmission that unfolds across generations in the communication of cultural practices, behavior, beliefs, and the like, the Nakba marked a swift and decisive rupture in Palestine's modern history, splintering a whole society and interrupting generational patterns related to food production and consumption. The current war on Gaza will surely be recognized as another such rupture, if not more extreme. Looking at food and foodways through the prism of the Nakba and the current war on Gaza, one can appreciate the interlinked facets that transmission demonstrates and which the contributions to this issue capture quite effectively. Sharif elaborates on the fact that food is much more than sustenance, but a form of freedom that enables us to continue "as we have always done."[19] As Zeina Ghandour has written elsewhere, "All this relentless cooking and baking and eating and keeping up traditions [in Palestine], by refusing to cease, become political acts of defiance and resistance"; under the bombs, it becomes a form of sumud.[20] Sharif describes cooking food in the context of its scarcity as work for survival against genocide that conjures an Indigenous ethos of presence, longevity, and durability; as Almadhoun writes, it is "about preserving the dignity and humanity of our community." Through her online presence, Renad defies the siege while trying to stay alive; for Chilean Palestinian cookbook authors, food may be a symbol of middle-class urban comfort, but it becomes a tool promoting resistance against Israel. As Bascuñan-Wiley writes, "The continued reproduction of Palestinian cuisine in Chile simultaneously constitutes an engagement with the local context and a form of diasporic sumud (steadfastness) – a long-term and long-distance connection to Palestine and quotidian resistance to symbolic erasure."[21]

The Zionist sabotage and erosion of memory, its relentless effort to usurp Indigenous Palestinian culture and with it the formative cultural accomplishments that originated in the region, are efforts to impose settler colonists as the true bearers of Indigeneity. But Indigeneity is not reducible to fixed and essentialized notions of identity, memory, and belonging, but rather is born out of the sites and processes of struggles that Palestinians in different locations and times are and have been inhabiting. Selwyn's review aptly condenses the impact of traumatic rupture on transmission and the fractures that settler colonialism brings about, making possible a genocide as the one presently unfolding in Gaza. Zakia and Renad's presence disrupts settler hegemony and, according to the Zionist canon, their existence must be blasted into oblivion.

Conclusion

The power of food in shaping identity, both individual and collective, is salient in all of the pieces constituting these special issues of *JQ*, and transmission is the backbone of Palestinian identity formation over generations of social, economic, and cultural interaction in the region. As a long, slow, organic process, transmission is analyzed as an experiential learning process that generates meaning within a community and provides it with a sense of identity and continuity. Recollection or memory, as embodied connections in food transmission, are analyzed from the perspective of recording the past and challenging settler-colonial history based on a "logic of elimination of the native."[22] Memory emerges as a palimpsest affirming a future-oriented Palestinian Indigenousness in historic Palestine. The contributors to these two issues help us see that food-related activities reflect a desire for exploration and recreation, of finding new avenues and renewed states of being. More than that, food becomes a source of self-assertion and renegotiating one's existence in the world, and of unequivocal sumud in the face of tragedy.

Christiane Dabdoub Nasser is an independent cultural consultant, researcher, and writer. She published her first novel, A Moon Will Rise *(David Paul Books), in 2021.*

Endnotes

1 Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

2 See Rebekah Graham, Darrin Hodgetts, and Ottilie Stolte, "Dual-heritage Households: Food, Culture, and Re-membering in Hamilton, New Zealand," *International Review of Social Research* 6, no. 1 (2016): 4–14.

3 As cited in Christiane Dabdoub Nasser, "Palestinian Food: Commensality and Cultural Resistance," in *Routledge Handbook of Palestine*, ed. Michael Dumper and Amneh Badran (London: Routledge, forthcoming 2024).

4 Ilan Zvi Baron and Galia Press-Barnathan, "Foodways and Foodwashing: Israeli Cookbooks and the Politics of Culinary Zionism," *International Political Sociology* 15, no. 3 (September 2021): 338–58.

5 Ruba Saleh and Olaf Corry, "Displacing the Anthropocene: Colonisation, Extinction, and the Unruliness of Nature in Palestine," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5, no. 1 (March 2022): 381–400, quote at 383. See also Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 182–83.

6 Boniface Mongo-M'Boussa, "Les saveurs de l'Autre," in *Se nourrir: L'alimentation en question*, ed. Michel Wieviorka (Auxerre: Sciences humaines, 2009), 179–88.

7 Connerton, *How Societies Remember*.

8 Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, 182–83. See also: Connerton, *How Societies Remember*, 3.

9 Mongo-M'Boussa, "Les saveurs de l'Autre."

10 Eva Wiseman, "'It's All I Think About': Stanley Tucci on Love, Grief, and Pasta," *Observer*, 6 October 2024, online at www.theguardian.com/film/2024/oct/06/its-all-i-think-about-stanley-tucci-on-love-grief-and-pasta (accessed 7 November 2024).

11 See also: Raul C. Matta, Charles-Edouard de Suremain, and Chantal Crenn, "Food and the Fabric of Home," in *Food Identities at Home and on the Move: Explorations at the Intersection of Food, Belonging, and Dwelling*, ed. Matta, de Suremain, and Crenn (New York: Routledge, 2020), 1–15.

12 It is also worth underlining that their Palestinian consciousness was supported by strong political activism in Chile, which was not the case in other Latin American countries with a substantial Palestinian community. Cecilia Baeza, "Palestinians in

Latin America: Between Assimiliation and Long-Distance Nationalism," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 2 (Winter 2014): 59–72.

13 Graham, Hodgetts, and Stolte, "Dual-heritage Households," 5, citing Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, "Communities of Memory and the Problem of Transmission," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 16, no. 1 (2013): 115–31.

14 See Lewis A. Coser's introduction to the edited and translated version of Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*.

15 Halbwach's collective memory is his riposte to Durkheim's "collective effervescence," which is punctual; by contrast, collective memory is a process that ensures preservation and renewal as part of ordinary life.

16 Rosanne Kennedy and Ben Silverstein, "Beyond Presentism: Memory Studies, Deep History, and the Challenges of Transmission," *Memory Studies* 16, no. 6 (December 2023): 1619, citing Paul Ricouer, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 21.

17 "Recipes Carry Voices and Stories: An Interview with Mirna Bamieh," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 98 (Summer 2024): 79–85.

18 Matta, de Surmain, and Crenn, "Food and the Fabric of Home," 9, citing Angela Meah, "Gender," in *Food Words: Essays in Culinary Culture*, ed. Peter Jackson and the CONANX Group (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 88–95.

19 Here Sharif references Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

20 Zeina B. Ghandour, "Falafel King: Culinary Customes and National Narratives in Palestine (I)," *Feminist Legal Studies* 21 (2013): 281–301, quote at 293.

21 Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley, "Sumud and Food: Remembering Palestine through Cuisine in Chile," *Mashriq and Mahjar* 6, no. 2 (2019): 100–29, quote at 100.

22 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409, quote at 387.

Binding Identity: Chilean Palestinian Cookbooks and the Formation of a Diasporic Cuisine

Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley and Jessica Schwalb

Abstract

Foodways have long been at the heart of the long-distance and long-term cultural connection that the Palestinian diaspora in Chile has maintained with the Palestinian homeland and Palestinian identity. Recent years have seen the publication of several new Chilean Palestinian cookbooks that have translated embodied knowledge from diasporic home kitchens into globally accessible written recipes. In this article, we ask why have these cookbooks emerged in this particular historical moment, and what are the cultural implications of these cookbooks for the Chilean Palestinian diaspora? In our response, we draw on ethnographic observation within the Chilean Palestinian foodscape, analysis of several recently published Chilean Palestinian cookbooks, and interviews with cookbook authors. We argue that these cookbooks have emerged now due to three interrelated factors: author interest in documenting and retaining family histories, a market of young consumers looking to engage with Arab food culture, and increased global attention toward ongoing Israeli military violence in Palestine. Furthermore, we argue that unlike cookbooks that center on national cuisines, these diasporic cookbooks stake out a unique position by focusing on the transitory nature of cuisine and the intersection of tradition and innovation in creating and sharing recipes. In the process, these cookbook authors bind Chilean Palestinian identity and inscribe the formation of a distinctly diasporic cuisine.

Keywords:

Diaspora; foodways; Chile; Palestine; cookbooks.

Chile hosts the largest Palestinian diaspora outside of the Middle East, with some demographic estimates putting the number of Palestinian migrants and their descendants in Chile at around 350,000 to 500,000.[1] Given the long-term and long-distance nature of the migratory relationship (the first migrants arrived in Chile as early as the 1850s and Chile and Palestine are separated by over eight thousand miles), most diasporans do not speak Arabic or maintain modern-day Palestinian cultural practices such as fashion, dance, or religious practices.[2] Foodways, however, tell a different story. Whether in restaurants or home kitchens, bakeries or grocery stores, Chilean Palestinians maintain a constant connection to Palestinianness through food and drink.[3]

The recipes and practices surrounding dishes such as stuffed grape leaves, *maqluba*, or hummus and falafel have been passed down across generations, traditionally in the form of embodied knowledge in home kitchens and frequently between women. However, in the last five years, several cookbooks dedicated to Chilean Palestinian cuisine have emerged and circulated throughout Chile (in print) and worldwide (via online platforms). These publications mark notable shifts: from the transmission of recipes predominantly via oral medium to written and visual ones; and from traditions historically available to only a select group of women connected to Chilean Palestinian families to recipes now readily available to a global audience, including cooks outside of the Palestinian diaspora community.

That print capitalism has shifted the relationship between migrants, foodways, and identity in general, and Chilean Palestinians, *comida árabe* (in Spanish: Arab cuisine), and Palestinianness more specifically, is not a new phenomenon nor is it of central interest in this article.[4] Instead, two questions drive our inquiry: Given the 150-year history of the Chilean Palestinian community, why have these cookbooks emerged at this particular moment? And what are the cultural implications of marketing these cookbooks as diasporic or migratory rather than mapping onto a specific national identity or cuisine? Or, phrased differently, what are the temporal, spatial, and flavor-based boundaries of national and transnational cuisines, and who asserts the authority to determine such parameters?

Cookbooks provide a situated lens into the nuances of identity, gender relations, and social values, and are increasingly examined as fundamental cultural texts.[5] In this article, we draw on interdisciplinary perspectives from food, area, and migration studies to frame ongoing negotiations around national and transnational identity formation.[6] Scholarship at the intersection of food and sensation, migration, and memory shows how quotidian forms of cultural production and consumption form the scaffolding of sociality.[7] Particularly within sociology and anthropology, tensions between tradition and innovation in commensality have taken center stage in diasporic contexts.[8] We build on existing conversations to show how (trans) nationalisms remain central to contemporary culture making and how diasporans contest and affirm these categorizations.

This article draws on research conducted by Bascuñan-Wiley between 2016 and 2023 and by Schwalb during a 2019 Fulbright research grant and subsequent study

of the Chilean Palestinian political community. Bascuñan-Wiley spent eighteen months conducting ethnography within Arab foodscapes in Chile's central region. He spent nine months working as a cook, server, and barista in a Palestinian restaurant in Patronato – an important neighborhood for the Palestinian diaspora located in Santiago, Chile's capital. He also cooked in Palestinian home kitchens, participated in online and in-person cooking classes, and shadowed various food workers in their daily routines. This project included interviews with sixty chefs, workers, and customers who frequented Arab restaurants in Chile and digital observation of social media sites central to the Palestinian diaspora community in Chile. Schwalb engaged in archival research of *Mundo Árabe*, an early Chilean Palestinian periodical, as well as interviews with community members involved in student activism, communal institution-building, and political organizing in the Palestine solidarity movement in Chile.

Using notes from both projects to provide context around the *comida árabe* foodscape, we focus on three contemporary Chilean Palestinian cookbooks and interviews with their authors. These cookbooks – *Cocina de la diaspora: Receta con herencia palestina* (2021) by Dalal Halabi; *Cocinando con Thermohabibi: Recetas con raíces palestinas* (2022) by Elizabeth Aduay; and *Nafas: Cuando el disfrute y goce suceden en torno a una buena mesa* (2024) by Mujeres Palestinas por Gaza (a group of Chilean Palestinian women) – can be found in bookstores throughout Chile in print and digital formats. In interviews, usually while cooking or eating together, Bascuñan-Wiley discussed with the cookbook authors their motivations for publishing and sharing their books and the reception their work received within the diaspora.

Analyzing these Chilean Palestinian cookbooks and the social worlds in which they are embedded, and responding to the two central questions of this paper, we make two arguments. First, we argue that these cookbooks emerged in this moment due to the confluence of three factors: market demand; the desire of authors to record family history for posterity; and a drive to promote Palestinian presence in the face of Israeli violence in the West Bank and Gaza. Market demand comes from third- and fourth-generation Palestinian migrants living in Chile who were encouraged to professionalize or study rather than spend time in home kitchens where culinary knowledge transfer typically occurs, as well as from non-Palestinian Chileans with time, money, and an interest in affordable ways to become elite omnivorous consumers.[9] Authors' interest in capturing family history and memory is motivated by the aging and passing of earlier generations of Palestinian immigrants to Chile. The desire to promote Palestinian culture amid recent rounds of Israeli military escalation in the West Bank and Gaza can be understood as the latest iteration of a long anti-colonial struggle for self-determination.

We also argue that by marketing these cookbooks as specifically Chilean Palestinian cookbooks, authors *bind identity* and demarcate a specific diasporic culture that is distinct from Palestinian or Chilean national cuisines. We show that

diasporic food culture exists in its contestations, as authors claim and refute other ways of making or explaining the same dish in an iterative attempt to delineate or blur identity's parameters. The context under which these cookbooks are produced, the authors' profiles, and the content they encompass, from recipes to family stories to photos and font choice, reveal how migrant foodways dance between invention, fusion, and preserving tradition. Accordingly, we address the special issue's themes around recreating home, preserving identity, and asserting Palestinianness by focusing on the ways and places where Palestinian identity emerges and evolves in diaspora.

Cookbook Context

Our analysis in this article takes into consideration the many forms of Palestinian recipes that have emerged and circulate in Chile. The most frequently used and exchanged recipes come in the form of embodied knowledge, passed on between individuals in home and restaurant kitchens through multiple demonstrations and constant practice of different techniques and flavor adjustments. On several occasions, while he cooked with participants, Bascuñan-Wiley received instructions to make dishes or adjust recipes such as "simmer until it is ready" or "pay attention to when you start to smell the garlic." Recipes exist here in shared anecdotes, subtle palates, muscle memory, sensory recognitions, and invested time.

Written recipes, although much less common than embodied knowledge recipes, are also present within the Chilean Palestinian foodscape. Several participants mentioned *Lo mejor de la cocina árabe* (The best of Arab cuisine), initially published in 1983 by Ketty Berr and Norma Yunis, as perhaps the only written *comida árabe* cookbook published and widely distributed in Chile before the surge of cookbooks that emerged circa 2020. This cookbook served as a staple in many households, and one participant even showed Bascuñan-Wiley an old edition with multiple stains and dog-eared pages from seasoned use. *Lo mejor de la cocina árabe* begins with a lengthy introduction that offers a detailed culinary history of the Arab world and asserts the book's aim is to "collect the most popular and traditional recipes from the Arab countries of Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon."[10] Ketty Berr and Norma Yunis draw on interviews with close friends and family members to compile the recipes for the cookbook, which has seen many later editions.[11]

Some recent recipes by Chilean Palestinian authors have been featured in cookbooks that compile recipes from multiple authors, such as Sofia Halabi's feature in *Craving Palestine* (2020) by Farrah Abuasad, Lama Bazzari, and Fadi Kattan. In some cases, Arab cuisine is incorporated as one of many global cuisines, such as in Noëlle Haddad's *El mundo en mi cocina: Recetas de los cinco continentes* (The world in my kitchen: Recipes from the five continents). In other instances, Arab cuisine takes center stage, as in *Cocina árabe*.[12] Each book centers beautiful images of ingredients and meals under preparation alongside recipes with short introductory blurbs. Other

recipes are shared over Instagram pages and other online platforms, written in the captions of food-oriented posts, or incorporated into video "reels" that feature high-definition shots of ingredients being prepared. Some recipes are shared in *comida árabe* cooking classes as instructors pass out paper or digital recipes that the class prepares together. Still others can be found in ethnic grocery stores or bakeries that have handouts explaining how to use the products being sold.

There are also recipes that are held close to the chest. During visits with Chilean Palestinian chefs and home cooks in Chile, Bascuñan-Wiley saw many recipes in restaurants jotted onto notecards and pinned on boards or on refrigerators. Cooks also kept personal journals containing recipes collected and tested over a lifetime or family cookbooks that were printed and circulated in small quantities between family members.

We highlight *Cocina de la diaspora*, *Cocinando con Thermohabibi*, and *Nafas* in particular for their depiction of Chilean Palestinian food as an explicitly diasporic cuisine and their similar release dates (between 2020 and 2024). In what follows, we draw on evidence from these cookbooks, interviews with the authors, and ethnographic context to unpack why and how diasporic cuisines emerge and evolve, as well as how the unique Chilean Palestinian diaspora asserts and contests its own history and political orientation.

Why Now?

The recent boom of *comida árabe* in Chile and the publication of Chilean Palestinian cookbooks mirror a larger global phenomenon, seen in the wave of Palestinian cookbooks published over the last decade.[13] This follows a trend of English language cookbooks that cover famous and emerging national cuisines from around the world, printed in glossy, hardcover editions. Banal nationalism has long been central to the cookbook format.[14] Palestinian gastronationalism has been building globally in an effort to combat Israeli settler-colonial policies of cultural appropriation through food.[15]

Both professionally produced and intentionally resistant to Israeli appropriation, what is unique about recent Chilean Palestinian cookbooks is their explicit focus on the *diasporic* character of this cuisine. They pull inspiration from multiple directions and stake a claim to a new cuisine that is untethered from a single nationality, draws on local and global influences, and combines tradition and innovation. Yet, given that the Chilean Palestinian migratory connection is over 150 years old, why have these cookbooks emerged now? We highlight three factors: market demand, an effort to preserve heritage that might otherwise be lost, and a need to respond to recent and ongoing crises in Palestine itself.

Market Demand

The first reason for the recent emergence of Chilean Palestinian cookbooks involves the market demand for cookbooks as a tool to (re)engage with Chilean Palestinian identity. There are two key separate consumer bases driving this demand: third- and fourth-generation Chilean Palestinians living in Chile; and non-Palestinian Chileans,

largely young professionals. Both groups mirror unique, but coexisting, relations to *comida árabe* that reflect migrant interests in connecting with cultural heritage and nonimmigrant desires to consume novel cultural experiences.[16]

The story of Palestinians in Chile is, in many ways, a classic migration story. Early travelers were young men who left a collapsing Ottoman Empire to seek work in the Americas. They arrived in Chile under difficult circumstances (xenophobia, language barriers, homesickness), but by selling goods from the homeland and local textiles from Santiago throughout the Chilean countryside, they were able to make a living.[17] Their children and grandchildren, the second and third generations, mobilized their parents' resources and their familiarity with Chilean culture, language, and customs to build factories and establish successful businesses. *Their* children, the third and fourth generation and beyond, were encouraged to professionalize or study, becoming doctors, lawyers, and so on. This upward mobility in terms of class and status is common within, though not entirely encompassing of, the Chilean Palestinian community.

The new generation of Chilean Palestinians are thus mostly young professionals who, as teens and young adults, were too busy with schooling to spend time in home kitchens learning traditional recipes from parents and grandparents through embodied knowledge transfer. That said, given more time and expendable income, many Chilean Palestinians of this generation have recently become interested in reengaging with their heritage and making "the dishes mom used to make." The cookbook as a medium affords this generation the ability to access recipes on their own schedule and reengage with familiar cuisine, albeit made somewhat differently than in their families. Many research participants noted they would complement cookbook recipes with cooking classes or phone calls home to ask their mothers for adjustments to written recipes. Whereas embodied knowledge was typically passed down matrilineally, both men and women use cookbooks and experiment with recipes.

In an interview, *Cocina de la diaspora* author Dalal Halabi observed that many of the participants in her virtual Palestinian cooking classes were in their thirties or forties or younger and sought out her classes to connect to the recipes their family members never taught them or could no longer guide them through. Here, the act of cooking diasporic Chilean Palestinian cuisine connects younger generations to specific family members but also to a broader sense of lost or tenuous cultural heritage as an older generation dies out or has less time for teaching recipes or techniques. "We don't want the next generations to forget all that the older generations have done for us," Dalal writes in her cookbook.[18]

The other audience that purchases and engages with the Chilean Palestinian cookbooks are young Chileans who lack familial connection to Palestine but have an interest in learning about a new culture. As Chilean millennials have fewer children and become more educated than their parents, they have more time and access to conspicuous consumption. While they have experienced some social mobility, many seek avenues to access global culture without having to board a flight to another country. Attending cooking classes and buying cookbooks provide ideal opportunities

to access Chilean Palestinian cuisine. Making and sharing a dish from a new cookbook when friends visit, for instance, demonstrates an omnivorous, cosmopolitan palate and consciousness, and the cookbooks make excellent coffee table decor.[19]

For both groups, months of social distancing brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic further catalyzed the production and circulation of these cookbooks, as well as an interest in home cooking. The pandemic created a moment of collective isolation and boredom and a need to establish and maintain community at a distance.[20] In an interview, *Cocinando con Thermohabibi* author Elizabeth Aduay noted:

> From what I have learned during the pandemic, lots of people sought ways to escape the boredom and fear of not knowing what to do … most of my students followed me [on social media] and for one reason or another – they had a friend who was of Arab descent or a family member who was married to someone with Arab heritage – they all had some moment in their life where they experienced their connection with Arab roots.[21]

Buying a cookbook and making the recipes or joining an online cooking class with one of the authors allowed participants to access Chilean Palestinian culture amid the chaos of lockdowns and uncertainty of social isolation.

Archiving for Posterity

The second factor driving the recent publication boom in Chilean Palestinian cookbooks is their material and seemingly *more* permanent (in relation to oral transmission) form of recording family and community histories. Family life and relations are central to Chilean Palestinian identities and many of the informants for this study maintain detailed awareness of their lineage and narratives of the accounts of their parents' or grandparents' migration from Palestine to Chile, interweaving recipes with stories of transnational and transtemporal connectivity.

Food itself and food production and consumption as cultural practices are fundamentally ephemeral.[22] Nutrients are eaten, digested, and expended, and the cycle continues. Meals are shared across tables, commensality is memorialized and eventually forgotten or evolved. Recipes and cookbooks attempt to capture and confine food's transient nature in the form of language and images. The younger generations described above realize that the knowledge of Chilean Palestinian foodways is largely held by older generations who have not written down their recipes and memories. As this generation ages, many solicit written versions of their family's recipes to preserve the older generations' food traditions as well as their family stories.

The cookbook authors note that they took the time and effort to publish their recipes because they believe their cookbooks will stand the test of time. Elizabeth recalled that her motivation to write her cookbook "was born because I wanted to leave an inheritance to my children about Palestinian culture, about Arab culture … the only way that they'll maintain these traditions is to leave them a book which can be a guide for them."[23] Even if the authors' children are too young to be interested in learning about family foodways for some years, they may change their minds later,

and, as parents, the authors might not always be around to educate. Like Elizabeth, Dalal noted:

> Some my age, some younger, entered my [online] classes and they told me, "my *abuela* died, and she never taught me [to cook]." Or "my mom knows the recipes, but never taught me." So, they came to my classes, and they bought the book. They knew that their mothers and grandmothers cooked, but they never before had the need to cook themselves.[24]

Published cookbooks also mark a shift in gender roles. Women have historically been expected to be culture keepers for the family and community and to carry out the labor of food work without recognition for the labor of food provisioning.[25] Cookbooks save women time by allowing readers to self-educate.[26] They also allow men to engage in cooking practices without having to seek out a willing instructor.

These cookbooks are at once an archive for future generations and a reference point to compare how different families make recipes. Both the authors and the readers were eager to have a tangible, material product so that unique recipes could be remembered. Dalal, for instance, explained that her desire to write a cookbook emerged after encountering the lack of existing published work about Chilean Palestinian food: "The Palestinian community in Chile is the largest in the world [outside of Palestine]. So [I wrote this] because someone had never done it before, no one had taken the time to gather recipes and standardize them."[27] Dalal said that publishing this cookbook felt like a (welcomed) obligation for her community and was a necessary project to complete before exploring other culinary directions that were not related to her heritage. Dalal, in the introduction to her cookbook, also takes pains to explain that this work is not representative of "all the Palestinians who came to Chile, but [is] the history of my family – my grandparents, aunts and uncles, parents, cousins, and siblings – through food, ingredients, smells and flavors."[28] Before the instructions for one recipe, the authors in the *Paisanas por Gaza* cookbook note that there are "as many ways to make *marmahon* [*maftul* in Palestine] as Palestinians in the world. *La cocina árabe* is a representation of the Palestinian people: it varies depending on the place, but there is always adaptability to change while retaining the essential resilience."[29]

An Eye on Palestine

The third relevant factor in the emergence of the publication of Chilean Palestinian cookbooks is the increased global attention toward Palestine and Palestinian identity due to recent social media proliferation of images of the escalation of Israeli military violence in Gaza and the West Bank. Most Chilean Palestinians maintain a close eye on what is going on politically in Palestine, despite the fact that direct political involvement as a diaspora has largely waned from its peak in the 1960s and 1970s, when earlier generations used Arab social clubs throughout Chile to organize for Palestine, sending money and advocating locally for Palestinian equal rights. In moments of increased global attention on the Israeli military occupation and the subsequent global surge in Palestinian solidarity movements, the Chilean diaspora draws its attention back to the

land through political organizing, solidarity demonstrations, and, of course, food and other cultural production.[30]

Two events in recent decades have sparked particular diasporic interest in the region. Chilean Palestinians took to the streets during the summer of 2014, protesting Israel's "Operation Protective Edge," which involved heavy bombing of Gaza and resulted in over two thousand Palestinian deaths. Siri Schwabe offers a detailed account of the diasporic mobilization in Chile around the events of that summer and how Chilean Palestinians pushed local politicians to respond and drew on collective memories of the Nakba.[31] Ten years later, Chilean Palestinians are again taking to the streets and to digital platforms to protest Israel's response to Hamas's attack on southern Israel on 7 October 2023, which resulted in the deaths of nearly 1,200 Israelis.[32] After 7 October, Israel launched ground and air invasions throughout Gaza, resulting in, to date, over forty-four thousand Palestinian deaths, well over one hundred thousand injuries, 90 percent of the population displaced, and the destruction of much of Gaza's existing civil infrastructure and agricultural land.[33] The Israeli military has also increased raids and killings in the already-besieged occupied West Bank. Like cities from Chicago to Cape Town, Santiago, Chile, too, has witnessed mass mobilizations in support of a ceasefire. The community who show up at local protests contain a rather wide-ranging spectrum of political affiliations, including non-Palestinian Chilean left supporters who have taken up the Palestinian cause and connected the current struggle against Israeli militarism to the anti-Pinochet and anti-colonialism struggles at home in the Andes, and also many prominent Chilean Palestinian figures and institutions that are strong supporters of the Chilean right.[34]

In addition to protest, food has provided an avenue for diasporic engagement. Club Palestino and other Chilean Palestinian social organizations have held dinners and event nights to solicit member contributions and donations to send to Gaza. Chilean chefs have led online or in-person cooking classes with the aim of educating students about what is going on in Palestine. Influencers have used TikTok or Instagram to share news or personal accounts about family connections in Palestine. Important culinary symbols of Palestinian resistance such as olive trees (which signal durability and steadfastness in difficult conditions) or watermelons (whose red, green, black, and white colors mirror that of the Palestinian flag) are graffitied on walls or stamped on social media posts. Chilean Palestinian cookbooks have also emerged amid these fraught times. Their publication emphasizes Palestinian identity through foodways, fighting against physical erasure in Gaza by asserting symbolic Palestinian presence in diaspora, drawing public attention to historical and contemporary information about the conflict, and serving as diasporic resistance to Israeli culinary appropriation. These foodways constitute a form of diasporic *sumud* (steadfastness), where public demonstrations of national culture and passing on memory across generations are acts of resistance against the ongoing Nakba.[35]

The suite of authors contributing to the *Nafas* cookbook speak directly to uplifting Palestinian food as a means of imbuing pride in one's identity amid images of violence and despair in Gaza. "Food allows us to understand ourselves, carry on our legacy

and identity, enjoy, relish, and feel infinite pride for our heritage," writes one cook in the notes before her recipe for za'tar flatbread.[36] And when violence and physical distance contribute to the increasingly tenuous connection to the land and people of present-day Palestine, food itself provides the most concrete sense of connection with the homeland when actual return is difficult or impossible. "Food is the most pure heritage of the culture that we, like many Palestinian families, left in the Middle East, but which at every family reunion we can return to, even if we have no concrete intention to return," reads another author's note before a recipe for tabbouleh.[37] The book itself is dedicated symbolically and materially to responding to the current genocide in Gaza, as indicated in the book's detailed historical description of the conflict and dedication: "All proceeds from this ebook will be used as humanitarian aid for the population of Gaza who, despite everything, remain firm and resilient in the face of adversity. Palestine, the soul of our soul, will rise again and us with her. *Inshallah*!"[38]

These three explanations for the recent wave of Chilean Palestinian cookbooks overlap. In many instances, both the authors and readers of these cookbooks see their engagement with diasporic foodways as simultaneously a form of political and cultural engagement with Palestinianness. Diasporic foodways have existed in Chile since the earliest Arab migrants crossed the Andes mountains in the mid-1800s, yet, as we highlighted in this section, they have undergone a recent transition within the Chilean Palestinian foodscape. In the following section, we build on this analysis to ask what the consequences of this transition are for the Chilean Palestinian community and the formation of a diaspora-specific cuisine.

Building a Chilean Palestinian Cuisine

> Arab gastronomy, especially Palestinian, is rich in aromas that penetrate the soul: the warmth of turmeric, the strength of saffron, cinnamon, nutmeg, or cloves, which in different mixtures and amounts of flavor [*sazonan*], give a unique character to each plate. These same dishes have accompanied me since my childhood when, despite my young age, my grandmothers and my mother let me help them in the kitchen. And among those smells, colors, and textures, I had the great fortune of learning from them, who passed on to me the entire culinary tradition of my ancestors. It is true that with the passing of centuries, some original ingredients from the Middle East were adapted to our occidental reality, but the resulting dishes continue to be as delicious as the first dishes brought to the continent by our great-grandparents. I invite you to try and get to know Arab gastronomy, which for us symbolizes hospitality. For that reason, each recipe of this book is designed so that our guests feel comfortable in our home; so that each plate says, "Welcome."
>
> – Introduction, *Cocinando con Thermohabibi*[39]

> For me, ingredients speak. Not literally, but I have always believed that you have to give them all the attention in the world. There is not only one recipe for Middle Eastern food, because each dish and its seasoning [*sazón*] is also part of the history of a family and of a Palestinian grandmother. What happens with the cuisine of an immigrant community is that it adapts to the country where they settle. And that is how it was with us, we grew up trying the flavors we inherited, listening to the histories and looking at the photos of those who stayed over there [Palestine]. We learned about flavors through inexact descriptions of spices, ingredients, and cooking methods. We took it and made it ours. *Cocina de la diáspora* is exactly that. A trip through the most classic of dishes and the characteristic aromas of Palestinian cuisine, and, above all, it is a diary of my family so that no one forgets where we came from and the memories those dishes hold. We don't want the next generations to forget what the previous ones did for us.
>
> – Introduction, *Concina de la diáspora*[40]

> We are a group of Chilean Palestinian cooks who decided to come together through Arab cuisine to honor our culture and roots. We compiled 25 recipes from our land that we have inherited from our mothers and grandmothers with the intention of sharing with you a piece of our history and opening a window so that you can look and, we hope, experience the beauty of Palestine. The preparation of *comida árabe* is always a space for creativity, reflection and encounter. It is a moment of enjoyment and togetherness around the table. We form bonds and share our affection through flavors, spices, and textures of the Orient. Our land, Palestine, is thousands of kilometers away. Many of us have not had the opportunity to visit it, but our culture is so powerful that from Chile we have created a bridge that keeps us connected. Our culture is always present in the quotidian: it is in our gestures and in our way of relating; in our language and our way of creating family; in the spirit of resilience and unity, and, of course, at our beloved Palestinian table where every guest is turned into another cousin.
>
> – Introduction, *Nafas*[41]

We begin this section by quoting at length the introductions of three Chilean Palestinian cookbooks to show the reader how the authors choose to introduce themselves in their publications. These excerpts elucidate the points from the previous section, as the authors center the importance of memory, family, and Palestine. These framing quotations set the scene for the following discussion of how these cookbooks

bind identity and stake a claim to cuisine that is neither strictly Palestinian nor Chilean but diasporic in its very nature.

These cookbooks, in their published form, fix and concretize for a moment a flowing, permeable diasporic food. The authors resist a singular or universal assertion of what Chilean Palestinian food is or is not; they ground recipes and instructions in their specific familial traditions and memories, explicitly noting that distinct experiences across the diaspora are reflected in unique methods, substitutions, and rituals around food. But as they do so, they begin to stake out an implicit consensus about the fundamentals of a Chilean Palestinian cuisine. Diaspora here exists between assimilation and globalization, in both tradition and innovation, and in the separation from and connection to a Palestinian homeland.[42] This section tracks the blurring of these binaries and the emergence of a diasporic cuisine through the publication of Chilean Palestinian cookbooks.

Palestinian Roots

The subtitles ("Recipes with Palestinian Heritage" and "Recipes with Palestinian Roots") of two of the cookbooks indicate the centrality of Palestinianness to the cuisine contained within. Foodways themselves are central to Palestinian identity in general, both in terms of their cultural importance as a tool of resistance against Israeli occupation (in the form of symbology and hunger strikes, for instance) and in terms of the material and sensory power of food to transmit memories, traditions, and a sense of communal belonging.[43] This is particularly true in the Chilean Palestinian case: where other forms of culture have been forgotten or assimilated, food practices persist.[44]

The rootedness of the diaspora in Palestinianness draws on individual and familial connections that provide a direct link to an imagined homeland through food.[45] Elizabeth's remark that "Arab gastronomy, especially Palestinian, is rich in aromas that penetrate the soul," for instance, connects the sensorial and material dimensions of cuisine to an intangible but fundamental dimension of individual identity. Dalal shows that flavors share the stories of whole communities and lineages, emphasizing the centrality of family in passing on recipes: "Each dish and its seasoning [*sazón*] is also part of the history of a family and of a Palestinian grandmother."[46] Mujeres por Palestina also write about these intergenerational and geographic links, describing their aim to use recipes and food to open "a window so that you can look and, we hope, also experience the beauty of Palestine."[47] Food thus has the power to transport the reader, the cook, and the eater through time and across distance, bringing them closer to each other, their histories, and the homeland.

The roots of the Chilean Palestinian diaspora have grown deep over the centuries and through multiple generations. The recipes found within modern cookbooks are linked to the recipes brought by the first migrants, the grandparents and great-grandparents of these cookbook authors. In one sense, these recipes remain frozen in time from that initial arrival. While culinary traditions in Palestine continued to evolve, diasporans in Chile kept a strict loyalty to those initial dishes that so powerfully

represent home. Take the following story that many participants referenced during fieldwork, described here by Saqqa and Abu Eid:

> In 2005, during his first encounter with Palestinians in Chile, President [Mahmud] Abbas would be surprised by the fact that "in Chile they eat some food that we even forgot how to cook," noting the deeply rooted Palestinian traditions of the largest Palestinian community outside the Arab world. After decades of immigrating, maybe many Palestinians have lost their language and even some traditions, but their hearts have remained in the right place. Latin America remains one of the strongest sources of support for Palestine and her people.[48]

Here again we see the centrality of roots and of "keeping" traditions in their original form throughout the years. Nabi, who migrated to Chile from Palestine in 2011 and opened a Palestinian-themed restaurant and cafe, noted that he was shocked by what Chileans considered Palestinian food when he arrived. "The foods they eat here every day we eat back home during celebrations, like weddings," he noted.[49] Nabi pointed to *mahshi,* a genre of dish that involves stuffing peppers, potatoes, zucchini, and other vegetables full of a rice, meat, and tomato mixture. Throughout Santiago, *rellenos* (the term for "stuffed" in Spanish used to refer to these dishes) are as ubiquitous on the menus of restaurants selling *comida árabe* as shawarma, falafel, and hummus.

The centrality and transtemporal "permanence" of particular dishes are reflected in the indices of the cookbooks. Implicitly or explicitly, these cookbook authors confirm and concretize a general understanding of what foods constitute Chilean Palestinian cuisine through their publications. In other words, they have built a canon and bound a unique, diasporic food identity. All three cookbooks have recipes for *arroz árabe* (rice with noodles), *hojas de parra* (stuffed grape leaves), hummus, pita bread, baklava, kebab, tabbouleh, *rellenos*, *fatayer* (stuffed puff pastry), among others. Whether a modification or exact replica of an earlier tradition, recipes are frequently prefaced with comments about the centrality of the dish to the author's childhood and family or to Palestinianness. Dalal, for example, writes, "This is one of the simplest recipes you will find in this book. Olives are an important part of the culinary identity of Palestine and the Middle East in general. From its original form, we can add flavor and they can be used for different preparations and eaten for breakfast."[50] This consistent link to homeland histories and traditions is common across each of the three cookbooks, first binding the recipes to the larger history of Palestinian migration in order to then establish a Chilean Palestinian cuisine.

Local Influences

While the cookbook authors heavily emphasize the importance of their Palestinian roots, they also acknowledge that the long-term and long-distance nature of the diasporic connection to Palestine means that Chilean Palestinian cuisine has both strayed from what is eaten in Palestine today and incorporates other local influences. For instance, Elizabeth notes, "With the passing of centuries, some original ingredients

from the Middle East were adapted to our occidental reality."[51] Dalal similarly writes that "the cuisine of an immigrant community … adapts to the country where they settle."[52] These changes came from local influences, market expectations, and producer creativity, and are woven into the cookbooks' larger assertion of what makes up this new diasporic cuisine.

Authors honor Chile's influential mark on Chilean Palestinian cuisine through ingredients as well as recipes themselves, noting the similarities and frequent overlap between Chilean and Palestinian produce, spices, and more.[53] After commenting on garlic's significance to Palestinian food in the introduction to her book, Dalal continues to say that "in Chile, [garlic] forms the base of *sofritos* [a green sauce]."[54] Later, Dalal describes *tahini* paste as akin to mayonnaise, the condiment ubiquitous on Chilean french fries, hot dogs, and sandwiches. And by including recipes for "legibly Chilean" dishes such as *empanada de pino* (dough wrapped around a meat and olive mixture) or *queque aleman* (a chocolate cake) alongside hummus and kibbe, authors further weave Palestinian and Chilean identity together. Chapters are not separated into "Chilean" and "Palestinian" influences in the three books, but rather into appetizers, entrees, and desserts.

The cookbooks' lack of nationality-based separation mirrors a key factor in Chilean Palestinian cuisine itself: there is a significant overlap in ingredients, including produce and spices, grown in Chile and in Palestine. While early Palestinian migrants to Chile had to substitute ingredients in their favorite dishes (choosing beef over goat or lamb, for example), similar regional climates meant that many ingredients could be found fresh locally (for example, Chile's wine industry meant that grape leaves were available to make stuffed grape leaves). In an interview, Dalal noted, "Cumin and oregano are the base of both Chilean and Palestinian culture. In Chile, we have *aji* (chili), which is sort of like paprika. In many ways, the base is very similar!"[55] Some of these early substitutions and adjustments stuck, while in other cases, increasing global trade and local agriculture made products (such as goat and olive oil) more readily available.

Consumer expectations of Chilean Palestinian food also influence what is considered part of this diasporic cuisine. Across the three cookbooks, authors alternate between describing the food as Arab food (*comida árabe*), Mediterranean food (*comida mediterranea*), Oriental food, (*comida del oriente*), and Palestinian food (*comida palestina*). Dalal, for instance, spends her first chapter outlining the essential ingredients for Chilean Palestinian food, describing rose water as "one of the most aromatic ingredients in oriental food" and garlic as a "much-used bulb in food of the Mediterranean."[56] Authors thus situate their cuisine within a larger Arab identity and acknowledge that diasporic cuisine is influenced not only by Chile and Latin America but also by the broader Levantine history and the multiple geographies of this diaspora. Many Chilean Palestinians, especially those expelled from Palestine in 1948, may well have spent time in Beirut, Amman, Cairo, Buenos Aires, and São Paulo before making their way west of the Andes. Authors consistently contrast the specificity of Palestinian food and even their own family's particular recipe with the broader, multi-hyphenate foodways to which Chilean Palestinians are connected.

At the same time, market forces influence the framing and content of the cookbooks.

Cookbook authors must respond to an "orientalist market inertia" within the foodscape of *comida árabe* in Chile.[57] Stemming from circulating popular culture discourses (such as the ever-popular Turkish television dramas), Chilean customers expect from restaurants and cookbooks a particular Orientalist representation of "Arabness" in the restaurant experience and cookbook imagery. The font for the section titles in Elizabeth's book, for example, alludes to Arabic script, highlighting familiar or cliché representations of Palestinianness or Arabness.[58] Elizabeth's partnership with the Thermomix brand, meanwhile, fundamentally shapes the recipe instructions, and the marketing of the book as a promotion is tied to a particular cooking tool. For Chileans unfamiliar with Palestinian food in particular, the broader legibility of *comida árabe* drives interest (and purchase) of cookbooks, spices, and takeout of this diasporic cuisine.

In describing how these cookbooks are shaped by Palestinian roots and local influences separately, we do not intend to suggest that these are separate processes. Rather, there is a coexisting tension between tradition and evolution that itself produces a culinary canon. Authors also create a unique diasporic food by utilizing and encouraging substitution, invention, and fluidity. In an introduction to the final chapter of her cookbook, Dalal frames her recipes for za'tar pizza and vegetarian kibbe by saying: "I have taken the liberty to play and make a personal goal: to take spices, ingredients, and classic flavors in everyday recipes. To mix origins, reinvent, and above all, make cooking something fun."[59] Elizabeth plays with the possibilities of "robot cuisines" and the potential of technology to influence how and what we cook, explaining, "I was able to adapt the recipes of my Palestinian ancestors to this marvel of a robot, without losing even a pinch of their force or flavor."[60] By drawing on multiple influences, whether Chilean cuisine or technological advances, and still staking a claim to a unique but cohesive identity, Chilean Palestinian food culminates as its own cuisine. These authors stake a claim to Chilean Palestinian cuisine as a unique and independent set of culinary and gastronomic practices through the implicit and explicit presentation choices found throughout their cookbooks.

The Formation of a Diasporic Cuisine

Cookbooks make up one element of the Chilean Palestinian foodscape alongside Sunday gatherings at home tables, sit-down and casual *comida árabe* restaurants scattered throughout the country, online food blogs and social media accounts run by digital foodies, and the ethnic grocery stores and bakeries selling homeland ingredients. Cookbooks are unique, though, in that they aim to bind the ephemeral aromas, flavors, and feelings of foodways through published print and images. Cookbook authors attempt to take a snapshot and to capture the essence of a larger whole for their reader. Yet, while most cookbooks are dedicated to national culture as assumed singularities (for example, Chinese or Peruvian cuisine),[61] Chilean Palestinian cookbooks are dedicated to culture as understood multiplicities. Their authors foreground the evolution of food practices that draw on homeland roots and local innovations, as well as the constant interactive process of changing and adapting

recipes and flavors. Still, authors are self-aware that the task of binding identity is weighty or even impossible.

The process of staking a claim to this contested, constantly evolving diaspora cuisine brings challenges. Dalal, when asked what new food projects were upcoming after the publication of *Cocina de la Diaspora*, spoke of food-based television shows, podcasts, and other cookbooks that revolved around heritage and cultural stories through cooking but not Chilean Palestinian cuisine. She reflected on her anxieties around publishing *Cocina de la Diaspora*, explaining that she had created this cookbook before her other culinary interests to satisfy herself, her family, and her community. Dalal worried about the book's reception in general and by *paisanas* (countrywomen) in particular. She felt an immense pressure to get the book *right*, judged by an unspoken but omnipresent set of criteria from her imagined community. As one of the first authors to render Chilean Palestinian cuisine legible in the form of a published cookbook, she attempted to capture the transitory nature of the diaspora through images and words, but herself acknowledged that others may have framed or detailed recipes differently. *Cocina de la Diaspora* and its contemporaries have attempted to make explicit a cuisine that has been implicit for decades, and in doing so have bound a new diasporic food canon, which will be applauded, critiqued, and built upon for generations to come.

Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley is an assistant professor of sociology at Stony Brook University. His research examines the sensory dimensions of migration through global foodways.

Jessica Schwalb is a writer, organizer, and researcher based in Chicago. She graduated from Northwestern University in 2019 and was a 2020 Fulbright Research Scholar.

Research for this article was supported by a graduate research grant from the Middle East and North African Studies Program at Northwestern University and a dissertation research award from the Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs.

Endnotes

1 Cecilia Baeza, "Palestinians in Latin America: Between Assimilation and Long-distance Nationalism," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 43, no. 2 (2014): 59–72.

2 The majority of these migrants originated from the towns of Bethlehem and Bayt Jala and were overwhelmingly Christian (Greek Orthodox). Several Greek Orthodox churches can be found in Santiago, though many migrants have converted to Catholicism given the influence and presence of the Catholic Church in Chile. Engagement with the Greek Orthodox Church and religious culture mostly occur around events like weddings or funerals.

3 We use Palestinianness here the way Amy Rowe describes Lebaneseness: "[P]eople of Lebanese ancestry refer to themselves as Americans, yet will momentarily describe 'Lebanese' aspects of their lives – family values, entrepreneurial skills, blood (which relates to kinship, race, genealogy, appearance), religious faith, etc. Yet they rarely actually use the term Lebanese when describing these things; what they do is use the food as a medium to convey these core

points. In this way, the food forms an anchor for communication. It is not a symbol for Lebanese culture; in a sense it is Lebanese culture." Amy E. Rowe, "Mint Grows through the Cracks in the Foundation: Food Practices of the Assimilated Lebanese Diaspora in New England (USA)," *Food and Foodways* 20, nos. 3–4 (2012): 211–32, quote at 212.

4 See, for instance: Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2016); Anita Mannur, "Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora," *Melus* 32, no. 4 (2007): 11–31; and Walter Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (New York: Routledge, 1982).

5 Janet Theophano, *Eat My Words: Reading Women's Lives through the Cookbooks They Wrote* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

6 Peggy Levitt and B. Nadya Jaworsky, "Transnational Migration Studies: Past Developments and Future Trends," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 33, no. 1 (2007): 129–56, online at doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.33.040406.131816.

7 See Jon D. Holtzman, "Food and Memory," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 361–78; and David E. Sutton, "Food and the Senses," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 39 (2010): 209–23.

8 Sidney W. Mintz, and Christine M. Du Bois, "The Anthropology of Food and Eating," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (2002): 99–119.

9 Josée Johnston and Shyon Baumann, *Foodies: Democracy and Distinction in the Gourmet Foodscape* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

10 Cristina Correa Siade, "Receta para las nuevas generaciones," *Al Damir* 109 (December 2015): 50–51, online at issuu.com/revistaaldamir/docs/aldamir_baja_19_nov_fd09d3b43eb1fb/50 (accessed 23 September 2024).

11 Siade, "Receta."

12 Published by Origo Press, 2013, Santiago.

13 See, for instance: Joudie Kalla, *Palestine on a Plate* (Northampton, MA: Interlink Books, 2016); Sami Tamimi and Tara Wigley, *Falastin* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2020); Yasmin Khan, *Zaitoun* (New York: Norton, 2019); Reem Kassis, *The Palestinian Table* (New York: Phaidon, 2017); Laila El-Haddad and Maggie Schmitt, *The Gaza Kitchen* (Washington, DC: Just World Books, 2021); Christiane Dabdoub Nasser, *Classic Palestinian Cuisine* (London: Saqi Books, 2013); Fadi Kattan, *Bethlehem: A Celebration of Palestinian Food* (San Francisco, CA: Hardie Grant, 2024); and Heifa Odeh, *Dine in Palestine* (Salem, MA: Page Street Publishing, 2022).

14 Arjun Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 30, no. 1 (January 1988): 3–24.

15 Michaela DeSoucey, "Gastronationalism: Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union," *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 3 (2010): 432–55, online at doi.org/10.1177/0003122410372226. For detailed histories of the "hummus wars" and other negotiations around culinary Zionism, see: Ari Ariel, "The Hummus Wars," *Gastronomica* 12, no. 1 (February 2012): 34–42, online at doi.org/10.1525/GFC.2012.12.1.34; Nir Avieli, "The Hummus Wars Revisited: Israeli-Arab Food Politics and Gastromediation," *Gastronomica* 16, no. 3 (Fall 2016): 19–30, online at doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2016.16.3.19; Ilan Zvi Baron and Galia Press-Barnathan, "Foodways and Foodwashing: Israeli Cookbooks and the Politics of Culinary Zionism," *International Political Sociology* 15, no. 3 (September 2021): 338–58, online at doi.org/10.1093/ips/olab007; Jacob Bessen, "Student Brief: Culinary Zionism," *Gastronomica* 16, no. 4 (Winter 2016): 18–26, online at online at doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2016.16.4.18; Dafna Hirsch and Ofra Tene, "Hummus: The Making of an Israeli Culinary Cult," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 13, no. 1 (2013): 25–45, online at doi.org/10.1177/1469540512474529.

16 Johnston and Baumann, *Foodies*.

17 See Nadim Bawalsa, *Transnational Palestine: Migration and the Right of Return Before 1948* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2022); and Myriam Tenorio and Patricia González, *La inmigración árabe en Chile* (Santiago de Chile: Instituto Chileno-Árabe de Cultura, 1990).

18 Dalal Halabi, *Cocina de la Diáspora: Recetas con herencia palestina.* (Santiago de Chile: Grijalbo, 2021), 13.

19 It should be noted that some Chileans have a good understanding and ability to make Chilean Palestinian cuisine because they or their parents (almost entirely women) have worked as *empleadas* (nannies) within

Chilean Palestinian homes, often learning to cook traditional dishes from the women they work for and then taking those teachings back to their own families.

20 Juan Pablo Pinilla, José Antonio Román Brugnoli, Daniela Leyton Legües, and Ana Vergara del Solar, "My Home Quarantine on an App: A Qualitative Visual Analysis of Changes in Family Routines during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Chile," *Qualitative Sociology* 46 (2023): 221–44.

21 Interview with Elizabeth Aduay, 3 March 2023, Santiago.

22 Annemarie Mol, *Eating in Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); Annemarie Mol, "I Eat an Apple: On Theorizing Subjectivities," *Subjectivity* 22 (2008): 28–37.

23 Interview with Elizabeth Aduay, 3 March 2023, Santiago.

24 Interview with Dalal Halabi, 30 January 2023, Santiago.

25 That said, many of the women interviewed for this project mention or demonstrate a "differential consciousness" where they find empowerment through cooking and providing amid what they recognize are patriarchal relations of power. Carole Counihan, "Mexicanas' Food Voice and Differential Consciousness in the San Luis Valley of Colorado," in *Food and Culture: A Reader*, ed. Carole Counihan and Penny Van Esterik (New York: Routledge, 2012), 187–200.

26 Cookbooks are just one of many technological and class developments that have saved women time (especially since many Chilean Palestinian recipes take so long to prepare). For instance, Elizabeth Aduay promotes the Thermomix, a machine with dozens of functions that facilitate mixing, chopping, blending, and so on. And as the diaspora experienced upward class mobility, many families could afford to pay nannies to do their cooking and house chores and to buy more expensive pre-prepared ingredients (such as potatoes or bell peppers cored by vendors in preparation for stuffing).

27 Interview with Dalal Halabi, 30 January 2023, Santiago.

28 Halabi, *Cocina*, 11.

29 Mujeres Palestinas por Gaza, *Nafas: Cuando el disfrute y goce suceden en torno a una buena mesa* (self-published online, 2023), 31.

30 Chilean-Palestinian solidarity demonstrations after 7 October 2023 have spanned from cultural production, direct action and marches, and fundraisers. For additional context, see Sammy Feldblum, "Chileans for Gaza," *Dissent*, 11 June 2024, online at www.dissentmagazine.org/online_articles/chileans-for-gaza/ (accessed 1 October 2024).

31 Siri Schwabe, *Moving Memory: Remembering Palestine in Postdictatorship Chile* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2023).

32 This diasporic engagement at a distance has been made possible with the ubiquity of social media, as diasporans instantly receive videos and photos from connections and organizations in Palestine. As the *Nafas* cookbook describes, "The citizens of the world watch genocide live from the screens of their 'smartphones.'" Mujeres Palestinas por Gaza, *Nafas*, 6.

33 AJ Labs, "Israel-Gaza War in Maps and Charts: Live Tracker," *al-Jazeera*, 9 October 2023 (updated 30 September 2024), online at www.aljazeera.com/news/longform/2023/10/9/israel-hamas-war-in-maps-and-charts-live-tracker (accessed 1 October 2024).

34 Jess Schwalb, "What a BDS-Supporting President Means for Chile's Jewish and Palestinian Diasporas," *Jewish Currents*, 10 March 2024, online at jewishcurrents.org/what-a-bds-supporting-president-means-for-chiles-jewish-and-palestinian-diasporas (accessed 1 October 2024).

35 Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley, "Sumud and Food: Remembering Palestine through Cuisine in Chile," *Mashriq and Mahjar: Journal of Middle East and North African Migration Studies* 6, no. 2 (2019): 100–129, online at doi.org/10.24847/66i2019.239 (accessed 1 October 2024).

36 Mujeres Palestinas por Gaza, *Nafas*, 23.

37 Mujeres Palestinas por Gaza, *Nafas*, 25.

38 Mujeres Palestinas por Gaza, *Nafas*, 3.

39 Elizabeth Aduay, *Cocinando con Thermohabibi*: *Recetas con Raíces Palestinas* (Santiago de Chile: Gráfica LOM, 2022), 5.

40 Halabi, *Cocina*, 13.

41 Mujeres Palestinas por Gaza, *Nafas*, 3.

42 Or, we can say, between gastronationalism and gastro-transnationalism. DeSoucey defines gastronationalism as "the use of food production, distribution, and consumption to create and sustain the emotive power of national attachment." DeSoucey, "Gastronationalism," 433. Klein defines gastro-transnationalism as "the active diffusion of foods and culinary techniques, technologies, knowledge, and

ideas across national borders." Jakob Klein, "Eating Potatoes Is Patriotic: State, Market, and the Common Good in Contemporary China," *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 48, no. 3 (2019): 340–59, quote at 349.

43 See Efrat Ben-Ze'ev, "The Politics of Taste and Smell: Palestinian Rites of Return," in *The Politics of Food*, ed. Marianne Elisabeth Lien and Brigitte Nerlich (Oxford: Berg, 2004), 141–60; Anne Meneley, "Blood, Sweat and Tears in a Bottle of Palestinian Extra-Virgin Olive Oil," *Food, Culture, and Society* 14, no. 2 (2011): 275–92, online at doi.org/10.2752/175174411X12893984828872; and Anne Meneley, "Resistance Is Fertile!" *Gastronomica* 14, no. 4 (November 2014): 69–78, online at doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2014.14.4.69.

44 Bascuñan-Wiley, "Sumud."

45 Plant-based metaphors for diaspora are plentiful (branches, roots, forests). Even diaspora means "the spread of seed" in Greek. We use and refer to roots and rootedness here drawing on the language found within the texts we are analyzing, not to impose our own understanding of diaspora as such.

46 Halabi, *Cocina*, 12

47 Mujeres Palestinas por Gaza, *Nafas*, 3.

48 Fayez Saqqa and Xavier Abu Eid, "Palestine and Latin America: A Legacy of Solidarity and Brotherhood," *This Week in Palestine*, no. 175 (2012).

49 Interview with Nabi, 22 November 2022, Santiago.

50 Halabi, *Cocina*, 13.

51 Aduay, *Cocinando*, 144.

52 Halabi, *Cocina*, 12.

53 We can connect this to Homi Bhabha's notion of hybridity and the blending of influences from multiple origins. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

54 Halabi, *Cocina*, 20.

55 Interview with Dalal Halabi, 30 January 2023, Santiago.

56 Halabi, *Cocina*, 20. On the growing popular and academic interest in Levantine cuisines, see Anny Gaul, Graham Auman Pitts, and Vicki Valosik, eds., *Making Levantine Cuisine: Modern Foodways of the Eastern Mediterranean* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021).

57 Nicholas Bascuñan-Wiley, "Sensory Authenticity: Embodying and Commodifying 'the Other'," in *Consuming Bodies: Body Commodification and Embodiment in Late Capitalist Societies*, ed. Jackie Hogan, Fae Chubin, and Sarah Whetstone (New York: Routledge, forthcoming).

58 Matthew Jaber Stiffler, "'Serving Arabness': Imagery and Imagination of Arab-themed Restaurants," in *Arab American Aesthetics: Literature, Material Culture, Film, and Theatre*, ed. Therí A. Pickens (New York: Routledge, 2018), 63–85.

59 Halabi, *Cocina*, 215.

60 Aduay, *Cocinando*, 5.

61 Appadurai, "How to Make a National Cuisine."

From Wasteland to Eden: Environmental Territoriality and the Remaking of the Political Ecology of East Jerusalem

Yair Agmon

Abstract

This article tracks the relationship between waste, environmentalism, and settler territoriality and its mobilization in the remaking of East Jerusalem's political ecology. While using environmental discourses for Palestinian dispossession is as old as the colonization of Palestine, this article shows how, in recent years, the Israeli state and private settler organizations have re-imagined the natural environment of the Wadi al-Rababa neighborhood and the Hinnom Valley through the lens of Jewish biblical cultural memory to pursue territory. It draws on extensive fieldwork in the heritage tourism sector to demonstrate how conceiving the Hinnom Valley as transitioning from a neglected wasteland to a biblical Eden is used to claim a Jewish relationship to land and sever Palestinian claims to property and sovereignty. It also demonstrates how settler political ecologies are deeply tied to racialization work, producing differences vis-à-vis temporality and the environment.

Keywords:

Political ecology; wasteland; temporality; dispossession; Indigenous "extinction"; state environmentalism; greenwashing.

The Hinnom Valley is a sliver of land at the foothills of the small Palestinian neighborhood of Wadi al-Rababa, located southeast of Jerusalem's Old City (figure 1).[1] Over the last five years, the once quiet valley, home to agricultural lands owned by Wadi al-

Rababa's residents, has undergone a radical transformation as Israeli authorities developed the area for tourism. This development has dispossessed Palestinians from their lands and severed their cultural and communal practices. Israeli authorities nevertheless frame this environmentally destructive development as an act of protecting the natural environment of the Hinnom Valley. Indeed, over three years of observing and documenting the process of dispossession in the Hinnom Valley – interviewing park officials, employees, and visitors, and during over a dozen guided tours – I was told again and again that the park's development was designed to safeguard the natural and open space of Jerusalem's "Green Belt" and conserve the valley's biblical landscape for its valuable cultural heritage.[2] This act of protection, I was told, was urgently needed in response to the valley's environmental dereliction. Authorities proposed to remedy the disrepair by peeling back Palestinian life to restore the landscape to its original state, an agricultural Eden.

Embedded in the vision offered by the Israeli state is the imagination of the non-human environment of Wadi al-Rababa and the Hinnom Valley, as if shifting on an axis from wasteland to Eden. On this imagined axis, Palestinians, the longtime owners and cultivators of the land, are associated with the barren and unproductive wasteland, a trope as old as the colonization of Palestine. In contrast, Jewish actors, such as authorities, settlers, and tourists, are imagined as reviving a flourishing Eden and are thus given authority over the land as those capable of its improvement – that is, adding value to supposedly unproductive land – a dynamic captured in the now infamous Zionist desire to make the desert bloom. This particular environmental imaginary – a term defined by geographer Diana Davis as the "constellation of ideas that groups of humans develop about a given landscape" – is not only constructed but entirely false, drawing heavily on colonial and imperial desires to possess lands.[3] And yet, these imaginaries carry immense power to change the material conditions of communities, leading to the loss of property, cultivation areas, relationship to land, and sovereignty. Moreover, as Edward Said argued, environmental imaginaries, and in particular Zionism's political ecology, are powerful tools to construct racialized hierarchies and produce property regimes by rendering cultural difference as natural and timeless.[4]

This article shows how environmental distinctions – between wastelands and Edens, disrepair and rejuvenation, ruins and revival, desert and bloom, nonlife and life – are drawn and mobilized for the material displacement of Palestinians from their property and cultural practices. Such distinctions are fundamentally temporal as they denote a moment of rupture, an axis of time, and subsequent improvement by settlers – progressing from wasteland to Eden. To demonstrate how the state and settlers claim symbolic and material ownership over nature based on biblical interpretations of Palestine's landscape, this article first presents the unfolding of events of the last five years and the historical circumstances that produced the Hinnom Valley as an open space. Subsequently, I discuss the legal construction of the Hinnom Valley as empty, a move that allowed Israeli authorities to seize

control of privately owned Palestinian land. Then, the article examines how the Farm in the Valley – colloquially known as the "Biblical Farm" – is constructed as an ecological unit of rejuvenation, an Eden, to claim a Jewish patrimony over the natural world.

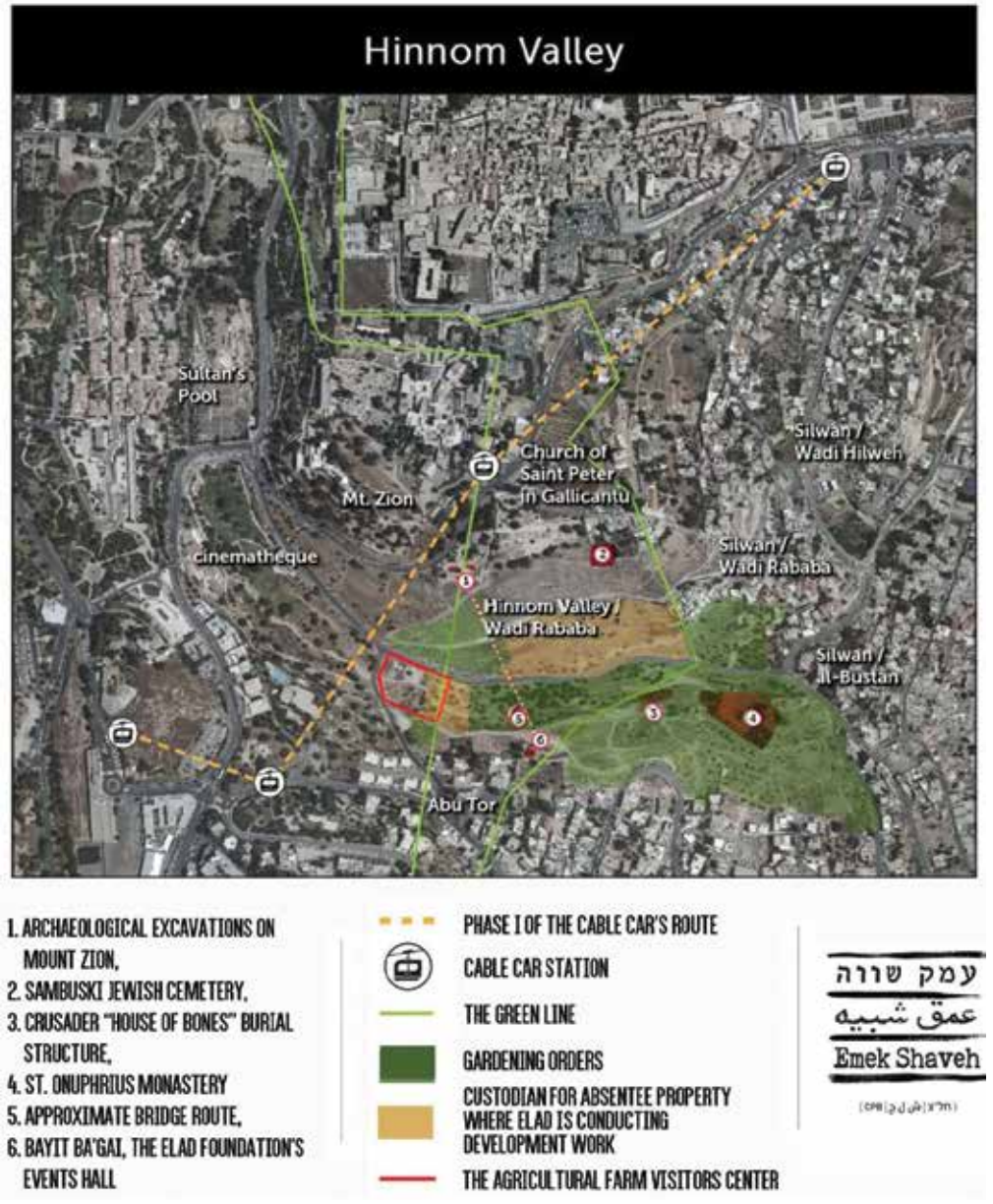


Figure 1. The Hinnom Valley/Wadi al-Rababa Area, November 2022. Map courtesy of the Israeli cultural rights NGO, Emek Shaveh, online at emekshaveh.org/en/hinnom-valley-monitoring-report/ (accessed 2 October 2024).

Figure 2. A view of the Hinnom Valley agricultural lands, August 2021. Photo by author.

Figure 3. A view of the Wadi al-Rababa neighborhood, August 2021. Photo by author.

It is critical to note that I have chosen to focus here on the Israeli mechanisms of settler-colonial dispossession, given my own proximity to and "implication" in these systems as a Jewish Israeli Jerusalemite.[5] This focus by no means suggests that residents of Wadi al-Rababa are passive actors who have not mounted any resistance. Indeed, Palestinian residents of Wadi al-Rababa, alongside a coalition of supporters from adjacent

neighborhoods, have filed legal opposition to the land seizures and undertaken a public campaign to call into question the morality of putting Palestinian private property in the hands of messianic settlers – a grassroots resistance I have observed, participated in, and remain in close connection to. My intention here is to contribute to the understanding of structures of environmental dispossession and refrain from reproducing the much-criticized dialectical dimension of settler-colonial theory in which Indigenous people appear only in opposition to state-led oppression.[6] Thus, while the focus of the paper is on the Israeli state and settlers, its commitment lies with the Palestinian residents of Wadi al-Rababa seeking justice, sovereignty, and decolonization of their lands.

Wadi al-Rababa, the Hinnom Valley, and Territorial Ecology

In 2019, when I began my fieldwork in nearby Wadi Hilwa, Batn al-Hawa, and the City of David, the valley was a quiet enclave in the heart of the densely populated city, and far from a tourist destination. Yet, throughout my frequent trips to the valley during 2021, 2022, and 2023, each visit introduced a host of new developments, rapidly encroaching into Palestinian land: a road paved seemingly to nowhere, a new staircase built from one plot to the next, a handful of olive trees uprooted, or a structure erected somewhere across the hills. Local landowners expressed anger at these rapid changes, insisting that the "Biblical Farm's" development had "destroyed the natural beauty" of their neighborhood and brought in waste and trash.[7] For them, life is already lived under settler-colonialism's "creeping apartheid" and the constant threat of expulsion and dispossession as non-citizen residents of East Jerusalem.[8] And yet, residents I spoke to saw in the development of the park a different kind of violence that was marked distinctly as following the construction of the park.

It is tempting to describe small and incremental changes to Wadi al-Rababa's ecology as part of the slow violence of settler colonialism. But there is a marked difference between the recent rapid process of dispossession that is the focus of this paper and the long-term environmental development of settler colonialism, which renders Palestine's "rural space a barren wilderness" and facilitates "the expansion of settlements in the West Bank and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians."[9] It is thus worthwhile recounting the historical and current forms of settler-colonial violence, slow and rapid, that make the Hinnom Valley a unique landscape in which colonial powers and residents have negotiated the ontology of nature in Palestine, which Ruba Salih and Olaf Cory have argued only becomes "Nature" – an imagined object, pristine and untouched by humans, and thus worthy of preservation in its natural state – when appropriated by the structures of settler colonialism.[10]

Mentions of the Hinnom Valley date back to biblical times, when it was located outside the ancient city's walls and used as its necropolis. Biblical scripture mentions the Hinnom Valley as a site of unsanctioned pagan practices, in particular, human sacrifice. As such, the valley is associated with Jewish apocalypticism and the physical location of Hell, translated in King James' Bible from the Hebrew name Gei Ben Hinnom, abbreviated to Gehinnom, as Gehenna. The mystical relationship between death and waste, suggesting the Hinnom Valley is a messianic wasteland with divine purpose, has not been borne out in archaeological

excavations, which found no signs of rituals or sacrifice. However, excavations did confirm the Hinnom Valley to be an ancient burial site stretching back to the Roman era and continuing all the way to the present with several active Jewish, Muslim, and Karaite graveyards dotting the landscape – and most likely associating the Hinnom Valley with nonlife.

Figure 4. A view of the olive groves in the Hinnom Valley's lowlands in June 2023. Photo by author.

Figure 5. "Valley of Hinnom," between 1898 and 1914, American Colony (Jerusalem) Photo Department, G. Eric and Edith Matson Collection, U.S. Library of Congress, Washington, DC, online at loc.gov/pictures/resource/matpc.11372/ (accessed 12 November 2024).

From its beginnings in 1918, the British colonial government in Palestine saw Jerusalem's cityscape and surrounding open spaces as an "untouched" landscape and a perfect image of an idealized Christian-Zionist Holy Land – despite the pervasive presence of traditional seasonal Palestinian agriculture, evidenced in photographs from the time (figure 5).[11] Seeking to preserve the image of Jerusalem as a distinctly unmodern sacred site, the British put in place a series of policies and regulations that protected its aesthetics. These policies saw the city as "a treasure that needed both to be protected as such for the future and to be restored to such from changes made in the immediate past and present."[12] In one such policy, the areas surrounding Jerusalem's wall were cleared of existing structures, and residential development and construction was prohibited to create a belt-like public park around the Old City. The Hinnom Valley, included in British preservation plans, was at that time an active cultivation area with built terraces and olive groves, landscape that has since become the hallmark of Palestinian natural and cultural heritage.[13] Indeed, while the colonial government saw the natural state of Jerusalem as one of a medieval treasure dating back to the days of Jesus, its actual landscape was made up of the traditional cultivation practices of Palestinians that made up the very image of the Holy Land.[14]

With the end of the British Mandate in Palestine and the ensuing 1947–49 war, the Hinnom Valley was split across the two sides of the 1949 Israeli–Jordanian armistice line, serving as part of the buffer zone between them. In 1967, the Israeli army conquered the West Bank and illegally annexed large parts of Jerusalem's eastern neighborhoods into Israeli territory, Wadi al-Rababa among them, placing them under the administrative control of Jerusalem's municipality. Israeli authorities then effectively abandoned East Jerusalem and failed to provide basic infrastructure, services, and social services.[15] The city and regional planning authorities deliberately resisted approving a zoning plan for East Jerusalem, leading to a rise in illegal construction that does not follow Jerusalem's strict visual building code. Moreover, the lack of services and infrastructure meant that Palestinian residents had to dump waste in their own backyards, and sewage ran into the riverbed of the adjacent Kidron Valley.[16]

These structural conditions caused East Jerusalem and the Hinnom Valley to be a veritable wasteland, a landscape which the Natures and Parks Authority has defined as a "refugee landscape," according to Irus Braverman.[17] Braverman demonstrated how Israeli authorities contrast the so-called understanding of Palestinian nature as unmodern and savage with a pristine and bucolic landscape, which they refer to as Nuf Kdumin – the ancient landscape. In the case of the Hinnom Valley, authorities not only drew the distinction but imagined both landscapes to exist in the same place, merely temporally separated. Moreover, they saw the potential to transform one into the other by peeling back the excess discards of Palestinian life. Max Liboiron and Josh Lepaswky point out a connection between the material discard of cultures and the discarding of a culture, in this case Palestinian culture, as both are necessary for the persistence of a system.[18] To move toward Nuf Kdumm and ostensibly protect nature, Israeli authorities needed to clean up the wasteland and discard what they deemed as unnatural elements of the landscape.

Figure 6. View of the "Biblical Farm" National Park from Wadi al-Rababa, June 2023. The park was expanded to additional plots of land (seen as the lower structures in the photo) since 2021. Photo by author.

Figure 7. In 2024, the right-wing messianic settler organization Elad added a biblically themed petting zoo to the farm, April 2024. Photo by author.

In 2019, the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) rebooted a long-delayed plan – originally zoned and approved in 1974 – to develop and operate a visitors center in the Hinnom Valley's open lands. However, the valley's lands, while zoned for public use, are privately owned, making any construction contingent on the consent and approval of the owners, who had no interest in forgoing their vital olive groves. Faced with this

legal obstacle, the municipal government declared several privately owned plots empty, full of waste, and neglected, issuing formal "gardening decrees." This sparsely used legal mechanism allowed Israeli authorities to seize administrative control – though not legal ownership – to begin construction under the auspices of improving the lands for the public good. INPA, relying on a maximalist interpretation of what counts as gardening, commissioned Ir David (the City of David Foundation, or Elad, in Hebrew), a right-wing messianic settler organization, to take on the project of developing and operating the park. Palestinian residents and human rights organizations have been highly critical not only of the administrative seizure of land but, in particular, of the choice to contract Elad. This organization has been working for more than thirty years to colonize East Jerusalem through heritage tourism and property purchases.[19] Moreover, Elad, as many point out, promotes an exclusionary ethno-nationalist vision of Jerusalem's history by focusing on Jewish remnants of its past and discarding the city's multicultural history.[20] Providing Elad with more territory in East Jerusalem only advances their colonization project.[21]

In 2021, despite joint protests and legal action from Palestinian residents and human rights organizations, Elad opened its visitors center. It touted its center, colloquially dubbed the "Biblical Farm," as an ecologically minded project in Jerusalem's designated green belt and marketed it as educating the public about Jewish biblical cultivation practices.[22] The national park, now sprawling over several plots and forming an archipelago of control over the Wadi al-Rababa neighborhood, offers a biblical animal petting zoo and a range of agricultural activities under the banner of heritage tourism: foraging for native herbs and plants, crushing grapes and olives using ancient machinery, and crafts associated with Roman-era Jewish culture such as stonemasonry, perfume making, and basket weaving. All of this produced an environmental imaginary of the Hinnom Valley that seeks to embed a Jewish national identity and origins within the valley's natural environment.

Figure 8. Tourists using a reconstructed olive press at the "Biblical Farm," July 2022. Photo by author.

Figure 9. A family engaging with the educational modern beehive at the "Biblical Farm," April 2024. Photo by author.

Figure 10. Tourists participating in a stonemasonry workshop in which they carve Jewish-themed symbols and decorations, July 2022. Photo by author.

Despite boasting values such as sustainability, environmental conservation, and a return to roots, human rights organizations have documented the grave damage the construction, tourist activities, and continual expansion of the "Biblical Farm" has caused Wadi al-Rababa's residents and its nonhuman environment. Palestinian landowners have lost access to many of their plots, which are now gated and overrun with tourists. Olive groves tended for generations were uprooted, blocked, or simply incorporated into the park's closed territory. New non-native species were introduced into the landscape, stone structures were erected across the hills, new public pathways were carved through the area, and a massive rope bridge was built across the valley. The increased presence of Jewish settlers working on private Palestinian lands, often unannounced and without permits and sometimes armed, has led to violent clashes and resulted in heightened surveillance of Palestinians.

Today, the environment of the Hinnom Valley is split. On one side remains the traditional agricultural landscape of Palestinians, not yet completely discarded. On the other side, or more precisely, nestled in its midst, is the "Biblical Farm" and its simulacra of an ancient landscape that never existed. These two ecological units not only present radically different relations to land, but they also display how place-based claims for Indigeneity by Palestinians are coopted and undermined by Jewish settlers who imagine themselves as part of the natural world.[23] To achieve their goals, however, settlers first had to transform their environmental imaginaries into legal regimes that allow dispossession.

Wastelands, Discards and Dispossession

Encroachments by Israeli authorities and Elad into the Hinnom Valley were made under the auspices of protecting nature, ostensibly conserving the valley's bucolic landscape and its status as a "green" part of the urban environment. Irus Braverman suggests that nature management, and in particular the establishment of national parks, is a critical part of Israel's settler-colonial territorial dispossession of Palestinians. This form of dispossession, she points out, has roots in colonial administrations and resonates with other national parks systems used to remove Indigenous peoples from their land.[24] The history that links nature protection and dispossession in Zionism is perhaps most infamously captured by the desire to "make the desert bloom."[25]

This idiom – applied across topographies and historical moments, albeit shifting in reaction to circumstances – functions as a proverbial form of environmental imaginary, capturing the simultaneous need, as Edward Said argued, to invent a Jewish geography to enable the machinations of imperial land theft.[26] It also reveals the colonial ontological assumption about nature and land, a fundamental association of Indigenous practices and being with emptiness.[27] Wastelands were never empty but were mapped as such by equating a lack of European capitalist surplus production to an absence of ownership.[28] This was no different in Palestine, where seasonal agriculture was marked by the British and Zionists as non-existent.[29]

Meanwhile, Zionist institutions have long sought to cover the traces of colonial violence, the wastelands of war, with manufactured "natural" environments.[30] Emptiness was also achieved through the slow violence of modernized agriculture that

destroys land, crops, and natural habitats and the relationship of native peoples to the more-than-human world.[31] Zionist projects to make the desert bloom – diverting water, mass forestation, drying marshlands, introducing new crops and foreign livestock, enclosing grazing grounds, and developing open agricultural lands into urban centers – were so destructive that their cumulative impact amounted to what Mazin Qumsiyeh and Mohammad Abusarhan call an "environmental Nakba."[32] Indeed, the distinction between emptiness and fullness relies, as Ruba Salih and Olaf Corry put it, on "an equivalence between Indigenous Life and Nonlife, with humans and nonhumans together fossilized or desertified by the ongoing settler colonial project which aimed at turning the settlers into the new Indigenous."[33] Heritage tourism development in the Hinnom Valley functions in many ways by producing a wasteland to be replaced by an Eden.

Before the Hinnom Valley could become an Eden, it first had to be declared legally empty and in need of improvement. This legal process began with the application of the municipal gardening decree in 2019 and unfurled over two years as a group of landowners from Wadi al-Rababa mounted a legal challenge in 2020. The courts, unsurprisingly, ultimately sided with the state. Yet, in the process, they had to articulate a legal reason to categorize a thriving Palestinian community full of life as a wasteland. Their argument relied on three steps: disqualifying the Palestinians' use of land, drawing a relationship between trash and dereliction, and qualifying the state as the only agent capable of protection and improvement.

The court's discussion of the environment and humans' relationship to it helps us understand just how it constructs the political ecology of the Hinnom Valley. On the matter of use, the courts "interpreted the term 'empty lot' under a utilitarian interpretation. In examining the [validity] of a gardening decree, the courts assess whether in effect the use currently conducted on the land matches the designated use determined for it in the [zoning] plan." Given that the plots had been designated as "an open space and a national park," any Palestinian use of the lands, "even if olive trees are planted in the lots," was regarded as inconsistent with their state designation: "Given that the condition of the plots today does not allow them to be used according to their designated use as determined in the plan, it is possible to determine that the plots are not used according to their valid planned use."[34] The courts argued that, ultimately, what defines the emptiness of land is neither physical presence nor intended use of its legal private owners. Rather, the only proper land use, and thus the only legitimate claim to access and control the land itself, is its official state designated zoning as a national park. Accepting this narrow definition of qualified use means the denial of the entire lifeworlds of Palestinians residing in Wadi al-Rababa.

There are two assumptions embedded in this language and the broader legal argument. First, in denying Palestinians' relationship to their land and cultivation, the courts affirmed that nature is a category administered and defined by the state. The olive groves are recognized to be present in the valley, yet they are nevertheless imagined as exogenous. By extension, the community's use of it is also disqualified, thereby legally defining the land as empty. Thus, a national park not yet in existence receives priority when it comes to the protection of nature over the traditional keepers of the land. Nature can only be imagined to be part of a "settler-ecology." Second, this process was done through legal

mechanisms ostensibly meant to safeguard both nature and the rights of residents. Yet, despite the appeal of Palestinians to the courts, the decision ultimately affirmed and cemented dispossession, pointing to the limits of inclusion and recognition.[35]

For all the discussion of emptiness, much of the legal definition of the Hinnom Valley as a wasteland revolved around a highly detailed account of waste. A testimony of a park ranger given to the court stated that: "There are many disturbances and hazards" in the land, such as "burnt trees [firewood], trash, construction waste, household waste, and invasive flora." Additionally, the court claimed that the dereliction of the land is reflected in "asphalt, wood pallets, plastic bags, and bare black zones [that] testify to fires that occurred." The court imagined trash to have infiltrated the landscape so deeply that it became infused with the land itself, stating that there must be more "waste present underneath the first layer of visible soil." Meanwhile, the court noted that the park ranger "mentioned in his testimonies that the images that were presented before him during his inquiry, which show the plots as clean and well organized … were taken after the defendant had cleaned the place." The court took this as evidence "that it is not the plaintiffs who take care of the maintenance and cleanliness of the land, but the Natures and Parks Authority which operated according to the decree."[36]

The association of Palestinians with waste suggests a lack of care for the plots in question. Yet, as Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins demonstrated, this metaphor extends far beyond the immediate management of trash, and suggests that Palestinians are ungovernable and, thus, in the eyes of the Israeli state, incapable of sovereignty.[37] This slippage in the scale of waste, between the residues of life under occupation and the denial of sovereignty, is enabled, as Liboiron and Lepawsky point out, by the fact that waste "always overflows its official meanings, and the technical systems designed to manage and contain it."[38] Indeed, in the court's argument, the excess of trash is meant to denote not only the dereliction of maintenance but dereliction of the land – completely ignoring the well-documented infrastructural abandonment of East Jerusalem that forces Palestinians to live with their own trash. Thus, the courts argue that the right to land is intertwined with, if not stemming from, the relationship between humans and their environment, specifically measured through the accounting of litter.

Undergirding the argument on use and waste is the perceived ability to add value to the land, either by fulfilling the zoning code or by cleaning up the landscape. Legal scholar Brenna Bhandar demonstrated how a Lockean colonial legal doctrine of improvement imagined subsistence farming and Indigenous ways of using land as unproductive. Thus, settlers could claim land by rendering it "productive" and integrating it into the capitalist economy. Investment by settlers, in essence, provided a legal claim to property.[39] The "doctrine of improvement" worked "through the attribution of value to the lives of those defined as having the capacity, will, and technology to appropriate."[40] In the case of the Hinnom Valley, Israel's courts accepted the current state of the land as derelict and, more importantly, the state's claim to be able to improve it.

Improvement here, however, was not understood as capitalist accumulation. Rather, improvement was understood as environmental in two distinct ways. First, the material clean-up of waste and discards, and second, the conservation of nature. In this articulation,

the Hinnom Valley is a part of Jerusalem's historical nature, empty of urban development but full of natural life and it is the current owners of the land who have damaged it by filling it with waste and endangering its existence as a historical monument to Jewish cultural history – turning it from an Eden to a wasteland. In the court's imagination, the state has the capacity to roll back the excess Palestinian residue to secure the land's rejuvenation. Thus, the courts ultimately tied the right to land to the imagined axis of progression from wasteland to Eden and granted the land to those imagined capable of its protection and improvement.

Making Edens

Following the initial legal transformation of the lands in Wadi al-Rababa into a national park, INPA contracted Elad to perform various clean-up operations and construct a visitors center. In 2021, a newly established segment of the national park dubbed the "Biblical Farm" opened on two plots. It has continued to expand since, forming today a kind of archipelago across the valley. The farm itself is not an agriculturally productive farm but contains a slew of agricultural-themed attractions and activities aimed at tourists: cultivation of local varieties of herbs, a simulation of winemaking and oil production, and a small petting zoo. The farm's overall landscaping and design is intended to simulate, albeit not necessarily accurately, how "Jerusalem's inhabitants sustained themselves thousands of years ago," when the valley was ostensibly the agricultural backbone of the city.[41]

Figure 11. The park's artificial waterfall is often used in promotional materials to depict the park as an idyllic oasis in the desert. Photo by author.

During my time in the "Biblical Farm," attending tours and talking to park employees and tourists, I heard the farm described, again and again, as a cohesive ecological unit that stands in stark contrast to its environment. These descriptions painted the farm as a veritable Eden, frequently pointing to the lush green hills, the abundance of vegetation, and the omnipresent sound of its gushing artificial waterfalls to describe it as an oasis. This spatial and environmental distinction relied on two elements: a temporal arc in which a former wasteland was revived and a depiction of its natural environment as a cohesive ecological unit that reflects the cultural heritage of the Jewish people from the time of the Bible. These distinctions were mobilized to suggest a patrimonial link between Jewish people and the ecology of Palestine despite the artifice of its agricultural simulation.

By suggesting an inherent link between cultural practices and the natural environment, dated to time immemorial, the "Biblical Farm" reflects a natural relationship between Jewish culture and nature. As Patrick Wolfe argued, agriculture does not merely provide settlers with the productive power necessary to sustain their society, but, as he puts it, "agriculture, with its life-sustaining connectedness to land, is a potent symbol of settler-colonial identity" that roots people in the land.[42] In the "Biblical Farm," the relationship between the land and settler-colonial identity is bolstered through interpretation of the biblical text, which is then used to determine what is "original" or "native." Anthropologist Jessica Cattelino reminds us that despite the temptation to relate native species with native peoples, the definition of "native species" has more often than not been embraced by settlers to anchor them in the land as their own.[43] Catellino sees such acts of categorization as ways to use the powerful symbol of rootedness to firmly place the settler in the soil, as "nature and political belonging are co-produced."[44] Both temporality and flora are mobilized in the environmental imaginary constructed by the "Biblical Farm" to create visual, ecological, and ultimately cultural differences in an attempt to politically reshuffle settlers and natives.

Tours often made a point of sketching out a temporal rupture that delineated two clear moments in time, assigning to each an environmental condition. As one guide told a group of visitors:

> Before we got here, there was nothing, just a trash-filled wasteland. Before there was this beautiful, well-maintained, exquisitely clean park, this valley was a wasteland. The landscape was full of litter, unkempt, and poorly maintained. It is rare to be able to enjoy shade amid this urban landscape, East Jerusalem does not usually have this kind of a gem.[45]

In contrast to the wasteland of the "before times," devoid of beauty, cleanliness, and care, the guide portrays the farm as it stands today, after Elad's arrival and improvement, as full of life, blooming, and serving the public. This distinction, which echoes the state's imagined axis from wasteland to Eden, uses the environment to mark a moment of rupture. The presence of waste, trash, and refuse before the rupture,

and their absence after, are used to suggest that the break is not merely visual but marks a different relationship between the people and the land.

Figure 12. A tour guide explains to tourists how the national park came into being. Photo by author.

Embedded in this narration of the shift in control from Palestinians to settlers is a story of arrival. Settler arrival narratives serve the territorial and political purpose in the settler-colonial context of distinguishing between who is modern and who is not, often by depicting Indigenous people as a relic of the past, extinct, or stuck in time.[46] In the Anglophone settler-colonial context, many instances of Indigenous dispossession turn on the axis of modernity, separating the modern settler and the unmodern colonial subject.[47] In this iteration, again reflecting the state's temporality, the native Palestinians are deemed failed custodians of the land. At the same time, the settlers are described as those who care truly for it. These stories are pernicious, beyond their cultural exclusion, as they drive and enable legal dispossession through land regimes that render Indigenous and native peoples' lands as white settler property.[48]

In the case of the Hinnom Valley, the story of arrival is told as a story of revival and return as part of a "messianic temporality."[49] In this story, settlers peel back the layers of discard to unearth the Eden that once was. This story conveniently tackles the persistent and tangled question of "When does a settler become native?" by dismissing the question altogether and declaring, "We were always here."[50] The temporal element of the "Biblical Farm's" story argues that for settlers, the

association between nature and identity is not only recently forged but rather a natural relation that stretches back to time immemorial, making a claim of "settler indigeneity."[51] Edward Said has shown that the Zionist narrative is based on a temporal break, represented by the transformation of wasteland into a blooming desert, and that this narrative and its associated temporality were necessary to drive the physical transformation of the land. In the case of the Hinnom Valley, the temporal demarcation provides an administrative and moral imperative for its transformation, and it drives the symbolic and material construction of the "Biblical Farm" as a distinct ecological unit.

Figure 13. In a video tour of Israel's "Biblical Farm," an actor shows his counterpart newly grown wheat, January 2022. Online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUofuVaHmLA (accessed 6 October 2024). Screen grab by author.

The farm-as-ecological-unit is constructed not only through temporal distinctions. Its demarcation is similarly made through its flora and its presentation as a simulated ecological system of ancient agricultural production. In a video tour produced for Tu BiShvat, a holiday associated with agricultural heritage, a tour guide dressed in costume meant to mimic ancient Jewish garb demonstrates to a contemporary visitor how each variety of plant used on the farm played a role in the life of those who inhabited the land during biblical times (figure 13).[52] In one moment, the actor instructs his modern-day counterpart about the utility of wheat: "Isn't this wheat beautiful? We can eat it! And when it is dry, it is great for making flour." As he unravels the wheat's encasing, his interlocutor asks him: "So you are separating the wheat from the chaff?" "Exactly!" he responds.

Importantly, the guide uses a well-known quote from the Bible, "separating the wheat from the chaff," to link the common agricultural production of wheat and its derivatives with, in this case, Jewish environmental history. Moreover, this common

idiom points to the fundamental processes of producing ecological and social differences on the farm: distinguishing between valuable and invaluable, between what should be kept and what should be discarded. This formula, using a quote from the Bible to introduce a plant, is repeated again and again throughout the tour, creating an inventory of the farm's flora: ezov and sage were used to make perfumes for temple rituals, pressed olive oil was used for lighting, dates and pomegranates are two of the "seven species" mentioned in the Bible, grapes were crushed for wine, and so on. Critically, each plant is linked not only to the biblical text itself but to an agricultural or cultural practice described in the Bible or later Jewish scripture and often related to some aspect of Jewish life and religious practice. As such, the plants in the farm, while curated, are nevertheless made to represent agricultural traditions of Jewish life during the First and Second Temple eras.

However, the plants cultivated on the farm are neither agriculturally productive nor reflective of Jerusalem's traditional and historical ecology – a somewhat cruel irony given the nearby Palestinian olive groves, which represent a layered agricultural history of the area that have been fenced off and made inaccessible to visitors. Rather, the various herbs, trees, and animals are culled into a single unit – the "Biblical Farm" – by their association with a cultural and biblical interpretation of Palestine's environment, regardless of their geographical origin or scientific taxonomy. Indeed, settlers have collapsed nature into a *biblically described* nature, suggesting an ontological identification between Jewish cultural identity and an originary presence in the land. Or, to recall Jessica Cattelino's observation, that constructing nature through the lens of biblical ontology and its determination as ancient mobilizes the allegory of native plants to suggest the nativeness of Jewish people while excluding Palestinians from being a part of nature. Indeed, creating this inventory of native species and embedding it within the Hinnom Valley sets up the farm's space as one subject to conservation rather than development, hiding the act of dispossession under the auspices of protection.

The "Biblical Farm" insists on itself as an ecological unit that reflects the Jewish cultural heritage embedded in the particular location of the Hinnom Valley. Yet this environmental imagination is constantly undermined by the unignorable presence of Palestinian olive groves that surround its gated area. In one way, the olive groves serve to reinforce the distinction between wasteland and Eden, as they are visually different from the farm. Yet in other, more pronounced ways, they undermine the farm's claim for rejuvenation and restoration, clearly displaying the ancient Palestinian cultural landscape so profoundly embedded in the image of the fellahin.[53] Examining the valley's landscape as a whole demonstrates that the "Biblical Farm," for all its claims of an environmental imaginary of Eden, sustainable and ecological, has worked to destroy and replace the existing ecological system rather than preserve and protect it.

Figure 14. Tourists posing as ancient Jews for a refrigerator magnet, with the "Biblical Farm" and Silwan as the backdrop, July 2021. Photo by the author.

Conclusion

Stories about how people are located in the environment produce property regimes and racial categories by naturalizing cultural differences and hierarchies. Mobilizing these racial categories and property regimes, settlers in the Hinnom Valley seek to contest Palestinian claims to Indigeneity by severing their historical ties to cultivation and claiming patrimony over the more-than-human world. This process relies not only on territorial removal but on placing a cultural object, in this case the newly minted "Biblical Farm" National Park, to obfuscate colonial violence. In *Tolerance is a Wasteland*, Saree Makdisi examines how Israel's denial of its settler-colonial history and actions relies on greenwashing the traces of violence by placing forests and monuments on sites of violence, a process he argues creates a "double denial." Makdisi points out that the environmental dimensions of this violence and obfuscation are what perpetuate settler-colonial structures, as they are the very "project of greening the landscape" that "makes it possible to overlook the dark history occluded by the act of joyous affirmation, but also makes the dark history possible in the first place; it nourishes and sustains it over the years."[54] Moreover, as Hagar Kotef argues, greening,

blooming, and making Edens not only covers up violence, it forms a fundamental attachment to it, resulting in a settler identity in which "sustainability is essentially and necessarily violent."[55]

While this case study involves a particular sliver of land in East Jerusalem, we have seen the state of Israel and settler organizations increasingly mobilize strategies of dispossession that bind cultural heritage to the material environment and in particular to the more-than-human world. It is therefore critical to understand these administrative and cultural mechanisms as they continue to spread, even in cases where they appear more fractured, piecemeal, and opportunistic and garner less attention than dispossession and violence that occur at times of intense and militarized conflicts and genocide – though they are, of course, linked and intertwined. The urgency of understanding this form of dispossession emerges out of the possibility of reversing it, as its status is still very much in flux. Yet, to undo it, we must understand that environmental dispossession is not only material, territorial, or legal, but also profoundly embedded in Israeli culture.

Yair Agmon is a PhD candidate in the department of Information Studies at the University of California, Los Angeles.

Endnotes

1 The valley, Wadi al-Rababa, is named after the *rababa*, one of the earliest bowl-shaped instruments played with a bow.

2 The "Green Belt" is a loosely defined term used by various authorities such as the Israeli Nature and Parks Authority (INPA), Jewish National Fund (JNF), Keren Kayemet LeYisrael (KKL), and the Jerusalem Development Authority to denote open "nature" spaces at the periphery of the city, though its geography is not defined in legislation or in official plans.

3 Many scholars have written on this colonial drive for possession. See, for example: Meron Benvenisti, *Sacred Landscape: The Buried History of the Holy Land since 1948* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); Steven Salaita, *The Holy Land in Transit: Colonialism and the Quest for Canaan* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006); Rebecca L. Stein, "Travelling Zion: Hiking and Settler-Nationalism in Pre-1948 Palestine," *Interventions* 11, no. 3 (November 2009): 334–51, online at doi.org/10.1080/13698010903255569; Yael Zerubavel, *Desert in the Promised Land* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019); and Matan Kaminer, "The Agricultural Settlement of the Arabah and the Political Ecology of Zionism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 54, no. 1 (February 2022): 40–56, online at doi.org/10.1017/S0020743821001021.

4 Edward W. Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (January 2000): 175–92, online at doi.org/10.1086/448963.

5 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019).

6 Rana Barakat, "Writing/Righting Palestine Studies: Settler Colonialism, Indigenous Sovereignty and Resisting the Ghost(s) of History," *Settler Colonial Studies* 8, no. 3 (July 3, 2018): 349–63, online at doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2017.1300048; and J. Kehaulani Kauanui, "'A Structure, Not an Event': Settler Colonialism and Enduring Indigeneity," *Lateral* 5, no. 1 (May 2016), online at doi.org/10.25158/L5.1.7.

7 Author's field note, 22 July 2022.

8 Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, following its illegal annexation to Israel in 1967, were given temporary resident status and denied citizenship at the time. Most Palestinian residents remain non-

citizens with only limited protection under the law. Since 1967, over fourteen thousand residents had their status revoked. For more on why Jerusalemite Palestinians stand firm in refusing citizenship and Israeli state discrimination against them, see: Oren Yiftachel, "Theoretical Notes on 'Gray Cities': The Coming of Urban Apartheid?" *Planning Theory* 8, no. 1 (February 2009): 88–100, online at doi.org/10.1177/1473095208099300; and Nir Hasson, "Just 5 Percent of E. Jerusalem Palestinians Have Received Israeli Citizenship Since 1967," *Haaretz*, 29 May 2022, 2022, online at www.haaretz.com/israel-news/2022-05-29/ty-article/why-so-few-palestinians-from-jerusalem-have-israeli-citizenship/00000181-0c46-d090-abe1-ed7fefc20000 (accessed 21 September 2024).

9 Saad Amira, "The Slow Violence of Israeli Settler-Colonialism and the Political Ecology of Ethnic Cleansing in the West Bank," *Settler Colonial Studies* 11, no. 4 (October 2021): 3, online at doi.org/10.1080/2201473X.2021.2007747.

10 Ruba Salih and Olaf Corry, "Displacing the Anthropocene: Colonization, Extinction, and the Unruliness of Nature in Palestine," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 5, no. 1 (March 2022): 381–400, online at doi.org/10.1177/2514848620982834.

11 Rana Barakat, "Urban Planning, Colonialism, and the Pro-Jerusalem Society," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, no. 65 (2016): 22–34; and Noam G. Seligman, "The Environmental Legacy of the Fellaheen and the Bedouin in Palestine," in *Between Ruin and Restoration: An Environmental History of Israel*, ed. Daniel E. Orenstein, Alon Tal, and Char Miller (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013).

12 Barakat, "Urban Planning," 26.

13 Jala M. Makhzoumi, "Unfolding Landscape in a Lebanese Village: Rural Heritage in a Globalizing World," *International Journal of Heritage Studies* 15, no. 4 (July 2009): 317–37, online at doi.org/10.1080/13527250902933793.

14 W. J. T. Mitchell, "Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (January 2000): 193–223, online at doi.org/10.1086/448964.

15 Ir Amim, "East Jerusalem – Central Information" (Jerusalem: Ir Amim, January 2019).

16 Hanna Baumann and Manal Massalha, "'Your Daily Reality Is Rubbish': Waste as a Means of Urban Exclusion in the Suspended Spaces of East Jerusalem," *Urban Studies* 59, no. 3 (February 2022): 548–71, online at doi.org/10.1177/00420980211018642.

17 Irus Braverman, "*Nof Kdumim*: Remaking the Ancient Landscape in East Jerusalem's National Parks," *Environment and Planning E: Nature and Space* 4, no. 1 (March 2021): 109–34, online at doi.org/10.1177/2514848619889594.

18 Max Liboiron and Josh Lepawsky, *Discard Studies: Wasting, Systems, and Power* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2022).

19 Emek Shaveh, "Archaeology in the Shadow of the Conflict: The Mound of Ancient Jerusalem (City of David) in Silwan" (Jerusalem: Emek Shaveh, September 2013), online at emekshaveh.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Booklet-English-04_Low-Res.pdf (accessed 16 September 2024); Hagit Offran, "Hitnachlot Bemisve Shel Tayarot: Sipora Shel Amotat Elad be Silwan" [Settlement disguised as tourism: The story of Elad in Silwan], Peace Now blog, 24 September 2020, online at peacenow.org.il/who-is-elad-el-ir-david-organization (accessed 16 September 2024); and Nurit Malkin, "A Quest to Recreate Davidic Jerusalem Carves a Valley of Shadow Palestinians," *Times of Israel*, 4 December 2021, online at www.timesofisrael.com/a-quest-to-recreate-davidic-jerusalem-carves-a-valley-of-shadow-palestinians/ (accessed 27 September 2024).

20 Raphael Greenberg, "Towards an Inclusive Archaeology in Jerusalem: The Case of Silwan/The City of David," *Public Archaeology* 8, no. 1 (February 2009): 35–50, online at doi.org/10.1179/175355309X402745.

21 Emek Shaveh, "The Valley of Hinnom: Trees and Flowerbeds in the Political Struggle over East Jerusalem" (Jerusalem: Emek Shaveh, October 2021), online at emekshaveh.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Hinnom-valley-update-Oct-2021.pdf (accessed 16 September 2024).

22 "The Farm in the Valley," City of David website, online at cityofdavid.org.il/en/sites/farm-in-guy-eng/ (accessed 16 September 2024).

23 Gabi Kirk, "Commodifying Indigeneity? Settler Colonialism and Racial Capitalism in Fair Trade Farming in Palestine," *Historical Materialism* 32, nos. 2–3 (2023): 236–68.
24 Irus Braverman, *Settling Nature: The Conservation Regime in Palestine-Israel* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023).
25 Zerubavel, *Desert in the Promised Land*.
26 Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980); Said, "Invention, Memory, and Place."
27 Alexandre Kedar, Ahmad Amara, and Oren Yiftachel, *Emptied Lands: A Legal Geography of Bedouin Rights in the Negev* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018).
28 Brenna Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property: Law, Land, and Racial Regimes of Ownership* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018); and Robert Nichols, *Theft Is Property! Dispossession and Critical Theory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019).
29 Seligman, "Environmental Legacy."
30 Saree Makdisi, *Tolerance Is a Wasteland: Palestine and the Culture of Denial* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2022).
31 Kaminer, "Agricultural Settlement."
32 Mazin B. Qumsiyeh and Mohammed A. Abusarhan, "An Environmental Nakba: The Palestinian Environment under Israeli Colonization," *Science for the People* 23, no. 1 (Spring 2020), online at magazine.scienceforthepeople.org/vol23-1/an-environmental-nakba-the-palestinian-environment-under-israeli-colonization/ (accessed 16 September 2024). See also: Simone Popperl, "Geologies of Erasure: Sinkholes, Science, and Settler Colonialism at the Dead Sea," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 50, no. 3 (2018): 427–48, online at doi.org/10.1017/S002074381800082X.
33 Salih and Corry, "Displacing the Anthropocene," 3.
34 Siam, Sumerin, Shaffa, Da'ana, Abu Hater, and Sumerin v. City of Jerusalem, Decision 46826-11-19 (2021), Court for Local Affairs, Jerusalem Municipality, 21 June 2021.
35 Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).
36 Siam, Sumerin, Shaffa, Da'ana, Abu Hater, and Sumerin v. City of Jerusalem, Decision 46826-11-19 (2021), Court for Local Affairs, Jerusalem Municipality, 21 June 2021.
37 Sophia Stamatopoulou-Robbins, *Waste Siege: The Life of Infrastructure in Palestine* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).
38 Liboiron and Lepawsky, *Discard Studies*.
39 Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*.
40 Bhandar, *Colonial Lives of Property*, 8.
41 "Hakhava ve-habayit ba-gei" [The farm and the house in the valley], City of David website, online at cityofdavid.org.il/sites/guy-ben-hinom/ (accessed 19 February 2024); English online at cityofdavid.org.il/en/sites/farm-in-guy-eng/ (accessed 27 September 2024).
42 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (December 2006): 387–409, quote at 396, online at doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240.
43 Jessica R. Cattelino, "Loving the Native: Invasive Species and the Cultural Politics of Flourishing," in *The Routledge Companion to the Environmental Humanities*, ed. Ursula K. Heise, Jon Christensen, and Michelle Niemann (London: Routledge, 2017), 129–37.
44 Cattelino, "Loving the Native," 130.
45 Author's field note, 21 August 2022
46 Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); and Daniel Heath Justice and Jean M. O'Brien, eds., *Allotment Stories: Indigenous Land Relations under Settler Siege* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2021).
47 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
48 Jean M. O'Brien, *Firsting and Lasting: Writing Indians Out of Existence in New England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010); and Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *The White Possessive: Property, Power, and Indigenous Sovereignty* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015).
49 Rachel Busbridge, "Messianic Time, Settler Colonial Technology, and the Elision of Palestinian Presence in Jerusalem's Historic Basin," *Political Geography* 79 (May 2020): 102158, online at doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102158.

50 Raef Zreik, "When Does a Settler Become a Native? (With Apologies to Mamdani)," *Constellations* 23, no. 3 (September 2016): 351–64, online at doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12240; and Yuval Evri and Hagar Kotef, "When Does a Native Become a Settler? (With Apologies to Zreik and Mamdani," *Constellations* 29, no. 1 (March 2022): 3–18, online at doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12470.

51 Rachel Z. Feldman and Ian McGonigle, eds., *Settler-Indigeneity in the West Bank* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2023).

52 City of David, "Siyur ba-khava ba-gei miyukhed la-Tu BiShvat" [A tour of the farm in the valley on the occasion of Tu BiShvat], YouTube, uploaded 16 January 2022, online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=AUofuVaHmLA (accessed 6 October 2024).

53 Edward W. Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); and Rana Barakat, "The Jerusalem Fellah: Popular Politics in Mandate-Era Palestine," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 46, no. 1 (Autumn 2016): 7–19.

54 Makdisi, *Tolerance Is a Wasteland*, 3.

55 Hagar Kotef, *The Colonizing Self: Or, Home and Homelessness in Israel/Palestine* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020), 216.

How Dough Rises in Gaza: Palestine's Foremothers and Recipes against Genocide

Lila Sharif

Abstract

Amid imposed starvation and Israel's genocidal assault, Palestinians in Gaza return to their foremothers' ovens, practices, and recipes to survive. Ancestral food practices such as baking bread in a clay tabun oven in the absence of fuel and electricity, and foraging for edible and medicinal herbs, become practices of *sumud* and material survival. Through Palestine's foremothers, the seeds of steadfastness had long been planted. Gaza's food vloggers assert an Indigenous presence and a refusal to be erased even in the darkest hour of genocide. I argue that Gaza's digital storytellers provide the source material for Indigenous survival made possible by the creativity of the Gazan people and the lessons they carry from their foremothers.

Keywords:

Foremothers; bread; starvation; genocide; tabun; Indigenous food epistemologies; Gaza.

Renad Attallah (@renadfromgaza) is a ten-year-old online storyteller on Instagram who cooks from her displacement camp in Rafah in the context of Israel's genocide in Gaza. She shares her recipes in Arabic with English subtitles, while noting the conditions around her. Her most popular video log (or vlog) is a recipe for a "war burger," using canned meat received from a humanitarian relief agency, which garnered almost half a million "likes" in just sixty days, a notable digital footprint for a displaced child surviving a genocide under siege.[1] She

started her account on 30 March 2024, almost six months into Israel's genocide and mass starvation campaign. She posted two videos that day: one "unboxing" of a parcel of aid, which received over two hundred thousand "likes," and another of her kneading dough and baking bread on a makeshift oven made from a flipped pot.

In her videos, Renad is always smiling and cheerful, giggling nervously as her tutorials are interrupted by the buzzing of remotely operated drones and sounds of aerial bombardments all around her. She ducks, frightened, before resuming her instructions: "Rolling dough in the tent," she announces beneath the deafening din of explosives. Her daily routine in Gaza is "struggling to survive," one dish at a time. Israel is killing children her age in the deadliest attack on children in modern history.[2] Her videos bear witness to the culinary productions of a child surviving a genocide. Combining meager ingredients, her videos are also a call to action: to spread awareness about Gaza and help her surviving family members escape to safety.

Through her online presence, Renad defies the blackout imposed on Palestinian journalism and people while trying to stay alive. In the absence of oil or bread, her incomplete meals reflect the ruinous destruction around her. She works to survive in her beloved Gaza as a storyteller against settler erasure. "The roads have changed, they are no longer filled with joy as they once were … In the past, we could walk comfortably and enjoy the space around us," she shares.[3] In addition to a "war burger," Renad also makes "war lasagna" which she cooks in the tabun – a communal, outdoor oven common during harvests, traditionally made from materials collected from the land and patted together by Palestinian women.[4] Her videos are instructive, teaching viewers the process of preparing common Palestinian dishes, such as *maqluba* (a savory dish of layered meat, vegetables, and rice cooked in a turmeric broth), while telling a story about the people of Gaza and their survival in real time.

Genocide is part of Israel's long, violent process of settler-colonialism; its purpose is to annihilate and erase the Indigenous from their land and from global memory. This essay looks at Gazan food content creation during the first nine months of the Gaza genocide to analyze it as a record of Palestinian presence-making and presence-affirming. Beginning with a brief Indigenous history of Gaza as the land of spice and *samak* (fish), I explore how Palestinian food is a land relation sustained even in the darkest hour, through Indigenous cunning and ancestral knowledge, which helps many survive genocide in Gaza. The Nakba of 1948, which began a process of dispossession, military occupation, and total containment, transformed Palestine's bustling Gaza District to an emaciated "Strip," a violently colonized, isolated, and militarized land, under siege, and actively starved. Through my discussion of olive oil, bread, *khubiza* (mallow), the use of the tabun, and the preparation of traditional dishes like maqluba, I contend that Palestinians continue to enact their *sumud*, or steadfastness; food enables the continuity of a people, reflecting an Indigenous land relation and the wisdom of Palestine's foremothers.

I argue that survival is not passive; it is active and rooted work animated by the place-based food knowledge of Palestine's foremothers. Palestinians' Indigenous

survival reflects an existential, insurrectionary, and activated sense of presence; it is resistance in itself.[5] That is the premise of the Palestinian Indigenous praxis of sumud. In the context of colonized Palestine, sumud has come to embody a range of significations, sensibilities, affections, attachments, aspirations, and practices. What connects them is a political subjectivity "that embodies the possibility of escaping hegemonic configurations of colonial liberal politics."[6] Indigenous food preparation and consumption, then, emerge as radical acts of embodied protest, refusing the necropolitical practices and sanctions by Israel's settler colonialism, military occupation, and efforts to erase Palestine and Palestinians. Food enables us to continue "as we have always done."[7] Cooking food in the context of its scarcity is work for survival against genocide that conjures an Indigenous ethos of presence, longevity, and durability. Under acute deprivation, food ritual and knowledge emerge to assert an Indigenous politics of sumud that summons the knowledge of our elders and asserts: *We are still here and we aren't going anywhere*.[8]

The Land of Spice and Samak

The coastal waters of the Eastern Mediterranean have long been a source of abundance, regeneration, and cultural exchange for Palestinians. Gaza's rich culinary traditions are composed largely of spice, samak, and other seafood and reflect the diversified desires of its people, including urban elites and land cultivators. Gaza served as a nexus of trade since the Bronze Age and its food reflected a long history of transnational trade and diplomatic relations, the tastes of its Bedouin communities, and the generations of fishers who made fresh seafood kebab and barbecued fish on open fires.

Gaza was also a famed spice hamlet along the Silk Road. In addition to Indian silks, African wood, and Arabian balsam, spices such as pepper, cardamom, and cinnamon would be loaded onto ships at the seaports of Gaza, ready to be sent off to markets all over the Mediterranean. Pepper, cinnamon, nutmeg, and cloves – the spices that for centuries moved the world's economy in their storied transit across the "Old World" – all passed through Gaza.[9] Gaza connected East Africa to Western Europe through land and sea routes and served as a loading dock for citrus, wheat, and barley harvested in the Gaza District.

As elsewhere in Palestine, olive oil was central to Gaza's cuisine. The wealthy urbanite, the land cultivator (fellah), and the fisher alike enjoyed olive oil produced from local olive trees that flourished in the coastal district. They used olive oil to dress salads and stews and cook traditional Gazan dishes like *sumagiyya* (sumac, chard, and meat stew), one of the oldest recorded meals in history, mentioned in Muhammad bin Hasan al-Baghdadi's 1225 CE cookbook.[10] In addition to olive oil, seafood, and chilies, Gaza had an abundance of dill and other fresh herbs. Gaza city, whose history stretches back some four millennia, has long been a culinary hub and the aromas, flavors, and tastes of its rich cuisine have been familiar to Palestinians for many generations.

Before 1948, most people worked the land in the surrounding countryside; Gazan landowners and land cultivators alike harvested citrus groves and fished for seafood. When the state of Israel was established on lands it dispossessed from Palestinians, Gaza was cut from its traditional food sources and markets, especially the land. The Gaza District – one of five districts of historic Palestine – was made up of two subdistricts, Gaza and Bir al-Sab‘. After the Nakba, the state of Israel took control of Bir al-Sab‘a and most of Gaza’s subdistricts. The once large and productive Gaza District was shrunk into an emaciated “strip,” and the Gazan economy was ravaged; within a few months, the people in the crowded strip were forced into poverty and aid dependence. Gaza simultaneously became a sanctuary for many of the Palestinians displaced by the Nakba. In September 1948, there were 83,000 refugees in the Gaza Strip; by December of that year, there were 250,000 refugees displaced from 144 cities, towns, and villages.[11] In a matter of weeks, 70 percent of the people living in the Gaza Strip were refugees of the 1948 Nakba.

In the 1950s and1960s, a steady influx of refugees into the Strip prompted a series of interventions by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). Following a freezing winter in 1950, UNRWA built better facilities. Soon, there were eight central refugee camps in Gaza: Jabaliya, Nusayrat, al-Maghazi, Dayr al-Balah, Khan Yunis, Rafah, Shati’, and al-Burayj. These refugee camps symbolized the continuation of the Nakba through Israel’s ongoing policy and practices of dispossession and militarized violence, but also the steadfastness of the Palestinian people. The part of the Gaza Subdistrict that remained Palestinian land was administered by the Egyptian military. Between 1950 and 1967, many Palestinians in Gaza worked and studied in Egypt. They would continue to cherish their ancestral recipes, fusing them with the coastal traditions they encountered.

After occupying the Gaza Strip during the 1967 war, Israel ran Gaza like a plantation economy. Wealthy settler “developers” replaced ancestral groves with cash crops, exploited Gazan land and labor, and forced Israeli commodities into Gaza’s markets. Israel coerced the descendants of the famed Gaza spice traders and the Nakba’s refugees to work fields of strawberries and avocados for export to its settler metropole. Young Palestinians in the Gaza Strip confronted a chokehold of ecological collapse, food deprivation, economic sanction, physical containment, settler-state violence, agricultural dumping, aid dependence, and a lifetime of besiegement. Those who could obtain temporary permits worked on Israeli plantations, making on average thirteen dollars a day, leaving the harvests to the elders and women as they sought to find a way out of impoverishment. By exploiting the labor of young Palestinian men, the settler state would maintain its branding as a Mediterranean paradise with excellent brunch options, “like Southern California. Only nicer.”[12]

Meanwhile, Gazans innovated their cuisine. As Israel established plantations of strawberries and avocadoes, Palestinians in Gaza began to integrate such produce that could be indigenized into Gaza’s environs, traditions, and diets. Bayt Lahiya became famous for strawberries, attracting tourists from across Gaza to its fall and spring harvests. Despite Israel’s military occupation, locals reported malnutrition levels near

zero in Gaza in 2003.[13] Gazan cuisine had a level of nutritive sophistication both in the creamy yogurt-based broths and tart flavors of the north and the savory tomato-based stews of the south.[14] Gazans also innovated their cuisine in the context of scarcity, making do with rations of vegetable oil, powdered milk, and water supplied by humanitarian organizations to make dough a canvas of possibilities: they spread olive oil and cinnamon sugar on it to make fresh cinnamon rolls; they stuffed it with cheeses, za'tar and olive oil, or spicy minced lamb and pine nuts to make savory pies. They ate freshly baked breads with tomatoes, cucumber, olive oil, labneh, salty cheeses, falafel, hummus, or *ful mudammas* for breakfast. In 2007, however, the adaptive and creative capacities of the people of Gaza were placed under a completely new order.

There Is No Olive Oil in Gaza: Erasure as Slow Starvation

In 2007, Israel put Gaza under an oppressive siege, closing its borders, destroying the very plantation economy it had imposed upon the captive population, and forcing Palestinians in Gaza into systemic food deprivation. To survive, Gazans were forced to rely on donor rations that arrived on humanitarian aid trucks and were distributed to households in accordance with Israel's policy of "counting [the] calories" allowed into the Gaza Strip.[15] Under international law, occupying countries are required to provide basic life necessities to occupied people. A leaked Israeli report estimated that 2,279 calories per person in food assistance would be sufficient to ensure the population would not starve, but would be held captive to "a basic fabric of life."[16] Olive oil became a luxury afforded by few, an astonishing fact in lands where olive trees make up at least half of the landscape. For over seventeen years, Gazans had to smuggle sage, cardamon, cumin, coriander, cinnamon, and ginger, as well as chocolate, fresh meat, seeds and nuts, vitamins and oil for animal feed, fishing rods, chamomile, and other items banned in the name of security by the state of Israel. Items like chocolate are admitted for international organizations, but are specifically not for Palestinian use.[17]

The colonization, theft, and desecration of Gaza's lands and waters has deeply affected the traditional diet of its people. The theft and destruction of the land directly impacts the availability of fresh food. Half of Gaza's farmlands lay along Israel's "buffer zone" – a settler-military area within occupied Palestinian territory along the entire northern and eastern sides of the Gaza Strip. Israeli soldiers in dystopic watchtowers regularly opened heavy machine gunfire on land cultivators and shepherds who were denied accessing 85 percent of the Palestinian maritime areas and orchards recognized in the 1994 Gaza-Jericho Agreement. In the 2010s, the Israeli navy routinely shot at Gaza's four thousand fishermen or any Palestinians who fished or boated beyond two nautical miles.[18] This nautical colonialism had a catastrophic impact on the environment as overfishing along the coasts depleted fish stocks, leaving a large gap in Gaza's traditional diet and economy.

Israel destroyed local food production and replaced Palestinian foods with Israeli brands at supermarkets. During Israel's 2009 assault on Gaza, Israeli forces destroyed

chicken farms belonging to Sameh Sawafeary and his family in Zaytun. In total, 131,000 of Sawafeary's chickens were killed; Sawafeary and his family had supplied approximately 35 percent of the eggs on the market in Gaza. Egg prices soared and Gaza's stores stocked frozen chickens supplied by Israeli firms.[19] Israel also destroyed dairy processing plants, bombed the al-Badr flourmill – the last one still operating in Gaza at the time – to rubble, and destroyed the famed strawberry fields of Bayt Lahiya. Through this material destruction, Gazans became more dependent on the Israeli state to grant official permission for flour to enter the Gaza Strip via international aid.

Still, Gazans refused to stop eating well. Instead, they returned to old methods of harvesting passed down by their foremothers. If they no longer had access to plots of land or if regular Israeli bombardment had contaminated the soil of their farmlands, they planted what they could on their rooftops, balconies, and entryways. They created small community gardens and invested in hydroponic agriculture. They became adept at preserving foods in the face of electricity blackouts imposed by Israel. Gazans planted and pickled and made jams; they sundried tomatoes and they dried herbs on clotheslines. They boiled water with rations of milk powder to replicate *jibna baladiyya*, a traditional farmer's cheese. These "slow food" methods became a matter of surviving slow starvation for an ever-growing population, of which half are children, under eighteen years of age.[20]

Motivated by the self-reliance and steadfastness of their predecessors, including the example set during the first intifada, the people of Gaza developed plans for wastewater management, water recycling, and rainfed agriculture. They became exceptional builders and rebuilders in the aftermath of Israel's repeated bombardments and massacres. Reconnecting with ancestral foodways disrupted by the ongoing Nakba was a move toward economic, political, national, psychological, and social sovereignty.[21] Despite the fact that 85 percent of Palestinians in Gaza were officially food insecure and dependent on donor agencies like UNRWA for flour, beans, sugar, salt, and vegetable oil, they continued to innovate food as a form of refusal of Israel's conditions of deprivation. To circumvent Israel's violent entrapment via air, land, and sea, Palestinians smuggled in goods through underground tunnels. Thus, Gazans draw from a rich historical tradition of sumud as well as a proclivity for creative problem solving and ingenuity. This "get it done" attitude, resourcefulness, and creative problem solving reflect the resilient spirit of the people of Gazan.

There Is No Bread in Gaza: Genocide in the Seas of Abundance

After nine months of genocide, flour is either scarce, held captive by Israeli forces, or extremely expensive. People are forced to eat grass and drink polluted water, and the bakeries, like most buildings, have been destroyed. Within a few days of 7 October 2023, bread queues began to lengthen as Israel cut off fuel, water, and electricity. People would line up at bakeries at 1 AM to secure a place in line and return home at 9 AM. Sometimes they would return the following afternoon, often empty-handed due to the absence of flour and water. Finding bread was a stressful and terrifying journey.

People in line were concerned that their gathering would provoke an Israeli strike and they became tired: "You can imagine waiting all that time under the missiles, the bombardment, the heat, and the crowding," reported a Gazan baker. Before long, bakeries went out of service. A young Gazan baker recalls that people who were "fortunate with flour" made *saj* and tabun bread and sold the loaves in the streets.[22] Soon they were flooded with even more customers as people became more and more desperate to feed their families, especially as winter loomed. By January, a sack of flour was four hundred shekels, or more than one hundred U.S. dollars. "We now eat beans with saj and then finish it using spoons," the unnamed baker says.[23] Then, there was no more bread left to sell in Gaza. In February, Hamza Abu Toha spent five days searching for food for his wife who had just given birth to their child, returning with a plate of uncooked rice and a few pieces of meat, which cost him ninety-five dollars.[24]

Currently, 100 percent of Gazans are food and life insecure. Israeli-declared "safety zones" have become death traps. The United States continues to enable the genocide, delivering thousands of weapons including precision-guided munitions, two-thousand-pound bunker buster bombs, tank shells, and other arms.[25] At the same time that the U.S. government arms Israel with weapons that level entire neighborhoods in the blink of an eye, it continues to allow Gazans to starve. Israel continues to kill journalists, poets, musicians, teachers, doctors, nurses, patients, medical workers, land cultivators, scientists, and bakers – all agents of Gaza's social reproduction – through aerial bombardment, targeted assassinations, recurring massacres, tank shelling, snipers, and ground assaults.

By late February 2024, the UN described the conditions in Gaza as the "highest percentage of acute food insecurity ever classified" and reported that pregnant or breastfeeding women were particularly vulnerable.[26] In five months, hardly any flour had made it into Gaza and people were desperate and exhausted. Death was taking its toll as children succumbed to starvation. Searching for flour or bread was tedious and results were meager.

On that rare 29th day of February, fifty-two-year-old Faris Elewya, a resident of the Sha'f area east of Gaza City, left his house, braving Israel's aerial bombardment in the hope of bringing home flour for his children. "It's been forty days, and none of my children has seen the sight of bread," the father of five told reporters.[27] At approximately 4 AM, Israeli troops opened fire on Elewya and others who had gathered to collect flour from humanitarian aid trucks. Israel killed at least 112 people and injured 760 others. UN officials condemned the massacre, calling on Israel to end its deliberate campaign of starvation.[28]

Over a two-week period, Israeli soldiers killed over four hundred Palestinians seeking the scant aid allowed into Gaza.[29] Israeli forces shot and shelled them as they gathered to get food for their starving families. Israel targeted Palestinian crowds desperately searching for flour at locations that aid groups had coordinated with the Israeli military in advance. This string of killings came to be known as the Flour Massacres.[30] Israel's policy of slow starvation became more systematized and crueler. The same day Israelis murdered starving Palestinians seeking aid, the military

bombed a UN aid shelter. Israeli officials claimed without evidence that UNRWA – a lifeline for food in Gaza – was supporting terrorism.[31] The United States and some of its allies immediately halted their financial support, further accelerating already imminent starvation in the Gaza Strip. Israel has since passed a law banning UNRWA from operating in Palestine.

Today, Palestinians in Gaza continue to be deprived of food. Under pressure from mass popular movements for Palestine, the United States sent canned food packed in flimsy boxes, dropped unceremoniously into the Mediterranean Sea. In six months, the United States conducted two airdrops totaling 126 bundles of food, or seventy-five thousand meals, for a population of over two million people. Desperate children risked being shot by Israeli snipers patrolling Gaza's coast as they dove into the Mediterranean Sea to receive the sloppily airdropped aid. Several parachutes failed to deploy and the aid parcels landed on five Palestinians, two of them children, crushing them to death.[32]

"We need fruits and vegetables," Gazans shouted at journalists covering the humiliating "rescue mission." By 4 November 2023, the average Palestinian in Gaza was surviving on two pieces of bread a day. Two weeks later, the only remaining mill in Gaza was shut. By spring, at the onset of Ramadan, nearly 1.5 million Palestinians displaced to Rafah were on the brink of famine. On 15 May, an unnamed Palestinian man held a bag of flour to reporters: "This bag belonged to a martyr, his blood is on it. A human life is worth a bag of flour now."[33] In Gaza, food continues to be a weapon of dispossession and erasure.

The Ovens of Our Foremothers: Tabun as a Feminist Praxis

Many video logs from Gaza during the genocide show young men bringing elderly Palestinian women sacks of dough. These women are often kneeling beside an oven made from an oil tin or a tabun or saj oven. These videos typically depict a woman kneading the dough, rolling it out, shaping it into balls, and stretching it into rounds over hot stones. People gather around her, many helping by breaking up the task of bread making, each person taking on a role. The tabun oven is lit and will run for as long as the fire continues, as long as needed. And as long as there is flour, the dough will rise, its aroma alone sacred in this ashen landscape – a pause from death, a reprieve from hunger, a source of comfort.[34]

When it comes to food for survival, Palestine's history is indeed our future.[35] Palestinian ancestors innovated the tabun oven using raw materials they gathered from the surrounding countryside. Earth and compost materials packed together and sterilized through the natural aerobic bacteria found in the soil was formed into a heating vessel. The tabun was heated by ground olive pits and other composted material. Once ignited, the oven remained lit for hours, the stones glowing dimly. These tabuns were coveted possessions often passed down from one generation to the next, and a tabun would serve a family, clan, village, or collection of *hamula*s (extended families) for hundreds of years. Sometimes they were in people's private homes or gardens, but

more often they were built in the open outdoors, near a central location like a spring, the base of a hill, a natural clearing between trees, or a community garden. In almost all cases, they were open for use by the community, including the village where it was located and neighboring villages. Traditionally, especially in the countryside, Palestinian women baked bread daily and the tabun was set up for the gathering of women. Women would sit beside the oven, cracking jokes, gossiping, exchanging resources, offering condolences, prayers, and blessings, or celebrating good news. They did this while watching the dough rise over the hot stones in a perfect puffy round. When crispy bubbles form on the surface of the bread, it is done. The smell of fresh bread signaled that someone was finishing up and the tabun would soon be free.

Tabun also refers to the kind of bread made in the tabun oven, a large round flatbread. Its dough is a simple recipe of flour, water, salt, sugar, yeast, and olive oil. Once the dough is rolled out and shaped, it is slapped onto the oven's walls or on hot stones to bake. The result is a doughy flatbread with a slight crisp to its edges and on the grooves that form on its surface from the stones. The inside is fluffy and aromatic. Once the fresh bread is made, it makes its way across clean hands and elders praise the blessing. Everyone tears a piece of the round, a cloud of billowing steam bursting from the fresh bread, and dunks it into a bowl of zingy, peppery olive oil characteristic of Palestine's olives, savory za'tar, creamy labneh, or soul-warming ful. The combination of piping fresh bread and the pepperiness of the neon-green olive oil is the ultimate satisfaction offered first to elders and eager children during the harvests.

In corners of Gaza, the tabun oven flickers due to the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the Gazan people. In Khan Yunis in January, a displaced elderly Palestinian man makes a clay oven as children play around him, a brief reprieve from the missiles encircling their makeshift shelter. In the ruins of Dayr al-Balah, Gaza Strip, fifty-three-year-old Inshirah Salem al-Aqra, a mother of ten, shares that the secret of delicious bread is in our foremothers' hearths, and that the wood-fired tabun makes food extra flavorful. Before 7 October, she would hand mold ovens from clay, straw, and organic materials, as Palestine's foremothers had done for generations, for sale to whoever wanted them. She would pat and mold, shaping the vessel by hand, before leaving it to dry in the sun. She says, "In this war, everything is so hard. People need the tabuns even to make coffee or tea."[36] With Gaza in total darkness, people come to Inshirah to ask her for a tabun. In the genocide's early stages, her gentle patting and molding became the only source of income for her family. Her husband was a fisherman, but Israeli forces burned his fishing boat in October. Inshirah returned to her foremothers' hearth to support her family of twelve. She made and sold five ovens in one week, more than she would have made in a month before October. But she is firm in maintaining her old prices, explaining: "I don't want to take advantage of people, especially during these times." She sells a small oven for twenty-one dollars and the largest for forty dollars. Inshirah has also opened her home to displaced women sheltering in nearby schools. "They bring me flour, so I can bake bread for them," she said. If she has clean water, she fills their jars.

The process of making tabun contains a lesson about land relations, social reproduction, and culinary creativity. Our foodways are lessons from our ancestors taught through stories and practices passed down from generation to generation, usually by women. Palestinian Indigenous foodways help us see food not as a commodity to be produced and consumed, but a site of mediation between our place of belonging, the way of our ancestors, and the worlds we seek to create. Food is a site of social, ancestral, cultural, and material regeneration, endowed at different times with various meanings: sustenance, care, currency, medicine, heritage, ancestry, identity, and traditional knowledge systems. Characteristically Palestinian culinary arts, including making tabun bread and foraging for plants, become practices and recipes against erasure, even when it stares people in the face.

The tabun method of making bread – a tabun methodology – guided and inspired by relations between women and the land, is imbued with lessons from our foremothers. Itself a product of the land, the tabun espouses a set of Indigenous principles that articulate a decolonial food praxis in the context of acute violence: 1) the centrality of the land (and water) and our appreciation for its sacredness; 2) the importance of connectedness, cooperation, and co-creativity for the regeneration of land, body, collective, and spirit; 3) the ritual of reciprocity in mutual nourishment and mutual accountability; 4) the emphasis on individual and collective wellness; 4) the sacredness of life; and 5) respect for human and nonhuman beings. Tabun bread is fortified through the spirit of collectivity informed by the gathering of women working to sustain life across generations.

Content creators from Gaza showed Gazan women baking bread in accordance with ancestral Palestinian traditions, to survive Gaza during the genocide. These videos show women's hands, kneading, rolling, rounding, sifting, stuffing, and baking. This is their house, and they invite young content creators to watch them skillfully knead and roll, forming balls of dough and then patting them flat in their palms. The young men and boys are responsible for the fire; they light the tabun, bring the precious rolls to the oven, kneeling beside it with a long-necked spatula or tongs and handling the dough with care and gratitude. The young men's agile hands place, flip, and bake.

At one tabun oven in a makeshift encampment for the displaced in Khan Yunis, Umm Ahmad bakes bread and calls for a young Gazan journalist Mohammed Majed Aborjela (@aborjelaa): "Here is a *manqusha* for you, Mohammed."[37] She has finished baking bread in her tabun and has saved her last few rolls to make these savory pies with the few ingredients she has. She offers Mohammed a za'tar flatbread, or manqusha, to which he responds with gratitude and supplication: "May God be with you … May this war end … May we eat these pastries at home upon our return." In the video, which has close to fifty thousand views, he describes to his viewers a Palestinian bread making tradition where the baker reserves the last few balls of dough to make savory flatbreads and pies that she distributes at will to her loved ones. These are typically stuffed with cheeses and herbs, scrambled eggs, minced beef and pine nuts, or spinach spiced with sumac and onions. Today there is only za'tar and Mohammed delights in the delicious, warm, and familiar pie: "We are proud of our Palestinian traditions and our traditional Palestinian foods as well," he tells his viewers.

At another encampment in the south Umm Mustafa calls another young journalist Ahmed Elmadhoun (@madhoun95) to enjoy a similar freshly baked pie. Umm Mustafa is a displaced mother from the north living in a makeshift UNRWA camp in southern Gaza. Ahmed is hungry and grateful to receive the fresh baked bread: "It was the first thing we ate since the morning," he shares. "Mothers are the ones helping us endure and stay strong."[38] Umm Mustafa bakes bread in her tabun oven for the many hungry people that surround her, distributing what she can. She also allows people to bring their own dough or wood, and she helps their dough rise. She greets Ahmed with a solemn blessing:

Umm Mustafa: May God calm our lives.

Ahmed: Praise God.

Umm Mustafa: With God's will, may this not be prolonged.

In her prayers, Umm Mustafa's voice is strong and resolute. Her bread is made simply and out of necessity, but robust prayers make up for the meager ingredients. Her blessings inspire a response from the content creator. *Ya rabb*, he says, "Praise God." Ahmed receives the bread with gratitude, calling the generous stranger "aunt." He blesses her hands (*salim iydayki*). Their interaction is soft, quiet. Ahmed gives Umm Mustafa "a thousand thanks" and makes his own supplication: "May the next time that we meet be in our homes," he tells her.[39] The quick exchange, mediated by bread and blessings, reflects a rooted sense of belonging. The Gazan baker becomes a spiritual and material lifeline anchored by a collective desire for safety and return. The final prayer between the Gazan acquaintance-kin is that Palestine will rise from the ashes of despair. This is a scene that is repeated over and again in videos of Gazan content creators in their depiction of food and survival beside the tabun oven.

As an oven quite literally made of the earth and a bread intended to feed a collective, Palestinian tabun brings with it the praxis of connection that has sustained our people. From the makeshift ovens first introduced during the neolithic period to the ongoing practices of foraging and harvest, our food, including the foods made under conditions of forced starvation and deprivation in Gaza, is a record of our belonging and rootedness to the land. Palestinian foodways thus serve as subversive records of presence, life making, and steadfastness that gather and sustain people even in genocide.

Maqluba Is a Call to Action, Khubiza Is an Antidote to Genocide

The feminist praxes of creativity, responsibility, co-creativity, relationality, and individual and collective nourishment converge at the Palestinian hearth. Gazans now collect what little vegetables and produce is available and teach people to make maqluba. Typically, a Gazan maqluba consists of layers of fried vegetables, meat,

rice, and spices cooked in a rich broth. Once the pot of layers has cooked, the pot is flipped over to reveal a perfectly tiered cake of savory layers of spicy rice, fried vegetables, and lamb or chicken. This is where maqluba, meaning "flipped over" or "upside down," gets its name. In Gaza, the dish is traditionally prepared with eggplant and lamb. I grew up eating the dish with chicken and fried cauliflower typical of my city, al-Khalil. In any case, maqluba is delicious, hearty, and soul-nourishing. It is perfect in the cold winter months and paired with a crunchy Arabic salad (cucumbers, tomato, onion, bell pepper, and leafy greens or cabbage dressed in olive oil, lemon juice, and a sprinkle of salt) and fresh whole fat yogurt, which has a cooling effect with the spiced rice.

With the destruction of gardens and groves and the extremely high cost of vegetables, and the prevention of humanitarian aid by Israel, Renad from Gaza makes an "orphan maqluba." This is a meatless maqluba with a few paltry vegetables and spiced rice that she fries with little oil over an open fire. Nisreen (@nisreendiary), another Gazan content creator displaced to Rafah, also makes the traditional Palestinian dish for her English-speaking viewers, using the only vegetables she could find. "After 124 days [of genocide], we were finally able to make maqluba!" Nisreen announces.[40] Nisreen has a few tomatoes, one eggplant, and some small potatoes. She expresses gratitude for the ingredients she has and concern that others do not have even this much: "We were lucky to get these few ingredients. Unfortunately, our brothers and sisters in the north are still struggling to find food and water as we are living in real hunger now."[41] Normally, she would slice and deep fry the vegetables, but there is not enough oil for frying. Every bit of food counts and nothing is to be wasted. Nisreen's cooking video briefly pans to crowds of people around small wagons of produce. "After layering the veggies, we should add meat at this point, but meat is very rare to find, so we added chickpeas as a source of protein," she informs the audience.[42] She then adds spices, rice, water, and bay leaves to the pot of vegetables and they simmer over the open fire. When the rice is fluffy and the spiced broth is absorbed, the maqluba is done. The maqluba is removed from heat and left to sit for a few minutes until it is ready for the grand finale: the flip. Nisreen expresses excitement because no vegetables stick to the bottom of the pot: it is a "perfect flip." She ends with a lesson: "Maqluba is about patience, love, and being together as a family. It's also a great way to talk more about Palestine." Nisreen concludes the video with a call to action: make a maqluba, invite your friends and family to enjoy it with you, and use it to raise awareness about Palestine. Use the hashtag #flipyourmaqluba on social media and connect with the people of Gaza through this traditional Palestinian dish.

Like Inshirah, who transforms the hearth into a tool of temporary repose, Nisreen's cooking demonstration is a pedagogy of life making, combining a necessarily pliable cuisine in the face of catastrophe and the assignment to learn and speak up. Her creativity imbues her food content with urgency and dynamic praxes of sumud. She also provides a space for solidarity through the appreciation of Palestinian food. These collective efforts to sustain life in the context of great deprivation, despair, and mass

murder transform the space of the hearth such that even in the face of atrocity, Gazans can make something delicious and enjoy when they flip their maqluba. Palestine is held by the steadfast Palestinian woman who breathes life into these ovens when the nexus of racial settler capitalism has imposed darkness.

As with her tabun oven, the Palestinian foremothers' knowledge emerges in the context of genocide through the embodied practice of foraging. Gazans take to foraging for wild plants and herbs like the Palestinian common mallow, *khubiza*, which grows wild across Palestine, to survive genocide. "This is my first time making Palestinian Khobiza," shares Nisreen in a different post. "I grew up watching my grandmother and then my mom prepare it with care. The leaves and stems are edible, and you can also eat it like a stew."[43] Like tabun bread, the wild mallow invokes Palestine's foremothers; they emerge as protective ghosts to feed the starving. They materialize as knowledge and lessons through stories passed down from one generation to the next, retained in collective memory as a toolkit for survival, replenishment, and regeneration amid the ruin. The edible plant contains anti-inflammatory and antioxidant components, is used to treat insect wounds or burns, and as cough relief. "This dish is part of our Palestinian heritage," Nisreen tells her 148,000 subscribers, and with healing properties, khubiza quite literally emerges from the land to heal Palestinians from Israel's imposed hunger.

A sister to *mulukhiya* (jute's mallow), khubiza grows everywhere in Gaza, in open fields and in the cracks of concrete along a highway. Like the tabun oven, foraging is about resourcefulness, making something delicious from the land, and appreciating food as it mediates the relationship between our people and homeland. Khubiza is also about the continuity of life, even in the circumstances of its negation. Khubiza became an antidote to the famine imposed on the Palestinians of Gaza: "Nowadays, it's common to see people in Gaza foraging in fields or stopping by the roadside to collect khubiza," writes Nisreen. To make a Palestinian khubiza salad, clean the greens thoroughly with vinegar and water, and give them a rough chop. Sauté the greens in olive oil with a diced onion, and season with salt and pepper. During the genocide in Gaza, foraging for khubiza and making salads like this became the steadfast work of survival.

Conclusion: Rising

In times of collective grief and tragedy, Palestine's foremothers make themselves present, providing the lessons and tools for survival. The food knowledge of our foremothers and the lessons it provides are not a vestige of the past, but animated in the present through a praxis of sumud. These practices are part of a process of "retrospective ethnogenesis," providing Indigenous people with new and updated content that connect the Indigenous past with an Indigenous insistence on presence.[44] The content of our collective past becomes the source material for our present and future, affirming our roots and sense of belonging, while materially enabling our people to survive.

In the context of Israel's settler-colonialism, military occupation, and besiegement, food is used as a weapon of starvation and genocide. The systemic destruction of Indigenous sources of food, including environments, livestock, and food establishments, has been a central part of a long history of Palestinian struggles for food and land sovereignty. Israel's theft and destruction of land and food sources are the primary means by which Gaza was transformed from a space of abundance to a starved "strip." Since 1967, more than eight hundred thousand Palestinian olive trees have been uprooted by Israeli authorities and settlers; many were centuries old.[45] Israel's consistent assault on Gaza's biodiversity has been prodigious, costing Palestinians a vital source of income, food, and medicine for the Palestinian cultivators who have long cared for it. For years, the settler state maintained a monopoly over imported goods and ran Gaza like a plantation. It sprayed Palestinian farmlands with toxic chemicals and pesticides.[46] Israel's seventeen-year siege systemically denied Gazan sovereignty by destroying access to land and water, fishing infrastructures, farmlands, and livestock.

This year's harvest is scorched or buried alive with other life beings along the captive coast. In Gaza, buildings filled with people have been razed to the ground, reduced to craters on the earth's surface. Mountains of ruin created by the settler state contain the dismembered bodies of Palestinians, most of them women and children, in a genocide that continues as I write. Ann Stoler writes that "ruins provide a quintessential image of what has vanished from the past and has long decayed."[47] But for Indigenous people, ruins are the story of our continuation. These ruins are the content of our lives. They are affirmations and reminders that our roots came before the ruin. The tabun, often considered a premodern relic of Palestine's past, emerges as a vessel of life making in the context of genocide. A product of our foremothers, the tabun oven is a gift to us from them, emerging directly from the land and providing a praxis for individual pleasure and collective well-being. The tabun also reflects the knowledge of its makers, including the children and young people who celebrate Palestinian food even in its deprivation. Palestine's foremothers' knowledge sustains us in this nightmarish reality. Tabun breadmaking reflects the insistence on Palestinian presence that stirs quietly in the spirits of the people. In Gaza, food provides a glimpse into the way people survive genocide and rise again; food is the culmination of the past embodied by the foremother, who reemerges through her knowledge and lessons to nurture the children of the land, across time and space, through the oven that will help the people rise.

Lila Sharif is a Palestinian feminist scholar, creative writer, and researcher originally from al-Khalil (Hebron), based in the Phoenix area. She holds a dual PhD in sociology and ethnic studies and teaches at the School of Social Transformation at Arizona State University. This essay is a version of the chapter "Rise," which appears in her forthcoming book, to be published by the University of Minnesota Press and tentatively titled Olive Skins.

Endnotes

1 Renad Attallah (@renadfromgaza), "War Burger," Instagram, 23 April 2024, online at www.instagram.com/p/C6G4nOeISLW/ (accessed 1 October 2024).

2 Doctors without Borders, "The Most Dangerous Place in the World to Be a Child: The Impact of War on Gaza's Children," 7 June 2024, online at www.doctorswithoutborders.org/latest/most-dangerous-place-world-be-child (accessed 26 September 2024).

3 Renad Attallah (@renadfromgaza), "Most difficult part of w@r," Instagram, 27 May 2024, online at www.instagram.com/p/C7eJGFZIBe5 (accessed 1 October 2024).

4 Also spelled taboun or taboon.

5 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, "Indigenous Resurgence and Co-resistance," *Critical Ethnic Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2016), 19–34, online at doi.org/10.5749/jcritethnstud.2.2.0019. See also Melinda Tuhus, "In Palestine, to Exist Is to Resist," *In These Times*, 24 January 2012, online at inthesetimes.com/article/in-palestine-to-exist-is-to-resist (accessed 1 October 2024)

6 Lena Meari, "Sumud: A Palestinian Philosophy of Confrontation in Colonial Prisons," *South Atlantic Quarterly* 113, no. 3 (2014): 547–78.

7 Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

8 Here I am referencing Winona LaDuke, "We Are Still Here: The 500 Years Celebration," *Race, Poverty, and the Environment* 3, no. 3 (Fall 1992): 3, 20–21.

9 Laila El-Haddad and Maggie Schmidt, *The Gaza Kitchen: A Palestinian Culinary Journey* (Washington, DC: Just World Books, 2021), 9.

10 Paula Mejia, "The 10th-Century Baghdad Cookbook That's a Poetic Tome to Food," *Atlas Obscura*, 3 October 2018, online at www.atlasobscura.com/articles/medieval-islamic-cookbook (accessed 26 September 2024).

11 Beryl Cheal, "Refugees in the Gaza Strip, December 1948–May 1950," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 18, no. 1 (1988): 138–57, online at doi.org/10.2307/2537600.

12 "Anthony Bourdain: Parts Unknown – Jerusalem," CNN, 2 November 2013, transcript online at transcripts.cnn.com/show/abpu/date/2013-11-02/segment/01 (accessed 26 September 2024).

13 El-Haddad and Schmidt, *Gaza Kitchen*, 34.

14 El-Haddad and Schmidt, *Gaza Kitchen*, 34.

15 This slow starvation policy was based on an Israeli report published in January 2008, titled "Food Consumption in the Gaza Strip – Red Lines." See Gisha, "Reader: 'Food Consumption in the Gaza Strip – Red Lines'," October 2012, online at www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications/redlines/redlines-position-paper-eng.pdf (accessed 19 August 2024)

16 In 2008, Wikileaks published communications in which Israel promised the United States it would be subtle but still keep Gaza's economy "on the brink of collapse." Israel was apparently aware that its aim of collective starvation would endanger its branding as a democratic state with the "most moral army in the world" and potentially impact its relationship with the U.S. federal government, which has been using U.S. taxpayer monies to finance Israel-imposed starvation. See Gisha, "'Red Lines' Presentation Released after 3.5-Year Legal Battle: Israel Calculated the Number of Calories It Would Allow Gaza Residents to Consume," 17 October 2012, online at gisha.org/en/red-lines-presentation-released-after-3-5-year-legal-battle-israel-calculated-the-number-of-calories-it-would-allow-gaza-residents-to-consume/ (accessed 26 September 2024).

17 See Gisha, "Restrictions on the Transfer of Goods into Gaza: Obstruction and Obfuscation" (January 2010), online at www.gisha.org/UserFiles/File/publications/Obstruction_and_obfuscation.pdf (accessed 26 September 2024).

18 Al-Mezan Center for Human Rights, "Gaza Fishermen: Life with Poverty, Harassment, and Suffering" (December 2010), online at www.mezan.org/uploads/files/11209.pdf (accessed 6 October 2024).

19 Ali Abunimah, *The Battle for Justice in Palestine* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 109.

20 El-Haddad and Schmidt, *Gaza Kitchen*, 25.

21 El-Haddad and Schmidt, *Gaza Kitchen*, 25.

22 @Jenan.Moha, "Nahki shwaya 'an halna ma' al-khubz?" [Can we talk a bit about our situation with bread?], Instagram, 3 January 2024, online at www.instagram.com/reel/C1orB22r6s- (accessed 26 September 2024). Saj is a very thin flatbread stretched across a

dome-surfaced oven by the same name, which is heated by fire underneath. It is perfect to wrap shawarma or falafel sandwiches that Gazans enjoyed before the genocide.

23 @Jenan.Moha, "Nahki shwaya?"

24 @Hamza_Abu_Toha, "Ama bi-na'mat rabbak fa-haddatha" [By the grace of God it happened], Instagram, 22 February 2024, online at www.instagram.com/p/C3pPYXpts28 (accessed 26 September 2024).

25 Sharon Zhang, "US Has Sent Israel over 600 Weapons Shipments since October," *Truthout*, 27 August 2024, online at truthout.org/articles/us-has-sent-israel-over-600-weapons-shipments-since-october/ (accessed 1 October 2024).

26 See Palestinian Feminist Collective, "The Palestinian Feminist Collective Condemns Reproductive Genocide in Gaza," 10 February 2024, online at palestinianfeministcollective.org/the-pfc-condemns-reproductive-genocide-in-gaza/ (accessed 26 September 2024).

27 He went on to describe how, after spending each day seeking food with his older sons, without success, "The whole family sits together in the night's darkness. The hunger eats away at our stomachs." Tareq S. Hajjaj, "Flour Soaked in Blood: 'Flour Massacre' Survivors Tell Their Story," Mondoweiss, 4 March 2024, online at mondoweiss.net/2024/03/flour-soaked-in-blood/ (accessed 29 August 2024).

28 United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, "UN Experts Condemn 'Flour Massacre', Urge Israel to End Campaign of Starvation in Gaza," 5 March 2024, online at www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/03/un-experts-condemn-flour-massacre-urge-israel-end-campaign-starvation-gaza (accessed 26 September 2024).

29 See "War on Gaza: Israel has killed over 400 people waiting for aid in Gaza" Middle East Monitor, Staff, published 12 March 2024, online at www.middleeasteye.net/news/war-gaza-aid-seekers-killed-fire-israel (accessed 1 October 2024).

30 Euro-Med Monitor, "Israeli Army Is Attempting to Evade Responsibility for Yet Another Flour Massacre in Gaza," 16 March 2024, online at reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/israeli-army-attempting-evade-responsibility-yet-another-flour-massacre-gaza-enar (accessed 26 September 2024).

31 See: Philippe Lazzarini, "UNRWA: Stop Israel's Violent Campaign against Us," *New York Times*, 30 May 2024, online at www.nytimes.com/2024/05/30/opinion/israel-gaza-un-unrwa.html (accessed 1 October 2024); and Simon Speakman Cordall, "Israel Gave No Evidence UNRWA Staff Linked to 'Terrorism': Colonna Report," *al-Jazeera*, 22 April 2024, online at www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/4/22/no-evidence-of-unrwa-staff-links-terrorist-groups-independent-review (accessed 1 October 2024).

32 "Aid Airdrop Kills Five People in Gaza after Parachute Fails," *al-Jazeera*, 8 March 2024, online at www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/3/8/aid-airdrop-kills-five-gaza-israel-war-hunger-famine (accessed 26 September 2024).

33 Middle East Eye (@middleeasteye), "This bag belonged to a martyr," Instagram, 15 March 2024, online at www.instagram.com/reel/C4hqJQ_iB3y (accessed 26 September 2024).

34 Science has shown that the scent and process of making bread invokes joy, the maternal, and adolescence, and that the scent of freshly baked bread inspires positivity, empathy, and altruism. The humanizing, visceral, and emotive response to bread was a revelation in the Western scientific community and was further taken up in interactive therapies. Psychatherapy – a play on "psycha" from Greek meaning "the soft interior of bread" and "psyche" meaning soul – integrates bread making into talk therapy as a way to address isolation, anxiety, and trauma. Bread making is also a coping mechanism during times of crisis. In the early days of the COVID-19 global pandemic, the cost and demand for flour soared around the world as people turned to kneading dough while sheltering in place.

35 Palestinian American writer Amanny Ahmad has said, "Wheat began where my blood began. I tend to think that my blood carries the same language as the plants from where I came, that I too, carry some of the same DNA as ancient wheat." Because food mediates the relationship between the Palestinian people and our homeland, "the seeds stored in this flesh sack" connect the past and future. As Ahmad concludes, "I am young, but parts of me are ancient." Amanny Ahmad, "Bread

and Salt: We Demand Action, Resistance and Change. The Time Is Now," *Mold*, 19 February 2024, online at thisismold.com/visual/art/amanny-ahmad-palestine-bread-wheat-history (accessed 26 September 2024).

36 Abdelhakim Abu Riash and Maram Humaid, "As People Run Out of Fuel in Gaza, Clay Ovens Are Back in Demand," *al-Jazeera*, 21 November 2023, online at www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2023/11/21/traditional-clay-ovens-in-demand-as-fuel-shortages-continue-in-gaza (accessed 26 September 2024).

37 Mohammed Majed Aborjela (@aborjelaa), "Thank you, Umm Ahmed. Please pray for us to return home," Instagram, 10 December 2023, online at www.instagram.com/aborjelaa/reel/C0q75tBNu3U/ (accessed 26 September 2024).

38 Ahmed Elmadhoun (@madhoun95), "Yesterday, during our work, we had a hot lunch," Instagram, 23 November 2023, online at www.instagram.com/reel/C0BA9ThNPOS/ (accessed 26 September 2024).

39 Elmadhoun, "Yesterday, during our work."

40 Nisreen Shehada (@nisreendiary), "Let's Make Maqluba," Instagram, 8 February 2024, online at www.instagram.com/p/C3F9NSLommO/?hl=en (accessed 26 September 2024).

41 Shehada, "Let's Make Maqluba."

42 Shehada, "Let's Make Maqluba."

43 Nisreen Shehada (@nisreendiary), "Palestinian Common Mallow (Khobiza)," Instagram, 29 February 2024, online at www.instagram.com/p/C37mwxusUJz/ (accessed 30 August 2024).

44 Philippe Erikson and Valentina Vapnarsky, "Introduction: Living Ruins and Vertiginous Vestiges: Amerindian Engagements with Remnants of the Past," in *Living Ruins: Native Engagements with Past Materialities in Contemporary Mesoamerica, Amazonia, and the Andes*, ed. Philippe Erikson and Valentina Vapnarsky (Louisville, CO: University Press of Colorado, 2022), 26.

45 Raja Shehadeh, "The Uprooting of Life in Gaza and the West Bank," *New Yorker*, 26 October 2023, online at www.newyorker.com/news/daily-comment/the-uprooting-of-life-in-gaza-and-the-west-bank (accessed 1 October 2024).

46 Forensic Architecture, "Herbicidal Warfare in Gaza," 19 July 2019 (updated 20 September 2019), online at forensic-architecture.org/investigation/herbicidal-warfare-in-gaza (accessed 9 October 2024).

47 Ann Laura Stoler, "Imperial Debris: Reflections on Ruins and Ruination," *Cultural Anthropology* 23, no. 2 (2008): 191–219, quote at 194, online at doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1360.2008.00007.x.

From Kitchen to Community: Food and Palestinian Marriage Rituals in the Ethnography of Hilma Granqvist

Mona Dorani

Abstract

Anthropologists have long recognized food for its profound social and symbolic significance within cultures. In Palestinian society, like other Middle Eastern cultures, food holds a central place in rituals and ceremonies, serving as a conduit for social cohesion and expression of cultural identity. This essay delves into the historical and social dimensions of food in Palestinian culture, elucidating its role in rituals and ceremonies, particularly marriage. Drawing upon the ethnographic work of Hilma Granqvist, a Finnish anthropologist whose monograph *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village* provides invaluable insights into the daily lives of Palestinian peasants in Artas, this study unearths hidden themes and understandings within the text. Through qualitative examination, we uncover that the act of offering food transcends mere custom; it symbolizes a profound transaction and plays a symbolic role in both public and private spheres associated with marriage rituals. The study sheds light on the intricate fabric of Palestinian culture, revealing the nuanced roles of food in shaping communal bonds and identity.

Keywords:

Palestinian rituals; marriage; Hilma Granqvist; food symbolism; negotiation; gender roles.

Beyond a basic human need, food often serves as a manifestation of social order, occupying a central place in our perception of identity and playing a crucial role in shaping social

relationships and expressing cultural values.[1] In nearly every society, offering food or drink is an expression of hospitality, implying generosity, authority, or affection. Accepting such an offer signifies acknowledgment and acceptance of these underlying assumptions, while declining might signify their rejection, particularly in rituals like weddings, where it serves to reinforce social bonds. In many societies, the ritual provision or exchange of food reinforces social hierarchy. In weddings and other public rituals, food can serve as a symbol of local culture as well as social solidarity and communal affirmation, and as an expression or assertion of social hierarchy. In these public settings, food functions as a tool to reinforce social bonds and cultural continuity and the rituals associated with it are not only expressions of hospitality but also performances of status and power.[2]

The symbolic role of food in expressing and shaping social relationships manifests in specific cultural contexts. This is evident, for example, in the ethnographic work of scholars like Hilma Granqvist (1890–1972), a Finnish anthropologist who studied Palestinian society in the 1920s and 1930s.[3] Initially interested in biblical women, Granqvist shifted her focus to the village of Artas, located in a valley just a few kilometers southwest of Bethlehem, where community life was vibrant and dynamic. She immersed herself in the daily life of the village, recognizing the interconnectedness of her subjects with broader Palestinian society.[4] Her extensive ethnographic study extended over two periods of field research, and focused on daily rituals and social structures to uncover the deeper meanings behind cultural practices. During Granqvist's first research period, from 1925 to 1927, she studied marriage practices and village life. During her second period of research in Artas (1930–31), she collected more data and expanded her research to various aspects of village life, including marriage rituals. Her revolutionary research on Palestinian culture broke away from the traditional Orientalist approach, focusing instead on the lived experiences of a single community. Granqvist was one of the first anthropologists to use participant observation, living among the villagers and documenting their lives in meticulous detail. Despite early resistance among academic circles in Finland, she earned international recognition for her groundbreaking research, which provided rare insights into Palestinian culture. Her extensive field notes, photographs, and genealogical data remain invaluable resources on Palestinian village life in the first half of the twentieth century.[5]

Drawing on Granqvist's writings, this essay emphasizes the central role of food in Palestinian marriage rituals in the early twentieth century, from initial negotiations through to the formalization of the marriage contract. Food served as a medium through which negotiations were conducted, social bonds were strengthened, and communal celebrations were shared, reflecting the intricate cultural practices surrounding marriage in Palestinian society. Gender dynamics also shaped the preparation and serving of food, highlighting the distinct roles men and women played during these events – and, by extension, in Palestinian society more generally. Finally, social and familial dynamics were negotiated and reinforced through the consumption of food, revealing larger social structures within Palestinian society.

This essay analyzes the weddings described by Granqvist as composed of three distinct temporal phases: the phase preceding the ceremony (which includes the request for the bride and the negotiation of the *mahr*, what Granqvist calls the "bride price"), the ceremony itself (including the procession of the bride from her family's house to the house of the groom's family and the ensuing betrothal feast called *al-tabkha*, the "cooking"), and the period immediately following the ceremony.[6] In *The Rites of Passage* (1909), Arnold van Gennep outlined three key categories of life events for individuals or groups: separation, which entails moving away from a former status or state of life; liminality or transition, the "in-between" phase where the individual or group has separated from a previous state but not yet fully transitioned to a new state; and incorporation or reintegration, when an individual or group is welcomed into their new status or role in society, marking the end of the transition.[7] I read the Palestinian wedding food rituals described by Granqvist as structured social transitions that guided individuals through significant life changes and into new social roles. Specific food rituals associated with each phase – pre-ceremony (separation), ceremony (liminality), and post-ceremony (incorporation) – signified the changing status of the bride and groom, reinforcing their new social roles in the community.

Arranging a Marriage

Food took central stage in the customary hospitality and negotiation process that precedes a marriage agreement in Palestinian culture, setting the tone for the negotiations involved. Granqvist recounts a proverb: "After the meal comes the talk" (*ba'd al-ta'am bisir al-kalam*). The offer of food thus symbolizes hospitality and respect for the visitor, as well as the hosts' openness to the marriage proposal that will come during the course of the meal or afterward.

Granqvist described how an intermediary on behalf of a suitor would approach the family of a potential bride on his behalf, "generally in the evening."

> If the inhabitants of the house of the bride have had their supper, then they must serve him separately. Otherwise he will be asked to take his evening meal with them. As soon as the supper is ready, they say to him: "Please, help yourself!" He replies: "I will not enjoy your salt or taste your food until you give me what I have come for." To this is replied: "Thou art welcome in what thou hast come for; i.e., we will willingly accede to thy wish. Thou art dear to us, and thy visit to us is highly esteemed. Thou canst instantly begin [to say] whatever thou wishest." Only then does he eat. Then they speak about the events of social life, work, politics etc. until the coffee is served. And after the coffee, the negotiations begin.[8]

Standard formulas confirming the high esteem in which the intermediary is held served as preamble to the negotiations, but not only this. The intermediary would only eat once he had the hosts' reassurance that his offer would not be rejected, at

the risk of losing face. The refusal to eat until the terms of the marriage agreement were confirmed underscores the significance of food as a symbol of commitment and agreement. It also emphasizes the seriousness of the negotiations and the importance placed on familial consent in marriage.

In another example, the aunt of a suitor, Muhammad, approached her brother Musa on behalf of Muhammad, the son of their brother ʻAli, to ask for the hand of ʻAziza, Musa's daughter:

> She sat and they brought food. When they put the food before her she said: "I shall not taste anything, until I know that I shall have what I want!" Musa … said to her: It shall be as thou wishest, my sister! – even if thou comest for ʻAziza!" She says: "May ʻAziza live and may her brothers live! And I come for ʻAziza. I wish her for ʻAli's son."[9]

In traditional Palestinian society, cousin marriage was the norm, which helps explain the aunt's selection as intermediary to intercede with her brother, father of the potential bride. It also reflects a measure of flexibility as to gender in such delicate negotiations. That the aunt was as forceful as her male counterpart in the previous example, and presumably commanded as much respect, indicates that she is no initiate in such matters.

The request for the bride and the dowry negotiations were conducted in the intimate circle of the family around food. The betrothal feast, by contrast, was attended by a wide circle of relatives and friends, which symbolized the celebration of the impending union. The contrast between the public betrothal feast and the private marriage contract ceremony reflects the social nuances and privacy surrounding the finalization of the marriage agreement. The following section describes the role of food in the betrothal feast.

The Wedding Feast

The public phase in the marriage process began with the procession of the bride from her family's house to the house of her groom. The bride left her father's house and went to the groom's house accompanied by a cortege of family members and villagers. The guests gathered to partake in the wedding banquet, and the men, sitting separately, were attended by the groom.

The departure of the bride from her father's house to the groom's house emphasized the role of family members, particularly paternal and maternal uncles, who escorted the bride, sitting atop a camel, to her future home, thus entrusting her to her new family.[10] As they proceeded toward the groom's house, "the men around the bridal camel vie with one another for the privilege to prepare the 'supper of the bride' (*ʻasha il-ʻarus*) or the meal which the bride and bridegroom eat together late on the evening of the wedding-day."[11] The men teasingly threatened divorce if not allowed to prepare the bridal supper, adding a humorous and competitive touch to the tradition.

The humorous repartee act over the preparation of the "supper of the bride" highlights the competitive nature of food preparation in such events where food acquires a symbolic significance. Food preparation in such a public setting becomes

a way to assert power and social standing within the community, and is gendered accordingly. Granqvist describes a similar hospitality ritual among Palestinian fellahin when guests come to the village and are invited to partake of food:

> People try to outdo one another in inviting guests and usually there is much rivalry. This kind of invitation is called *mughalatah*. In case of disagreement, the mukhtar or someone chosen for the purpose must decide. The one in whose favor the judge decides is addressed with the words, "May God reward you." These words are considered as a final decision. Then the victor in the contest goes at once and prepares the food needed for the feast, such as rice and sheep.[12]

The competitive spirit of this ritual reflects the social value placed on generosity, which is often a marker of social status and community respect. The involvement of an authority figure, typically the village leader (*mukhtar*), to mediate disputes shows that hospitality is not only a personal or familial virtue but also a public affair. In this regard, it was regulated by communal norms and leadership to ensure that acts of generosity did not devolve into conflict, which could disrupt community cohesion.

During the procession of the bride from her father's home to the groom's house, the women sang, expressing their appreciation for the man who would prepare the supper for the bride and bridegroom: "May God reward thee doubly … Instead of one reward may there be two! Thou father of the overflowing food tray, full of rice from the sea and piled up with mutton."[13] Later, when the bride's supper was delivered via procession to the wedding couple at the end of the night, the man chosen to prepare the supper was feted again in a song describing him as "presiding at the assembly of a hundred men" and "among the most prominent people."[14]

Palestinian wedding feasts functioned within a public sphere, where the community engages in dialogue and publicly affirms social bonds and important life transitions, such as marriage.[15] These communal rituals reinforced social cohesion and communal identity through the shared experience of food and allowed families to perform and affirm their social roles and confirm the marriage contract in a communal setting. This is evident in the betrothal feast, which began with the slaughter of animals and the preparation of food. Guests were invited to partake in the meal, which served as a testament to the hospitality and beneficence of the groom's family as well as the agreement reached between the families.

Granqvist describes the festive atmosphere:

> I had met the bridegroom the same day during my walk in the village and radiant with pleasure he told me what an important day it was for him … Directly after this we went to the bride's home. Outside the house the bridegroom's father 'Ali Khalil and his son were just slaughtering the animals for the feast and invited us to take part in it. We then went into the house and were given seats of honor in the window in front of the village women who sang and danced for the betrothal.[16]

The gendered division of roles during the feast is evident. Male relatives are primarily responsible for the slaughter and preparation of meat, while women participate in the celebration by singing and dancing.[17] The songs, which are also gendered, underscore the role of food as a symbol of abundance and prosperity:

> For the men is sung:
> "Our bread is sufficient,
> our house is warm,
> our sword is perfect!
> Eat, ye good men of God!
> May it do ye good [*lit.* be health and well-being]"[18] . . .
>
> A song sung for women runs as follows:
> "Eat o girls, may it do ye good!
> and she who does not say: 'May it do ye good!'
> may she get pains in her stomach
> and her medicine be from me and I shall give her
> medicine which does not cure her."[19]

Granqvist highlights the role of the bridegroom as a host who had to be gracious to his guests and ensure their comfort and well-being. The groom greeted his male guests, who "are refreshed with coffee, prepared by men and handed round by men."

> As far as possible the guests are invited to smoke, which the men like very much. Near men, relatives to the bridegroom, slaughter the animals for the feast – goats, sheep, or sometimes a calf or a cow – and cook the meat and rice on a big fire. When the wedding-meal is ready they place the rice on big wooden trays and put pieces of meat on the top and carry them out to the male guests.[20]

The groom also provided the horses of the wedding guests with fodder (*'asha al-khayl*) and if the bride is from a different village, he was obliged to give the young men from the bride's village a meal: "For this meal the bridegroom must give them a sheep which is called 'the sheep of the young men' (*shat ish-shabab*), or, he can give them money instead."[21]

The sacrifice of animals (primarily sheep and goats) to provide the meat in Palestinian weddings can be understood as a sacred act and offering, in which the ritual of slaughtering symbolizes purification and social renewal for the newlyweds and their families. This act creates a sacred space within the wedding context, reinforcing both spiritual and social cohesion.[22] The consumption of food thus symbolized the formalization of the marriage contract. The reading of the opening chapter of the Qur'an added a religious dimension to the ceremony, underscoring its solemnity and covenanting character. Granqvist notes that "the ceremonial feast is also a testimony of the fact of the betrothal. They slaughter or cook because witnesses are necessary,

for even if there are written contracts, the statements of people are important."[23] This is made explicit through a ritualized dialogue that accompanies the feast:

> Today they slaughter (*il-yom bidbahu*). The food is placed before the men. One says to them: "Please accept what is given to you!" They say: "For what reason are we invited to eat?" One says: "£50 [i.e., the amount of the bride price]." They ask: "Is all clear? Is there anything not clear, or unsatisfactory in this affair?" One assures them: "Everything is clear!" and again says to them: "Are ye witnesses to this? Will ye bear witness to what ye have heard?" They say: "We will bear witness to what we have heard. We wish to keep to what is right." Then they eat; the food trays stand in front of them. One says: "Read the opening Chapter of the Koran in the name of Mhammad [i.e., the bridegroom]!"[24]

The preparation and consumption of food during Palestinian weddings actively demarcates public and private spaces.[25] The communal sharing of food during the wedding ceremony creates public spaces where social relationships are performed and community identities are reinforced. In contrast, the private sharing of meals between the bride and groom after the ceremony marks their transition into intimate, private spaces, where they assume their new roles as husband and wife.

After the Feast

The interplay between public and private can be seen in the preparation and delivery of the bridal supper. The man chosen to provide the "supper of the bride" in the ritualized competition described above would slaughter a goat or a sheep and cook the meat and rice while the feast was occurring. Then, Granqvist writes: "After this [public] feast has been celebrated it is said: 'They have slaughtered (*dabahu*)' or it is said: 'They have cooked for her, i.e., the bride (*tabakhu 'aleha*).'"[26] Later, she describes the scene:

> In the evening after sunset when it is already dark some women go to his house to bring "the supper of the bride." The woman who has been chosen to carry the basin – sometimes the wife of the man who prepared the meat – goes in front of them, often with a torch in her hand, so that it looks very picturesque. They like to go a round-about way and trill and sing in honor of the man who provides it …. When the guests arrive at the house where the bride is sitting, they are received by the bridegroom's mother or the oldest woman of his house and she takes possession of the basin and gives the best piece of meat to the woman who carried it saying: "Take thy right in return for thy labor." It is customary that the mother of the bridegroom takes the basin, and looks after it. No one may touch it but the bride's mother-in-law and she then gives it to the bride and bridegroom.[27]

The mother's role in safeguarding the basin reflects her authority and responsibility in maintaining family traditions.

Once the betrothal feast has ended and the bridal supper has been delivered, the guests disperse and Granqvist describes how the bridal pair is left in seclusion (*fi khalwa*) to consummate the marriage. After the nearest relatives have left, but before consummating the marriage, the bride and groom should eat the "supper of the bride" together.[28] The wedding feast, with its public display of hospitality and generosity, falls within the public sphere, while the secluded meals shared by the couple signify their transition into the private sphere of marriage, reinforcing both social roles and personal bonds.[29]

The morning after the wedding, the groom would again slaughter a sheep or a goat, and this would be followed by a communal meal of meat and rice, concluding the festivities and marking the couple's formal union. This act of communal eating was not merely celebratory but also signaled a ritual closure, reinforcing the newly established familial connections. The village women would also come to the bridegroom's house to congratulate the married couple and the groom's family. Visitors would greet the bride and wish for her fertility, drawing on language that resonates with the harvest and its bounty:

> The woman visitor says: "May she build up [the house] and bring fruit (*inshallah bit'ammar u bittammir*)!" Turning to the bride she says: "Mayest thou be oil and an olive tree – and a green entry (*ya retik zet u zetun u hille khadra*)!"

Granqvist described joining the women on one such occasion, during which the mother of the groom welcomed her visitors and gave an accounting of the costs associated with the wedding:

> She invited us to sit down, gave us grapes and spoke about the expenses of the wedding: £100 minus 5 Piasters was her bride price; two sacks of rice and one sack of wheat and 9 goats and melted butter (*samne*), sesame oil and sugar and coffee and tobacco (*titen*) – for smoking – and tobacco (*tunbak*) – for the waterpipes – and all the time the men did no work. And clothes! All women of the clan received clothes except Sabha Shakhtur, because she did not give any, when she celebrated the wedding of her son.[30]

Throughout the week after the wedding, visitors, including relatives-in-law and friends, would come from elsewhere to congratulate the bridegroom and his family. Upon their arrival, guests would be greeted by ululation and songs of welcome by women who would ascend to the rooftop of the groom's house. Guests would generally bring one or more goats, and "they slaughter the animals in honor of the bridegroom."[31]

The exchange of congratulations and gifts highlights the role of reciprocity in maintaining social relationships. As Marcel Mauss articulated in his famous theory of gift exchange, gifts are never free; they create social bonds and obligations.[32] Here, the dowry (*al-mahr*) and wedding gifts – like rice, goats, and clothes – are not just

material items but also social exchanges that strengthen familial ties. The public accounting of who gave what (and who did not) reinforces social hierarchies and status, serving to display wealth and generosity and build social capital to enhance the family's prestige. The reciprocity of the exchange becomes evident, as when the exclusion of a guest illustrates how failure to participate in gift-giving can result in social alienation, reinforcing the mutual obligations tied to these exchanges.

Granqvist writes: "A week after her wedding she visits her father's house carrying on her head a basin with meat and rice and for this she gets a present from her parents."[33] This act symbolizes the bride's ongoing connection to both her birth family and her new status as a wife. Returning to her father's house having refilled the basin with food marks the bride's reintegration into society with a new role – having been provided for, she is now one who provides for others. The basin of meat and rice acts as a symbolic bridge between her past life and her new one, affirming her dual connection to her birth family and her new family. The bride's act symbolizes a reestablishment of social cohesion and reaffirms familial and community bonds through this ritualized sharing of food.[34]

Ceremonial Importance of Food Sharing and Negotiation through Meals

The act of sharing food during Palestinian wedding ceremonies, especially at the betrothal feast, illuminates the ceremonial importance of food in fostering social bonds and emphasizing the seriousness of the occasion. A core component of hospitality, offering food symbolizes generosity and warmth, key cultural values deeply embedded in Palestinian traditions. The betrothal feast, offered not just to family but to the wider village community, reflects this communal spirit, where sharing meals reinforces social connections and celebrates the union of two families. But Granqvist's accounts show us in finer detail the way food played a role throughout the Palestinian village wedding process in the early twentieth century, from negotiating the betrothal to the establishment of the new couple as a household of their own.

Food played a crucial role in negotiations, particularly those related to marriage agreements like the dowry (*al-mahr*). In such cases, food served as both a medium for conversation and a symbol of agreement. The practice of offering food to the intermediary before discussions demonstrates a respectful and welcoming attitude toward the negotiation process. After agreements were made, the shared meal becomes a symbolic act of commitment, marking the conclusion of the negotiations and solidifying the social bonds between the families. The condition imposed by intermediaries not to enjoy the food until their requests are met underscores the seriousness of these negotiations and the commitment implied by eating together. Food as a witness-bearing tool is evident here, with the act of eating together not only confirming the agreements but also making the witnesses to these negotiations an essential part of the ceremony.

This ceremonial approach to food continued in the slaughter of animals, a practice that carries deep symbolic meaning beyond sustenance. The ceremonial feast served as both a celebratory event and a testimony to the betrothal, reinforcing the commitment between families. The presence of witnesses at these feasts emphasizes their role in affirming the terms of the marriage, with food serving as a vehicle to publicly convey the importance of the bond. The themes of social responsibility and hospitality are further exemplified through acts such as the bridegroom's obligation to provide a meal to the young men from the bride's village, demonstrating the commitment to fostering positive relations between communities.

The preparation and offering of food during Palestinian weddings was, like other social rituals, deeply intertwined with social order, including gender and social hierarchy. Ceremonial food preparation was often a competitive and public display, particularly among men. Preparing the bridal supper – which involves slaughtering animals, cooking meat, and preparing rice – was a significant cultural ritual and men often took great pride in this task. Preparing the supper became a communal effort, where competition among men to prepare the best meal adds a layer of humor and camaraderie. The victor, who prepared the bridal supper, became the focus of songs and praise sung by women, further enhancing his social status and the celebratory nature of the occasion.

The role of women in these ceremonies, while less publicly visible, was equally important. In addition to singing songs of praise for the men who prepared the meal, women often invoked blessings and expressed communal gratitude through their performances. The ululation and singing of women during the torchlit bridal supper procession was a key part of the ceremony, symbolizing the final phase of the wedding celebration. These songs expressed familial love and celebrated the culinary contributions of the men, highlighting the importance of food in fostering social harmony. The procession itself is a symbolic journey, where food is carried through the village, accompanied by singing, marking the transition to the next stage of the wedding. That the mother of the bridegroom was traditionally tasked with guarding the wedding basin, and she alone had the privilege of presenting it to the newlyweds, signifies a transfer of responsibility and marks a key ceremonial moment. This symbolic gesture reflected the gender norms at play within the ceremony, where women, though often in the background, maintain essential roles in preserving family traditions and social order.

These symbolic meals, shared in both public and private settings, underscored the importance of food in marking life transitions. The sacrifice of animals for meat to prepare celebratory dishes bridged the gap between public celebration and private sustenance. The involvement of family members in preparing and contributing to the wedding feast further emphasized the communal element and the importance of social dynamics. Family members and other guests brought gifts including goats or other livestock, contributing to the abundance of food prepared for the bride's wedding dinner. The practice of gifting food, whether through offering livestock or through contributing rice and meat, symbolized the communal support that surrounded the

bride and groom, reinforcing the interconnectedness of families and communities during such significant life events. These food-sharing practices reflect cultural values of generosity, reciprocity, and social cohesion, underscoring the integral role of food in Palestinian life. The role of food in the marriage rituals recorded by Granqvist in Artas – whether in the betrothal feast or the private sharing of the bridal supper – demonstrates how food nourishes not only the body but also communal ties, cultural values, and familial relationships across generations.

Mona Dorani is a PhD candidate in Arabic and Islamic studies at Ruhr-Universität Bochum, where her research focuses on rural Palestinian social history.

Endnotes

1 Claude Fischler, "Food, Self, and Identity," *Social Science Information* 29, no. 2 (June 1988): 275–92. Anthropologists such as Victor Turner emphasized the symbolic nature of rituals, where food reinforces this social order, while Claude Lévi-Strauss described cooked food as a marker of civilization and culture, underscoring its role in transforming natural elements into cultural symbols. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked (Mythologiques)*, vol. 1 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

2 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984).

3 On Granqvist, see Abdullatif M. Barghouthi, ed., *Arab Folk Stories from Artas* (Birzeit: Birzeit University, 1987); Mary E. Rogers, *Domestic Life in Palestine* (New York: Kegan Paul International, 1989); Helen Antonovsky, Mahmoud Mwari, and Judith Blanc, "Le changement de la vie familiale dans un village arabe," in *L'Enfant dans sa famille*, ed. E. James Anthony, Colette Chiland, and Cyrille Koupernik (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1983), 269–93; Riina Isotalo, "Edward Westermarck and Hilma Granqvist in the Field of Orientalist Discourse in Finland," paper delivered at the Third Nordic Conference on Middle Eastern Studies, Joensuu, Finland, June 1995; Riina Isotalo, *Many Routes to Palestine: The Palestinian Return, Forged Transnationalism, and Gender* (Helsinki, Interkont Books, 2005); Falestin Naïli, "L'œuvre de Hilma Granqvist: l'Orient imaginaire confronté à la réalité d'un village palestinien," *Revue d'études palestiniennes* 105 (Autumn 2007): 74–84; Falestin Naïli, "Memories of Home and Stories of Displacement: The Women of Artas and the 'Peasant Past'," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 38, no. 4 (Summer 2009): 63–74; Falestin Naïli, "Hilma Granqvist," in *Dictionnaire de la Méditerranée*, ed. Dionigi Albera, Maryline Crivello, and Mohamed Tozy (Arles: Actes sud, 2016); and Karen Seger, ed., *Portrait of a Palestinian Village: The Photographs of Hilma Granqvist* (London: Third World Centre for Research and Publishing, 1981).

4 Falestin Naïli, *La Palestine entre Patrimoine et Providence: imaginaires bibliques et mémoire du village d'Artas (XIX–XXe siècles)* (Paris: Karthala, 2022).

5 See: Sofia Haeggman, *Dedicated to Palestine: The Life and Work of Ethnologist Hilma Granqvist* (Bethlehem: Dar al-Kalima, 2023); Riina Isotalo, "Palestine Research of Hilma Granqvist: An Analysis of Academic Discrimination in Finland," in *Finland and Palestine: Proceedings of a Joint Workshop, 22–23 November 2008, Intercontinental Hotel, Jericho* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 2009; and Tuula Sakaranaho, "Finnish Studies on Islam: Themes and Approaches," *Temenos* 46, no. 2 (2010): 215–49.

6 Hilma Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions in a Palestinian Village*, vol. 2 (Helsinki: Societas Scientarum Fennica, 1935), 9. Transliterations from Granqvist's text have been simplified throughout this essay to remove diacritical marks. In her ethnographic work, Hilma Granqvist uses the term "bride price" to describe *al-mahr*. However, this term is considered problematic, as it implies a transactional exchange that fails to capture the cultural and symbolic meaning of the practice. In Palestinian wedding traditions or in general in Islamic tradition, this financial or material contribution, often referred to as *al-mahr*, is a form of financial security provided to the bride,

symbolizing respect and commitment, rather than a "purchase" of the bride. The *mahr* is the wife's right and the husband is obligated to pay it to her unless she expressly, by her own will, and without any pressure absolves him of it. Today, anthropologists prefer terms like "marriage gift" or "dowry" to more accurately reflect the purpose and significance of these customs. See Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

7 Arnold van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), 15–26.

8 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 10.

9 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 11.

10 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 76–78.

11 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 78.

12 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 83. Here Granqvist draws on the work of Elias Haddad and Omar al-Barghuthi.

13 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 78.

14 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 111. Granqvist records and transcribes the song: "The large tray of the noble one is sent out – how green his stick is – / from thy hand, oh 'Ali. May thou never be deprived of him! / He deserves the red wooden Hebron basin. / This is for 'Ali, because he is presiding at the assembly of a hundred men. / He deserves the wooden basin and the slaves carrying it. / This is for 'Ali, because he is among the most prominent people (*tale' minsaf il-bahlul mikhdar 'udo/ min kaffak ya 'ali wala te'damuno/ yistahal il-batiye il-hamra il-khaliliye/ hada la 'ali 'aminno imsadder il-miye/ yistahal il-batiye u il-'abed hamilha/ hadi la 'ali 'aminno min 'awayidha*)."

15 I use the term "public sphere" here as it is conceptualized by Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989): 27–56.

16 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 15.

17 On linguistic aspects of Granqvist's work, see Rosanna Sirignano, "Popular Wisdom and Marriage Customs in a Palestinian village: Proverbs and Sayings in Hilma Granqvist's Work," *Studi Interculturali* 2 (2014): 189–208; Rosanna Sirignano, "Mother and Child in Palestine: The Artas Material in Hilma Granqvist's Nachlass at the Palestine Exploration Fund," *Studi Interculturali* 3 (2013): 159–81.

18 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 108. Granqvist transliterates the song: *ya 'eshna kafi/ ya betna dafi/ ya sefna wafi/ traddu ya ajawid allah/ ya reteh sahha u 'awafi!*

19 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 110. Granqvist transliterates the song: *tradden ya sabaya ya reteh sahha/ u illi ma tqullkin sahha/ ya ret qalbha yoji'ha/ udawaha min 'indi u a'tiha/ dawa illi ma yinfa'ha!*

20 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 108.

21 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 110.

22 According to Eliade, such sacrifices are not only about the physical offering but also serve as a means of spiritual renewal, contributing to the creation of order in both the social and cosmic realms. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, 1959), 20–65.

23 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 14.

24 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 14.

25 On space as a social product, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991).

26 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 23.

27 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 111–12. On the song that is sung, see note 14.

28 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 122.

29 This division mirrors Habermas's theory of how public acts reinforce social norms, while the private sphere reflects individual and familial dynamics. Habermas, *Public Sphere*, 27–56.

30 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 133.

31 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 134. Granqvist records a song that the village women sing to greet the visitors: "To us comes an 'anima' running/ with it is a sheep and a ram/ And this is thy doing oh 'Isa!/ And a vile person would not do it (*ajatna jrire timshi/ ma'ha kharuf u kabshi/ u hada fi'lak ya 'isa/ u in-nidel ma yif'alshi*!"

32 On the symbolic significance of gift exchange, see Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1967), 5–41.

33 Granqvist, *Marriage Conditions*, vol. 2, 138. Citing Atonin Joseph Jaussen, Granqvist notes that "the festival of the 7th day after the wedding closes with the return of the young wife to her father's house for some days."

34 This aligns with Turner's idea of ritual symbolism. See Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Piscataway, NJ: Aldine Transaction, 1969).

When the World Collapses in Palestine

Benjamin Kaplan Weinger

Abstract

Engaging with the ongoing collapse of lifeworlds experienced in Palestine, this article reinforces the urgent need to eliminate colonial grammars of differentiation in order to reinscribe life and place in a rapidly warming world. By throwing the violent material and discursive productions that have attempted to engender the social and material death of Palestinians and Palestine into crisis, this intertextual reading of Palestinian literature aims to transgress the system of representations that have long rendered Palestine, as with other "zones of nonbeing," the materiality upon which colonial and imperial accumulation take shape. The article first delves into critiques of the Anthropocene, a concept traditionally centered on a proverbial undifferentiated humanity's global environmental impact. These discussions can aid our understanding of the catastrophic colonial present. Attention is then drawn to the vital question of who is even considered human in the Anthropocene, drawing on the poetics and politics of Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmud Darwish, Edward Said, and others to reassert the humanity that prevails in the collapse. Finally, the essay turns to recent conversations among climate thinkers to consider the interlocking architectures of Palestinian liberation and climate futures. The aim is to challenge conventional definitions of humanism, demonstrating how the Palestinian experience can both serve as a material allegory for broader crises like planetary climatic collapse and scrutinize the universality of narratives that homogenize ongoing genocide and ruination.

Keywords:

Palestine; humanism; Anthropocene; climate change; ecocide.

The world is watching with horror as the people of Gaza and greater Palestine endure a relentless genocide that will reverberate in life, body, and land for generations.[1] As the sky falls with a torrential "rain of rockets" and the world's attention is drawn to this small strip of land, there lies an undercurrent of themes intricately tied to forms of planetary collapse experienced by many across the world.[2] The plight of Palestinians, especially in Gaza, is increasingly positioned as not just a localized conflict, but a vivid representation of the enduring struggles against wider waves of colonization and imperialism. Palestinian liberation has long transcended resistance to the Israeli state alone. Indeed, Palestinian liberation predates the Israeli state itself.[3]

For generations, the question of who gets to define the human experience and who is relegated to the margins has become manifestly present in both the tangible, catastrophic violence in Palestine and the now existential threats of planetary climatic changes. In our present moment, while genocide rages with no end in sight, large climate summits like the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change's (UNFCCC) COP28 (Conference of the Parties 28) have met in Dubai and the Summit of the Future in New York, severely limiting freedom of assembly amid normalization of Israeli crimes against humanity. An organization like the UNFCCC that simultaneously fails to institutionally report military emissions is but one colossal gap in planetary justice.[4] To engage in discussions of climate change during a dark colonial present means to rethink the proverbial "species marching in unison toward biospheric mastery."[5] Recent debates on humanism and universality in a time of differentiated planetary warming, in conversation with decades of allegorical Palestinian literature, can indeed aid our understanding of the catastrophic colonial present and serve as a "political cartography" and a "tool of direct national mobilization" in a warming world.[6] By throwing into crisis the violent historicity and discursive productions that have attempted to engender the (social and material) death of Palestinians and Palestine, this intertextual reading aims to transgress the system of representations that have long rendered Palestine, as with other "zones of nonbeing," the materiality upon which colonial accumulation takes shape.[7]

Figure 1. Civil society gathering at COP28 calling for climate decolonization, Gaza ceasefire, and an end to environmental apartheid. Dubai, UAE, 3 December 2023. Photo by author.

Figure 2. Gaza ceasefire gathering at COP28. Dubai, UAE, 3 December 2023. Photo by author.

Colonial Echoes in a Warming World

In a polemical 2015 essay, Roy Scranton proposes that it is time to learn to die in the Anthropocene.[8] The Anthropocene is the name of a proposed geological epoch, in response to planetary climatic changes, in which humans writ large are said to be a geological force "so pervasive and profound that they rival the great forces of Nature."[9] Emphasizing that the dominant way of life, and the structures of capitalist militarism, are unsustainable in the face of climatic changes, Scranton argues that we must "learn how to die" to confront the reality that our civilization – its systems, values, and ways of living – need to undergo radical transformation or even collapse in order to adapt effectively to the Anthropocene.

Yet if we interpret the differentiated experiences of planetary changes through the viewpoint of colonial differentiation, the universality of the "Anthropos" – denoting culpability of the entire human species – invokes profound critique, as has been discussed at length for over a decade.[10] The slip into an undifferentiated monolithic humanity erases forms of socialized differentiation as the human subject is constituted as universal and planetary. Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg object to the notion that climate change is inherently "anthropogenic" in nature – all humans do not instinctively alter the climate on a planetary scale.[11] Rather, they argue that industrialized and late capitalist actors of the Global North, particularly those invested in petrocapitalism and its enduring imperial geographies, are historically responsible for nearly two-thirds of carbon emissions and a majority of contemporary planetary warming.

The move away from "humanity as an undifferentiated whole" similarly prompts Jason Moore to propose the term "Capitalocene," imputing the global capitalist

economic regimes, and Donna Haraway to suggest "Plantationocene," to impute forms of intensive, extractive, and exploitative agricultural and labor practices.[12] Yet still the Anthropocene is not a collateral externality of modernity, but rather the very telos of colonial projects: to render the earth and its subsurface under the domain of man. But not just any man.

Engaging with a broad context of Arab anticolonial struggles for justice, decolonization, and resistance to the imperial status quo, we can tie recent debates around who is considered human in the Anthropocene to the end of worlds experienced by Palestinians. Climate thinkers like Andreas Malm help us consider the numerous connections forged between the crises of planetary collapse and the colonization of Palestine, or as Malm likes to refer to the destruction of the climate, the "planetary version of the Nakba."[13] Palestine, as an idea and "material allegory," represents more in the imaginary of liberation movements than the sum of its land.[14] Step foot into a Palestine protest around the world and you will often hear the chant, "We are all Palestinians." For climate thinkers and representatives, like Greta Thunberg, to center the question of Palestine in a moment of planetary collapse is perhaps a precise intention of Palestinian literature that works to excavate those rendered beyond the normative frames of the human. Yet beyond simply unsettling these norms, Palestinian literature denounces the sort of fatalism promoted by Scranton's essay, teaching us instead how to live in the end-times, how to resist continuous colonial extraction and dispossession, and how to create more just futures.

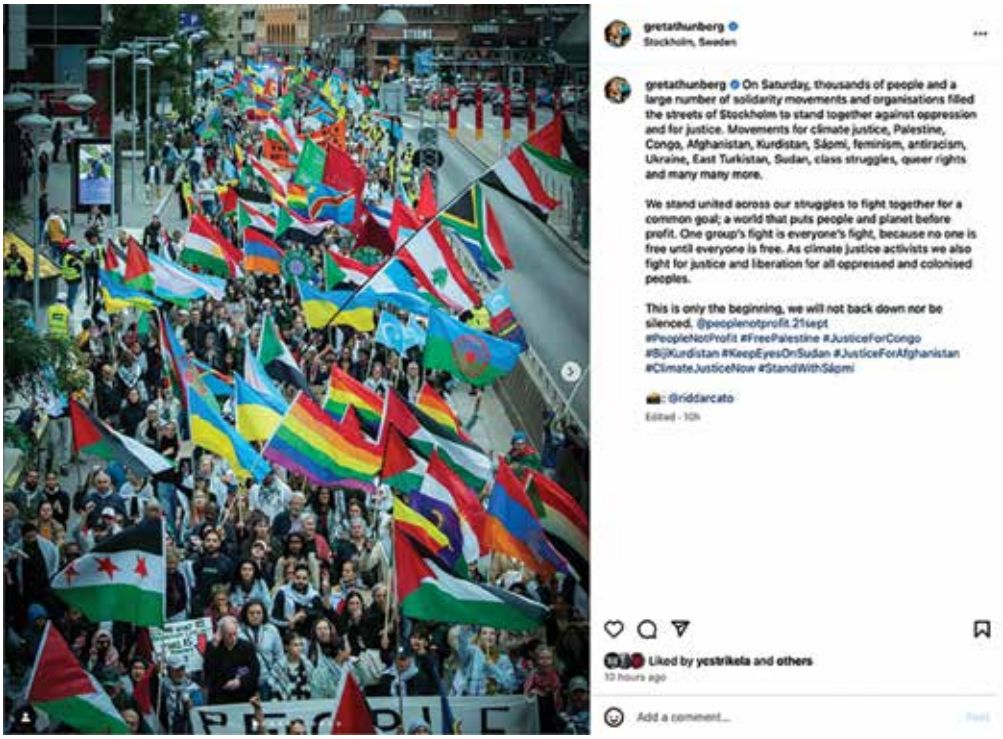


Figure 3. Social media post by Greta Thunberg. Instagram, 23 September 2024. Screenshot by author.

Who is Human in the Anthropocene?

Taken-for-granted understandings of the human have been dominated by exclusionary forms of thought that ordered "Man" into subcategories of human, subhuman, and inhuman, or what Paul Gilroy terms "infrahuman."[15] As Sylvia Wynter formulates this division, "Man1" was set to represent a rational political subject, emerging out of the Renaissance as *homo politicus* and remade in response to the colonial encounter with the already inhabited geographies of the Americas.[16] "Man2" is a revision of humanness that later gave rise to the liberal *homo oeconomicus*, predicated on Darwin's colonial episteme dividing the naturally selected and the racialized "deselected." Both Men have come to serve as overrepresentations of the human, "producing racialized/non-European/nonwhite/New World/Indigenous/African peoples as, first, fallen untrue Christians (in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries) and, later, as biologically defective and damned (most markedly in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries)."[17] Put another way, the normative sphere of European humanism was defined against those classified as natural resources: fossilized nature (the Indigenous) and fossilized energy (the enslaved).[18] Race is materialized via inhuman material property (Indigenous land, chattel salary, personhood, labor) as the colonized body politic is positioned at a physical, "biological minimum," lacking the "qualified life" afforded to others.[19]

Racial grammars, as we see in Palestine, are severely materially consequential. With this recognition, many have traced the profound material implications of the development of European humanism. The exclusionary and racialized form of humanism proffered in colonial thought is predicated upon a "politics of nonlife" or "zone of nonbeing" where imperial geographies map on to the division of the human into subcategories.[20] These forms of material differentiation render certain geographies human and inhuman, the latter of which feature anti-Blackness and anti-Brownness as the ground – the materiality upon which colonial accumulation, often via extraction, takes shape.[21] In other words, "metaphysical designations [the imposition of racial subjectivities on colonial subjects] have geophysical effects, establishing anti-Black and Brown gravities as the affective architecture of extraction."[22] For Katherine McKittrick, the mine and the plantation serve as two central social institutions of extraction. These material geographies "reified global segregations through 'damming' the spaces long occupied by man's human others."[23] In this formulation, occupants of geographies marked as uninhabitable are cast as irrational and "designated as incongruous with humanness."

Anticolonial thinkers like Wynter, McKittrick, and Kathryn Yusoff, as well as Palestinian thinkers like Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmud Darwish, and Edward Said, thereby foreground the Columbian encounter and final collapse of Andalusia of 1492, crystallizing the delivery of Europe's colonial projects, as a key moment in the development of humanism, or the overrepresentation of the Western bourgeois conception of what it means to be human. Many of these contemporary thinkers build on Frantz Fanon's stretching of Western modes of analysis and his searing critique of humanism to unsettle the coloniality of humanism, reckon with the materialities

of the humanist liberal subject, and recover colonial subjects (and their geographies) racialized as inferior, subhuman, and inhuman. For Yusoff, "only by unsettling the normative frames of the human as an episteme of universality (that thereby continues to claim an expansionist [colonial] geography and refuses to acknowledge its history of inhumane acts through which such a figure was constituted) can the inhuman be encountered in the full sense of its existence."[24] In this manner, the current crises of climatic changes can be understood as an "intensification of environmental change imposed on Indigenous peoples by colonialism."[25]

Zoe Todd ponders, in the context of Indigenous genocide in North America:

> What does it mean to have a reciprocal discourse on catastrophic end times and apocalyptic environmental change in a place where, over the last five hundred years, Indigenous peoples faced (and face) the end of worlds with the violent incursion of colonial ideologies and actions? What does it mean to hold, in simultaneous tension, stories of the Anthropocene in the past, present, and future?[26]

Todd and Heather Davis further consider what it was like for these Indigenous peoples to face the end of their respective lifeworlds and encounter contemporary apocalyptic discourses about climatic change.[27] But just as importantly, many survived the end of lifeworlds and their resistance in the face of world-ending violence can teach others about living in a period of genocide and colonial-induced violence.

How to Live in the Post-Apocalypse

> Everywhere that the inhumane is imposed, it is resisted by a humanness that highlights the dark contours of the humanist subject in its partiality.
>
> The Inhumanities - Kathryn Yusoff[28]

Perhaps within the question of Palestine lies an answer to the plight of subaltern people trapped within the proverbial tankers heating up under the searing sun. In the pages of Palestinian literature, and for the over forty, and the likely more than one hundred thousand Palestinians murdered in Gaza this past year, the end of the world has already proceeded. If the question is how to survive the end of the world, surely Palestinians have a thing or two to say about living in the end-times. For nearly a century, Western imperialism and Zionist colonization, reaching their most recent apotheosis in Gaza, have marked the beginning of the end of Palestinian lifeworlds.

Palestinian steadfastness (*sumud*), then, is not about learning to die in the afterworld but surviving and resisting the post-apocalypse, a continuous reality that has not abated since 1948 and previous colonial instantiations. As Yusoff's epigraph above denotes, Palestinians, simply by existing, always already resist the partial humanist subject that rendered them and their land the material ground upon which Zionist colonization was constructed.[29] In this sense, the connection between the Palestinian plight and other

crises of exceptional or slow violence becomes not an allegorical stretch but indeed a "material allegory" rooted in the ongoing colonial encounter.[30] Some, often of the Zionist bent, may wish to provincialize the question of Palestine and bracket it off as a religious or ethnic conflict, or even render it a canonical or proverbial chapter of anti-Jewish history to legitimize the replacement of one collective continuance with that of another in the name of the divine.[31] Liberationist thinkers, however, have long drawn inspiration from the ways Palestinians, as with other Indigenous groups, have confronted colonial invasion by adapting to and resisting shared tenants of colonial projects: displacement, genocide, and ecocide.[32]

Leading Palestinian thinkers have, through conspicuous effort, placed Palestine at the heart of world history, beyond a biblical cartography, as an allegory of oppression and suffering.[33] Plotted at the axis of colonialism, empire, and capitalism, or what Amitav Ghosh has deemed the "great derangement,"[34] the Palestinian catastrophe and calls for liberation now feature prominently in movements for climate justice, racial justice, and the socialist project writ large. This is precisely because of the efforts of Palestinian writers like Ghassan Kanafani, Mahmud Darwish, and Edward Said to render Palestine a symbol of humanity. "It became apparent to me that I saw in Palestine a complete human symbol," Kanafani explains in an interview published posthumously.[35] "So when I write about a Palestinian family, I am in reality writing about a human experience. There is not an event in the world that is not represented in the Palestinian tragedy. And when I depict the suffering of the Palestinians, I am in fact exploring the Palestinian as a symbol of misery in the entire world." Kanafani's explicit acknowledgment here furnishes his writings as a tool of resistance for all those denuded of humanity and struggling against greater structures of domination.

Figure 4. Gen Zayin, *Heaven Cannot Be Bought with Blood*, poster, Haifa, 5 March 2023. Photo by author.

In his poem "The 'Red Indian's' Penultimate Speech to the White Man," Darwish makes a parallel move toward solidarity with the millions of Indigenous peoples of "Turtle Earth" (North America), beginning with an epigraph from the Duwamish Chief Seattle: "Did I say, The Dead? There is no death here, there is only a change of worlds."[36] Lyrically affirming the linkage of colonially dominated peoples via the adopted voice of the "Red Indian," Darwish instantiates how the violent ecological ruination experienced by Indigenous peoples of the Americas is inextricably entangled with the colonially induced transformation of lifeworlds endured in Palestine. The incursion of a structure of elimination and demographic replacement of precursory peoples is inherently an environmental injustice through its ecological forms of domination.[37]

Edward Said's insistence on the inseparability of the Palestinian cause from the broader framework of colonial and imperial designs highlights its centrality in global discourses on justice, rights, and self-determination. Said's *The Question of Palestine* renders the Palestinian experience of deracination part of a larger mechanism of Orientalism, with the Zionist project predicated upon, not divorced from, European colonial discourses and practices of domination.[38] As Elias Khoury writes:

> *The Question of Palestine* is a concrete political application of his Orientalism. Putting the idea of Palestine in the heart of world history gives it a universal dimension and makes it a reference point for justice and freedom. The Zionist conquest, according to Said, is part of a global European colonial project, in which the Zionist movement adopted the colonial discourses and practices.[39]

Palestine is not just a regional issue; it represents a microcosm of struggles against domination, dispossession, and misrepresentation. John Collins therefore ponders, echoing the common activist call: "Are we all becoming Palestinians?"[40]

This collective, Palestinian-led move toward allegorizing is key to understanding why Palestine remains central to today's planetary crises and liberation movements. This is why Collins envisions *Global Palestine* and Eyal Weizman visualizes the *Hollow Land* as a site and laboratory where the ongoing forces of colonial domination crystalize, experiment on the Indigenous population, and boomerang back to other locales.[41] The case of Israeli carceral technologies and state surveillance practices deployed beyond Palestine in Ferguson, Missouri, marks just one example.[42] Yet these practices are not simply met by passivity but renew calls for revolutionary thinking and praxis.[43]

Planetary Collapse and Palestinian Literature

In a time of rapid planetary collapse and intensifying climatic shocks, the very reading of literature changes as we search for compelling stories about adapting to violent ecological change.[44] As Saidiya Hartman poignantly asks of the archive of Atlantic slavery, "How does one rewrite the chronicle of a death foretold and anticipated, as a collective biography of dead subjects, as a counter-history of the human, as the practice of freedom?"[45] Palestinian literature has attempted to reclaim life from the violent

chronicles that stripped Palestinians of humanity. For climate thinkers to draw upon the case of Palestine and read between the lines of its literature stories about ecological change is not beyond the intent of Palestinian authors but perhaps their precise telos.

Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* figures prominently in the imaginaries of climate thinkers.[46] Detailing the harrowing journey of three Palestinian refugees as they traverse the scorching desert in an empty water tank of a truck to find a better life in Kuwait, Kanafani's novella reveals the traumas of displacement as the refugees confront physical and symbolic suffocation. Ultimately, their quest for freedom and opportunity ends in tragedy, underscoring the human costs of political conflict and exile. Andreas Malm reads this story as a "material allegory" of warming, writing that "there is no more famous scene in Palestinian literature than the three men perishing in *Men in the Sun*. Can there likewise be a more powerful image of the fate of subaltern people in a warming world?"[47] Kanafani's refugees in *Men in the Sun* highlight a universal plight as they bring the question of what it means to be human to the table.[48]

Concerned less with the actors that caused their misery and more about how they navigate the end of their world, Kanafani constructs these men under the sun as a warning to others. These wandering individuals have left the homeland only to find themselves locked inside a cellar of death constricted from all sides. The geophysical forces shaping their journey – the infrastructures of oil, including the imperial borders of Iraq and Kuwait, and at its core colonial dispossession and displacement – are plights that refugees the world over face. What defines the human then, for Kanafani, is precarity and vulnerability, especially when the individual is disjointed from a greater collective. Those living at the margins of society and featuring prominently in Kanafani's oeuvre – refugees, the infirm, the maimed – refuse to be the inhuman ground upon which colonial extraction and accumulation take place, lest they end up like the characters Abu Qais, ʿAsad, and Marwan on a garbage heap in the middle of the warming desert. While these men perish without even a knock on the side of the tanker, Kanafani's pessimistic call for resistance here alludes, for Malm, to a "logical, as yet unrealized possibility: that of resistance, of breaking out of the confines before it is too late, or, with Benjamin, of snatching 'humanity at the last moment from the catastrophe looming at every turn'."[49] The novella itself performs the knocking, enlisting the reader into the witnessing. The possibility of breaking out exists and Kanafani repudiates the passivity and fatalism of the disjointed individual. Drawing on the threat of extinction, "the possibility of their own erasure from history," Kanafani compels the reader to avert this fate.[50]

In his later works, Kanafani develops a clearer vision for an internationalist struggle. As Bashir Abu-Manneh explains, "A new set of values is introduced to undermine this suffocating status quo: actively humanist, hopeful, and searching for solutions. The 'why' of *Men in the Sun* and the 'when and where' of *All That's Left* change to 'how' in *Returning to Haifa*."[51] For Kanafani's protagonist Saʿid in *Returning to Haifa*, visiting his dispossessed home in Haifa forces the reader to recognize a shared understanding of being human.[52] The story follows a Palestinian couple, Saʿid and Safiyya, as they return to their former home in Haifa two decades after fleeing during the Nakba of 1948. Upon their return, they discover that their son, Khaldun, whom

they were forced to leave behind as a baby during their escape, has been raised by a Jewish woman, Miriam, who lost her own son in the Holocaust. Renamed Dov by Miriam, their son was socialized as a Zionist and enlisted in the Israeli military. The novella delves into themes of identity and loss as both families grapple with painful histories and the question of rightful belonging.

Speaking to his son Khaldun, Sa'id explains:

> I'm decreeing that in the final analysis you're a human being, Jewish or whatever you want. You must come to understand things as they should be understood. I know that one day you'll realize these things, and that you'll realize that the greatest crime any human being can commit, whoever he may be, is to believe even for one moment that the weakness and mistakes of others give him the right to exist at their expense and justify his own mistakes and crimes.[53]

Turning to his wife, Sa'id adds,

> Do you know what the homeland is, Safiyya? The homeland is where none of this can happen … I'm looking for the true Palestine, the Palestine that's more than memories, more than peacock feathers, more than a son, more than scars written by bullets on the stairs.

For Kanafani, humanity starts with those most vulnerable, most precarious, most defeated and disenchanted. It is precisely in the moment of weakness that humanity comes forth – that the titular character in *Umm Sa'd* nurtures the masses and 'Ad, Shaddad, and Murthid in *al-Bab*, confronting death, plant the seeds of life for the next generation.[54] The homeland then is a place where human weakness is not exploited, where no human is dominated. The idea of Palestine, the homeland, the paradise, al-Andalus – despite ongoing epistemic erasure and violent displacement from the land – continues to persist through the generations.[55]

Toward a Poetics and Politics of Living Through Planetary Collapse

While the present moment begins with the acknowledgment that the end of worlds has always already arrived, it is not to suggest that heroic poetics and politics have not enabled those rendered other-than-human or *homines sacri* to resist colonial enclosure.[56] Climate thinkers thereby seek out the revolutionary thinking embedded in Palestinian literature toward a "sense of the positive transformability of the present" and its emancipatory possibilities.[57]

For example, in her Edward Said Memorial Lecture, Naomi Klein reads within the violence of othering and the denuding of humanity captured by Edward Said and other Palestinian writers, a lesson for today's warming world:

> The state of longing for a radically altered homeland – a home that may not even exist any longer – is something that is being rapidly,

> and tragically, globalized …. If we don't demand radical change we are headed for a whole world of people searching for a home that no longer exists. Said helps us imagine what that might look like as well. He helped to popularize the Arabic word *sumud* ("to stay put, to hold on"): that steadfast refusal to leave one's land despite the most desperate eviction attempts and even when surrounded by continuous danger. It's a word most associated with places like Hebron and Gaza, but it could be applied equally today to residents of coastal Louisiana who have raised their homes up on stilts so that they don't have to evacuate, or to Pacific Islanders whose slogan is "We are not drowning. We are fighting."[58]

Klein's optimism, then, surfaces through "climate *sumud*" – a steadfastness inherent in grassroots resistance toward the interconnected forces of colonially-induced violence, from petrochemical extraction to militarization. While some may charge Klein with appropriation of Palestine's unique mode of survivance – and surely *sumud* means something more for Gazans and Palestinians writ large under genocidal siege than for residents of coastal Louisiana facing a slower form of violence – she is quick to acknowledge that although "Edward Said was no tree hugger," Palestine's colonial occupation is deeply imbricated with other forms of exceptional and slow violence and at the very least has much to teach those searching for better worlds.

Max Ajl's world-systemic call for a People's Green New Deal similarly takes stimulus from the Palestinian resistance for land, liberation, and return, "the most widely supported struggle for justice."[59] Appealing for a renewed defense of national sovereignty, Ajl turns to Palestine, and Kanafani's history of the 1936–39 revolt in Palestine, to underscore how the nation's role as a central political-social vehicle, only via class analysis and revolutionary strategy, can carry resistance to oppression.[60] As Franz Fanon writes: "National consciousness, which is not nationalism, is alone capable of giving us an international dimension … It is at the heart of national consciousness that international consciousness establishes itself and thrives."[61] The nation here is conceived as the foundation of politics in internationalist terms.[62] The resistance of an oppressed people is justified because the nation for colonized peoples is not an inherently oppressive (that is, nationalist) entity but a "democratically constituted collective struggling against social and political structures of domination."[63]

This distinction is made clear in *Men in the Sun*. The struggle of the refugees to transcend the colonially imposed borders of Iraq and Kuwait, a partition predicated no less on the oil interests of imperial powers, represents the imperative for Palestinians to develop a political strategy that comes to terms with, exploits, and subverts the state system they incarnate. As opposed to the anti-humanist Zionist model of self-determination, isolating itself with militarized walls and fences, the Palestinian form of national consciousness that Kanafani begins to develop through the stark death of the three refugees is a humanist call for universal freedom and justice. Their final act of death under the sun enlists the reader into a rallying call to "break out of the confines before it is too late."[64] The national question and right to sovereignty, maintained

in the global imaginary by the case of Palestine, remains central to revolutionary transformations. The prescription for decolonization then serves as the reappropriation of land and life – the recovery of humanity for those rendered inhuman.

Andreas Malm's recent polemic *How to Blow Up a Pipeline*, urging climate movements to sabotage fossil fuel infrastructure, also turns to Kanafani's history of the 1936–39 revolt in Palestine to gain insight from "the pioneer of pipeline sabotage … the Palestinian resistance."[65] Many symbolic acts of the anti-imperial revolt in Palestine were oriented around the British oil pipeline running from the oil fields of Kirkuk, Iraq, to the Haifa refineries. Documenting each instance of Palestinian rebels blowing up the oil pipeline, Kanafani explains: "The British were unable to defend this vital pipeline, and admitted as much, that the 'pipe' as the Palestinian Arab peasants called it, was enshrined in the folklore which glorified acts of popular heroism."[66] These early attacks on pipelines would not be the last for Palestinian militants. In 1972, a Palestinian group set oil tankers in the Netherlands on fire, while in Italy PFLP members blew up an oil tank. In 1974, members of the PFLP also attacked a Shell oil refinery in Pulau Bukom, Singapore, serving as a warning to monopolistic oil companies and imperialism writ large. The group noted in a statement dropped from the boat they seized that the explosion was set off "for the solidarity with Vietnam revolutional [sic] people, and for making revolutional [sic] situation after considering the situation of today's oil crisis."[67]

Figure 5. "Disrupt Fossil Fuels for Gaza" protest in El Segundo, California, 11 August 2024. Photo by author.

More recently, climate movements across the world have aligned with Palestinian liberation movements to target fossil fuel infrastructure, among other infrastructures contributing to weapons manufacturing or direct land exploitation. Outside of Los Angeles, for instance, dozens of climate activists recently encircled Chevron's El Segundo Refinery to protest the company's investments in Israeli oil and gas production and consumption, and its subsequent use in weapons manufacturing, especially amid energy apartheid. Climate movements and thinkers like Malm therefore draw on the "material allegory" of the Palestinian resistance movement, keeping works like Kanafani's *Men in the Sun* in mind, to denounce fatalism and accept civil disobedience, property destruction, and sabotage as a mode of mass social change.

When the World Collapses in Palestine

> Is there a country that will accept me? All you find are detailed reports of wars, earthquakes, and floods in the newspapers. Perhaps God is angry because of what humans are doing to Earth. Perhaps Earth is pregnant with Apocalypse!
>
> Mahmud Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence* [68]

The interlocking architectures of Palestinian liberation and climate futures is robust and revolutionary. Against fatalism, the notably existentialist poetics and politics of Palestine have much to offer contemporary movements surviving amid planetary collapse. First, learning to live, and not die, in the Anthropocene must be predicated upon a cessation to genocide and a problematization of the human. Second, we must delineate and unsettle the ongoing material ascriptions of colonial grammars of differentiation – especially if we are to understand how the colonial geographies that materially enforced exclusionary humanism persist in a world facing the reverberated consequences of accumulation on classed and racialized grounds. Finally, we must endeavor to redeem fragments of the past from the triumphalist "bulldozers" of history that long claimed sole voice, illuminating the revolutionary commitments embedded in a practice of dynamic remembrance.[69] Ultimately, what Kanafani, Darwish, and other anticolonial thinkers offer is a vision for a decolonized humanist subject rooted in place.

And yet, it bears an explicit proclamation that just as we mark Palestine as a figurative, universal allegory to stand in for collapse and resistance, it is a place with a people who are living and dying and whose current and historical catastrophic status necessitates immediate, urgent collective action to cease the forces of genocidal ruination before our often bourgeois concerns with wider planetary collapse can proceed.

To all those keeping afloat despite the heaviness of your worlds: May your memories form collective survival. May your grievers be comforted among all the mourners. May your worlds be free from drought to flood.[70]

Benjamin Kaplan Weinger is a PhD candidate in the Department of Geography at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). As a political geographer, their research and creative practice explores the history and politics of planetary climate planning, normative dimensions of climate governance, and heterodox movements for climate justice.

Endnotes

1 International Court of Justice, "Summary of the Order of 26 January 2024, Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel)," last modified 26 January 2024, online at www.icj-cij.org/node/203454 (accessed 28 August 2024).

2 The phrase "rain of rockets" is borrowed from Mahmoud Darwish, *Memory for Forgetfulness: August, Beirut, 1982*, trans. Ibrahim Muhawi (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 7.

3 Rashid Khalidi, *The Iron Cage: The Story of the Palestinian Struggle for Statehood* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006); Ghassan Kanafani, *The 1936–39 Revolt in Palestine* (New York: Committee for a Democratic Palestine, 1972), online at www.marxists.org/archive/kanafani/1972/revolt.htm (accessed 15 August 2024).

4 "We Are All Palestinians: COP28 Activists Demand Ceasefire in Gaza, Defying Protest Restrictions," Democracy Now!, 4 December 2023, online at www.democracynow.org/2023/12/4/we_are_all_palestinians (accessed 28 August 2024); Benjamin Neimark, Frederick Otu-Larbi, Patrick Bigger, Linsey Cottrell, and Reuben Larbi, *A Multitemporal Snapshot of Greenhouse Gas Emissions from the Israel-Gaza Conflict* [updated pre-print] (6 June 2024); and Benjamin Kaplan Weinger, "Thirty Years On: Planetary Climate Planning and the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee," *Global Environmental Change* 80 (2023): 1–14.

5 Andreas Malm, "'This Is the Hell That I Have Heard Of': Some Dialectical Images in Fossil Fuel Fiction," *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 53, no. 2 (April 2017): 133.

6 See: Ben Ratskoff, "Can the Palestinian Belong to a Universal History?" *Jewish Currents*, 28 July 2022, online at jewishcurrents.org/can-the-palestinian-belong-to-a-universal-history (accessed 15 August 2024); Judith Butler, Edward Said, and Mahmoud Darwish, "'What Shall We Do Without Exile?': Said and Darwish Address the Future / 'Madha sanafʿal min dun manfa?' Said wa Darwish 'an al-mustaqbal," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics* 32 (2012): 30–54; and Maha Nassar, *Brothers Apart: Palestinian Citizens of Israel and the Arab World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2017).

7 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (London: Pluto Press, 1986), 8.

8 Roy Scranton, "Learning How to Die in the Anthropocene," *New York Times*, 10 November 2013, online at archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/11/10/learning-how-to-die-in-the-anthropocene/ (accessed 27 August 2024).

9 Will Steffen, Paul J. Crutzen, and John R. McNeill, "The Anthropocene: Are Humans Now Overwhelming the Great Forces of Nature?" *Ambio* 36, no. 8 (2007): 614–21.

10 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "The Climate of History: Four Theses," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 2 (2009): 197–222.

11 Andreas Malm and Alf Hornborg, "The Geology of Mankind? A Critique of the Anthropocene Narrative," *Anthropocene Review* 1, no. 1 (2014): 62–69.

12 Jason W. Moore, "The Capitalocene, Part I: On the Nature and Origins of Our Ecological Crisis," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 44, no. 3 (2017): 594–630; Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (May 2015): 159–65; and Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Anthropocene Time," *History and Theory* 57 (2018): 5–32.

13 Andreas Malm, "The Destruction of Palestine is the Destruction of the Earth," Verso Books blog, 8 April 2024, online at www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/the-destruction-of-palestine-is-the-destruction-of-the-earth (accessed 28 August 2024); Andreas Malm, "Standing with the Palestinian Resistance: A Response to Matan Kaminer," Verso Books blog, 28 May 2024, online at www.versobooks.com/blogs/news/standing-with-the-palestinian-resistance-a-response-to-matan-kaminer (accessed 28 August 2024); Malm, "This Is the Hell."

14 Malm, "This Is the Hell," 129.
15 Paul Gilroy, "Race and the Right to be Human," inaugural lecture on the occasion of accepting the Treaty of Utrecht Chair at Utrecht University, delivered on 3 December 2009, online at www.uu.nl/sites/default/files/gw_gilroy_paul_oratie_definitief.pdf (accessed 28 August 2024). See also: Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004); and Kathryn Yusoff, "The Inhumanities," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 111, no. 3 (2020): 663–76.
16 Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.
17 Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality." See also: Katherine McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," *Small Axe* 17, no. 3 (2013): 1–15.
18 Kathryn Yusoff, "The Inhumanities," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 111, no. 3 (2020): 663–76.
19 Kathryn Yusoff, "Geologies of Race," YouTube video, posted by Arizona State University Institute for Humanities Research, 27 February 2020, 1:19:40, online at www.youtube.com/watch?v=6GNzDbrILmA (accessed 28 August 2024); Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).
20 Yusoff, "Inhumanities," 668; Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 8.
21 McKittrick, "Plantation Futures."
22 Yusoff, "Inhumanities," 666.
23 McKittrick, "Plantation Futures," 5.
24 Yusoff, "Inhumanities," 670.
25 Kyle Whyte, "Indigenous Climate Change Studies: Indigenizing Futures, Decolonizing the Anthropocene," *English Language Notes* 55, nos. 1–2 (2017): 153–62, quote at 153.
26 Zoe Todd, "Relationships," *Society for Cultural Anthropology*, 21 January 2016, online at culanth.org/fieldsights/relationships (accessed 23 November 2024).
27 Heather Davis and Zoe Todd, "On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 16, no. 4 (2017): 761–80.
28 Yusoff, "Inhumanities," 671.
29 Yusoff draws on Césaire's assertion of "a humanism made to the measure of the world." Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: NYU Press, 2000), 73.
30 Malm, "This is the Hell," 129. On slow violence, see: Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).
31 Lazar Berman, "Netanyahu: Goal of War Is 'to Defeat the Murderous Enemy, Ensure Our Existence in Our Land,'" *Times of Israel*, 28 October 2023, online at www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/netanyahu-goal-of-war-is-to-defeat-the-murderous-enemy-ensure-our-existence-in-our-land/ (accessed 28 August 2024).
32 Whyte, "Indigenous Climate Change Studies."
33 "Kanafani … 'an al-tufula wa-l-adab wa-l-markisiyya wa-l-jabha wa-l-hadaf" [Kanafani … on childhood, literature, Marxism, the front, and *al-Hadaf*], *Romman Magazine*, 9 April 2022, online at www.rommanmag.com/view/posts/postDetails?id=6495 (accessed 15 August 2024).
34 Amitav Ghosh, *The Great Derangement: Climate Change and the Unthinkable* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
35 "Kanafani … 'an al-tufula."
36 Mahmoud Darwish, "The 'Red Indian's' Penultimate Speech to the White Man," trans. Fady Joudah, *Harvard Review*, no. 36 (2009): 152–59.
37 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409; M. R. Arefin and B. K. Weinger, "Infrastructural Occupations: Waste and Electricity in Palestine," *Cultural Geographies* 28, no. 3 (2021): 569–72; Benjamin Kaplan Weinger, "Scripting Climate Futures: The Geographical Assumptions of Climate Planning," *Political Geography* 88 (2021): 1–13.
38 Edward Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
39 Elias Khoury, "Rethinking the Nakba," *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 2 (2012): 257.
40 John Collins, *Global Palestine* (London: Hurst, 2011), 45.
41 Collins, *Global Palestine*; Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (London: Verso, 2007).
42 Noura Erakat, "Geographies of Intimacy: Contemporary Renewals of Black–Palestinian Solidarity," *American Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2020): 471–96; Robin D. G. Kelley, "From the River to the Sea to Every Mountain Top: Solidarity as Worldmaking," *Journal of*

Palestine Studies 48, no. 4 (2019): 69–91.

43 Mohammed El-Kurd, *Perfect Victims and The Politics of Appeal* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket, 2025).

44 Malm, "This Is the Hell," 125.

45 Saidiya Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," *Small Axe* 12, no. 2 (2008): 3.

46 Ghassan Kanafani, *Men in the Sun and Other Palestinian Stories*, trans. Hilary Kilpatrick (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999).

47 Malm, "This Is the Hell," 129; Andreas Malm, "Warming," in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature and the Anthropocene*, ed. Jason Parham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 246.

48 Ilan Pappé, "A Text in the Eyes of the Beholder: Four Theatrical Interpretations of Kanafani's *Men in the Sun*," in *Palestinians and Israelis in the Theatre*, ed. Dan Urian (London: Routledge, 1996), 153–70.

49 Malm, "This Is the Hell," 153.

50 Joe Cleary, *Literature, Partition and the Nation-State: Culture and Conflict in Ireland, Israel, and Palestine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 219.

51 Bashir Abu-Manneh, *The Palestinian Novel: From 1948 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 82.

52 Ghassan Kanafani, *Palestine's Children: Returning to Haifa and Other Stories*, translated by Barbara Harlow and Karen E. Riley (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2000).

53 Kanafani, *Returning to Haifa*, 186.

54 Ghassan Kanafani, *Umm Sa'd* (Beirut: Dar al-'Awda, 1969); Ghassan Kanafani, *al-Bab:masrahiyya* [The door: a play] (Beirut: Dar al-Tali'a, 1964). It should be noted that the phallogocentric production of meaning by these largely male writers should be critiqued, as the patriarchal modality of power is not transcended. See: Honaida Ghanim, "Poetics of Disaster: Nationalism, Gender, and Social Change among Palestinian Poets in Israel after Nakba," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 22, no. 1 (March 2009): 23–39.

55 See: Ghassan Kanafani, *al-Athar al-kamila* [The complete works], vol. 1 (Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Abhath al-'Arabiyya, 1994); Kanafani, *al-Bab*; Mahmud Darwish, "Eleven Planets in the Last Andalusian Sky," in *Adam of the Two Edens: Selected Poems*, ed. Munir Akash and Daniel Moore (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2001), 147–70.

56 Yusoff, "Inhumanities"; and Tom Langley, "Exceptional States: The (Bio)politics of Love in Darwish's *A State of Siege*," *Interventions* 14, no. 1 (2012): 69–82.

57 Abu-Manneh, *Palestinian Novel*, 78.

58 Naomi Klein, "Let Them Drown: The Violence of Othering in a Warming World," *London Review of Books* 38, no. 11 (2 June 2016), online at www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v38/n11/naomi-klein/let-them-drown (accessed 28 August 2024).

59 Max Ajl, *A People's Green New Deal* (London: Pluto Press, 2021).

60 Kanafani, *1936–39 Revolt in Palestine*; Max Ajl, "Logics of Elimination and Settler Colonialism: Decolonization or National Liberation?" *Middle East Critique* 32, no. 1 (2023): 1-25.

61 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Paperback, 2021), 179–80.

62 Abu-Manneh, *Palestinian Novel*, 71–95.

63 Abu-Manneh, *Palestinian Novel*, 71.

64 Malm, "This Is the Hell," 135.

65 Andreas Malm, *How to Blow Up a Pipeline: Learning to Fight in a World on Fire* (London: Verso, 2021), 71.

66 Kanafani, *1936–39 Revolt in Palestine*.

67 For the PFLP's published statement, see: "Terrorists in Singapore Menace Refinery, Then Take 5 Hostages," *New York Times*, 1 February 1974, 3, online at www.nytimes.com/1974/02/01/archives/terrorists-in-singapore-menace-refinery-then-take-5-hostages.html (accessed 28 August 2024).

68 Mahmoud Darwish, *In the Presence of Absence*, trans. Sinan Antoon (New York: Archipelago Books, 2011), 53.

69 On the bulldozers of history, see: Sinan Antoon, "Before the Ruins: When Mahmoud Darwish Met Walter Benjamin," lecture, Asia Pacific Center, University of California, Los Angeles, 5 November 2009, published 25 January 2010, online at www.international.ucla.edu/apc/article/113655 (accessed 28 August 2024).

70 The author thanks Sinan Antoon, Nouri Ghana, and Dudu Zaslavsky for orchestrating the worlds to engage such literature amid relentless disintegration and enduring violence. Your commitments reaffirm the power of poetics as a weapon that resists erasure and sustains hope, nurturing the collective memory that guides us through collapse. The views and interpretations in this article are solely my own and do not represent those mentioned above.

The Gaza Soup Kitchen: Generosity amid Genocide

Hani Almadhoun

Abstract

Last year, Hani Almadhoun, senior director of philanthropy at UNRWA USA, was thrust into the spotlight of media and government attention as he advocated for the safety of his family and the well-being of his people in Gaza. He engaged in high-level meetings with U.S. officials and made countless media appearances to bring attention to the urgent needs of the people of Gaza. In the face of official inaction, Hani mobilized an informal donor network and with the help of his brother, Chef Mahmoud, and others organized material resources on the ground in Gaza to found the Gaza Soup Kitchen. The Gaza Soup Kitchen provides meals and direct assistance to families in Gaza, including his own, who have been deeply affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis. Despite working for one of the largest humanitarian organizations in Gaza, Hani felt compelled to take direct action to help families facing food insecurity.

Keywords:

Gaza Soup Kitchen; volunteer; charity; UNRWA; famine.

In February 2024, my family launched the Gaza Soup Kitchen to serve our community in North Gaza, where famine conditions have taken hold. We are not alone in this – many Palestinians in the diaspora, like us, have taken it upon ourselves to step in and help. It is heartbreaking and shameful that we must assume these risks – risks to the safety of our families and the well-being of our neighbors, and the constant challenges of moving resources into

Gaza, where banks have been bombed, and ATMs have been ripped from walls.

Our family, like many others, has lived through the trauma of displacement. My grandparents were from Majdal. Their stories of 1948 still echo in our hearts, including stories of bakers in Jabaliya handing out bread to the displaced. Fast forward to 2024, when I witnessed my sister grinding animal feed to make a bread-like substance because there was nothing left to eat. Even the cat ran away from the smell. That was a turning point for me. Living in the United States and working for UNRWA USA, people asked me how they could help, and I knew something had to be done. We couldn't let history repeat itself without taking action. And so the Gaza Soup Kitchen was born.

It started with a small donation from a friend who wanted us to "figure something out." What began as a makeshift effort grew into a movement – creating jobs, serving meals, and offering dignity to people who had been stripped of everything. Ultimately, we not only fed people, we built a community, using tools like GoFundMe, Instagram, and LinkedIn to share our story.[1]

My younger brother, Chef Mahmoud, began cooking for the community of 120 families armed with just three large pots. He had to leverage every connection he had ever made to make the community kitchen a reality. He even had to use the money left behind by our deceased brother to source food, braving dangerous areas where drones had taken many lives, just to buy potatoes, carrots, zucchinis, and eggplants to serve for free to starving families. Challenges came one after another – lack of firewood, cell service, and filtered water – but Chef Mahmoud found his purpose. He implemented high hygiene standards in the community kitchen, emphasized storytelling, and preserved people's dignity. He managed a team of fifteen people working in the kitchen, establishing a chain of command and advocating for them.

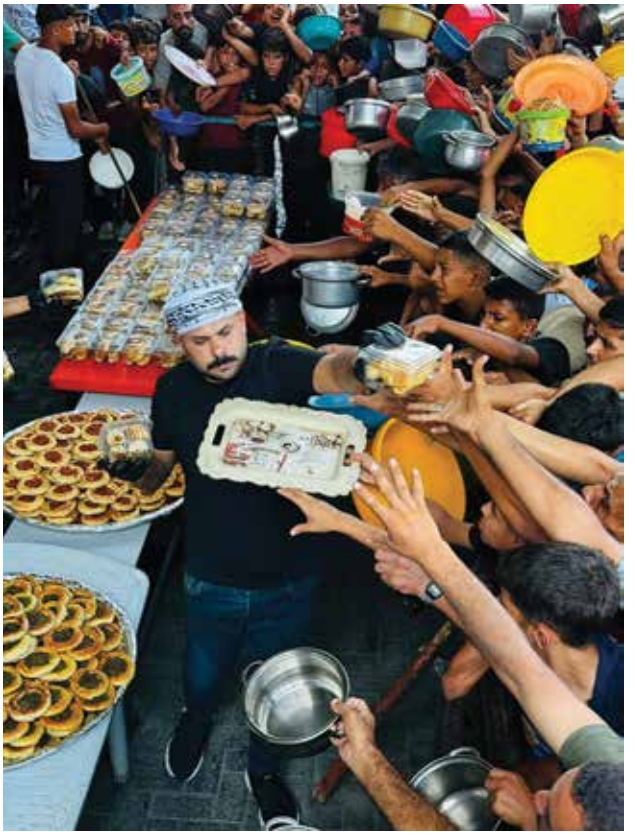


Figure 1. Chef Mahmoud distributing food to hungry children at the Gaza Soup Kitchen, August 2024. Posted by Hani Almadhoun on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/posts/hanifundraiser_this-photo-captures-just-one-corner-of-a-activity-7232164502044090368-b38G/ (accessed 25 October 2024).

Chef Mahmoud works tirelessly to ensure that no one leaves empty-handed. If he runs out of food, he gives whatever he has available, whether it's dates, milk, or even a shirt. In his journey, Chef Mahmoud transformed himself from a help seeker to a help giver, buoyed by an army of people who cheered him on and offered him love and support, both financial and moral. Despite facing daunting challenges, he found strength in the solidarity of his community, propelling him forward in his mission to alleviate suffering and bring hope to those in need. And just like everyone else in Gaza, he had to worry about the safety of his wife, kids and parents, all of whom were made homeless by the war.

After starting in Bayt Lahiya, where the man-made famine became acute in early 2024, a second soup kitchen opened in April in Rafah, just as soaring prices and an impending military campaign kept everyone in constant fear. Led by Niveen, my sister who has the most formal education, with the assistance of other women from our families who sought shelter in the south of Gaza, this kitchen served both sweet and savory dishes. During Ramadan, the children appreciated the sweet, milk-enriched rice pudding that kept them strong during their fast.

In early May, the Israeli army forced the Gaza Soup Kitchen crew, along with everyone else, to leave Rafah. They relocated, set up a tent, and resumed cooking in Dayr al-Balah. In September, they received word to evacuate once again, but where could they go? Everywhere else is already overcrowded, and transportation costs have skyrocketed due to Israel's fuel restrictions. They evacuated North Gaza last year, then moved to Nusayrat refugee camp, then to Rafah, some to Khan Yunis, and now they're being ordered to evacuate again – but where to this time?

Amid these compounded hardships, the Gaza Soup Kitchen has expanded to serve eight thousand people daily, offering hot meals while bombs fall and drones hover overhead. We've added a health clinic and a fully accredited school, despite the destruction of banks, ATMs, and nearly all infrastructure in Gaza. None of this would have been possible without the unprecedented generosity of donors and volunteers from around the globe. Perhaps most uplifting were the Palestinian families who, inspired by our work, began their own projects in their neighborhoods. Despite the difficulties of sourcing ingredients in a war zone, these families refused to let the situation stifle their creativity.

For our family, this work was not just about feeding the hungry – it was about preserving the dignity and humanity of our community. In the process of helping, we lifted the voices of those we served, telling their stories and sharing their steadfastness with the world. This work became my lifeline, too. Amid the constant reports of destruction and the deaths of friends and family members, sharing these small victories gave me the strength to keep going.

And yet, the fact that we have to do this work – while beautiful – is painful. No one should have to turn to their neighbors for survival during a genocide. But here we are, doing what we must to survive. The truth is, we're only scratching the surface of the need. While we are proud of our work, it is a shame that families like ours have to shoulder the responsibility when large humanitarian organizations like UNRWA, the biggest actor inside Gaza, face restrictions and lack the resources to operate at the scale needed.

As part of our work, the Gaza Soup Kitchen has also taken on the role of documenting the heartbreaking realities on the ground. We tell the stories from the center of this famine – showing the sheer desperation and the immense suffering, but also capturing those rare moments of joy when a smile breaks through the ocean of trauma. These small instances of happiness remind us of the strength and resilience of the Palestinian people, even in the face of unimaginable hardship.

Just consider the difficulty of working with the food donations available at any given point. UNRWA is now delivering halal canned meat, produced in Jordan, to Gaza, similar to the spam delivered to U.S. and Allied troops in Europe during World War II. While these cans are a lifeline, due to Israel's restrictions on fresh or frozen meat, people have grown tired of the canned taste. Enter Chef Faten, who introduced a creative twist: shredding the canned meat, seasoning it, heating it up with olive oil, and filling fresh bread (made on-site using flour provided by UNRWA). The final touch? A smear of tomato sauce, followed by grilling over charcoal. This innovation turned the ordinary canned meat into a delicious shawarma, and it has become a hit. Others in the area have started adopting this new menu item, transforming a bland necessity into an exciting dish that brings people together. But let's be clear: this is far from normal or cool. We must keep pushing to end the bloodbath and bring real change.

The gravity of the situation is driven home by what happens just three blocks from our kitchen, where malnourished children take their last breath at Kamal 'Adwan Hospital. Sent from across Gaza City, these kids suffer not just from hunger, but from a lack of baby formula and medical supplies. Diseases like cancer only worsen their fragile conditions. The desperation is unimaginable, and yet the world seems to look away.

Figure 2. Canned meat stacked at the Gaza Soup Kitchen, August 2024. Posted by Hani Almadhoun on Instagram at www.instagram.com/p/C-xhYfUp4ig (accessed 25 October 2024).

We should not have to be in this position. This is a man-made crisis, imposed by an occupation that seeks to break the spirit of the Palestinian people. But we will not stop. Alongside a global network of people who

care deeply about our cause, we will continue to resist through acts of solidarity, compassion, and humanity. We must not lose sight of the fact that organizations like UNRWA need support and access to resources to address this man-made starvation that grips Gaza. This is a collective fight, and while we are doing our part, we need the world's help to ensure that no more children take their last breath for lack of food, medicine, or hope.

The success of the Gaza Soup Kitchen is deeply bittersweet. While it is uplifting to know we are able to provide nourishment and comfort to so many, the growing need only highlights the painful reality we face. Every meal served is both a victory and a reminder of the immense suffering that continues to unfold around us.

Hani Almadhoun serves as the senior director of philanthropy at UNRWA USA, a U.S.-based charity dedicated to ensuring that UNRWA has the resources to continue its life-saving work for Palestine refugees. He is also co-founder of the Gaza Soup Kitchen (gazasoupkitchen.org), a grassroots initiative that provides meals and direct assistance to families in Gaza, including his own, who have been deeply affected by the ongoing humanitarian crisis.

Endnotes

1 Hani Almadhoun is on Instagram (@myhanitizer) and LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com/in/hanifundraiser/); the Gaza Soup Kitchen is on Instagram (@gazasoupkitchen) and crowdsources financial support at www.gofundme.com/f/Hot-meals-in-gaza-daily.

REVIEWS

Ottolenghi and Tamimi's Cookbook, *Jerusalem*: Israel as Frame and Palestine as Subject

Review essay by Reem Farah

Abstract

In 2012, *Jerusalem: A Cookbook*, co-authored by the Israeli chef and food writer Yotam Ottolenghi and the Palestinian chef Sami Tamimi, was released to widespread acclaim. It has often been celebrated by mainstream audiences as an example of Israeli-Palestinian partnership and coexistence. This review essay challenges the cookbook's erasure of settler-colonial violence and its portrayal of diversity as characteristics of broader projects of political normalization and culinary appropriation that steadily serve to erase Palestine.

Keywords:

Jerusalem; Yotam Ottolenghi; Sami Tamimi; normalization; culinary colonialism; Palestinian cookbooks.

Jerusalem: A Cookbook, co-authored by the Israeli chef and food writer Yotam Ottolenghi and the Palestinian chef Sami Tamimi became an instant bestseller when it was published in 2012. The *New York Times* described the book's popularity as "*Jerusalem* fever," and attributed the recipe for its success to the London-based authors "who know how to tweak and choose recipes for Western tastes."[1] Further, the book's positioning as a collaboration between an Israeli and a Palestinian served as an example of co-existence that appealed to international liberal audiences. The book helped launch Ottolenghi into an international brand and a celebrity chef in the genre of "Middle Eastern–inspired" and Mediterranean cooking. Yet *Jerusalem* can and should also be

seen as a normalization project that declares an "apolitical" stance while obscuring a political history and present. The cookbook brings together an Israeli and a Palestinian chef, collecting recipes from "both sides," to define a cuisine that doubles as a claim over the city itself. The book's decontextualization and dehistoricization serve to erase Israel's history of settler colonialism and ethnic cleansing. Meanwhile, through imagery, text, and food, Jerusalem presents a vision of the city that marginalizes the political reality of Palestinian life there.

The *Jerusalem* cookbook contains one hundred and twenty recipes from the "religious and cultural melting pot of this diverse city" in addition to a narrative section of several chapters. Omissions, conflations, and intentional inaccuracies provide the necessary base for the book's "apolitical" politics. This begins in the history section of the book, where the longer history of Jerusalem presented is one of Jewish continuity under various empires (Persian, Greek, Roman, and so on), centered around Jewish connections to the site of the Jewish temple destroyed by the Romans in 70 CE. Jewish history is woven over two pages while Jerusalem's place in Christianity and Islam is confined to two short paragraphs. This omission of geographic, ethnic, and social ties to prioritize Jewish claims over the land is

Figure 1. This Bonfils image of Jerusalem's Jaffa Gate in 1880 contrasts with Zionist claims of the city as neglected. Félix Bonfils, "Jérusalem: Porte de Jaffa," from Photographies de Terre sainte: Jérusalem (1880), via Bibliothèque nationale de France, online at gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b10102045h/f5.item (accessed 1 October 2024).

characteristic of Zionist narratives that evoke religious claims to the land to suit a settler-colonial project. Notably, the text bolsters colonial tropes of modernization, claiming that Jerusalem became a "neglected place" under Ottoman rule, describing it as a "miserable, congested, and squalid provincial town."[2] This is contrasted with their account of the British Mandate, which brought "a definite push for modernization." Historians such as Salim Tamari and Rochelle Davis, writing against the grain of colonial history, point out how the Zionist history of Ottoman Jerusalem emphasizes the backwardness of the time in order to claim that social developments occurred due to Zionist efforts.[3]

The book offers a narrative of two groups (Arab and Jewish) migrating and settling in a city completely divorced from questions of political power and violence. Thus, for example, the book states: "Arabs settled in the city as part of a general urbanization trend, and Jews arrived from around the world to the re-founded national home."[4] This obscures the sinister systematic efforts to displace Palestinians from the city. In 1948, when over seven hundred thousand Palestinians were uprooted from their homeland, Palestinian Jerusalemites were expelled from their homes by Zionist militias in Jerusalem's western neighborhoods of Talbiyya, Baq'a, and Qatamon, and nearby villages such as 'Ayn Karim and Lifta, as well as from eastern neighborhoods of the Old City, Silwan, Ras al-'Amud, and Abu Tur. The Israeli state seized their lands and properties, which were then inhabited by Jewish settlers.[5] The book's Zionist history of events since 1947 does not acknowledge this history. Instead, it offers a historically false account that presents 1948 as Jewish loss: "The young Israeli state managed to hold onto the western part of the city while losing its eastern, ancient part, which has been densely populated by Arabs."[6] This is symptomatic of the book's framing and political position.

Nor does *Jerusalem* mention Israel's efforts since 1948 to maintain political and demographic dominance in Jerusalem by forcibly displacing Palestinians. In particular, the Jerusalem municipality seeks to maintain at least a 70:30 majority of Jews to Arabs in the city, through policies such as home demolitions, residency revocations and precarity, zoning restrictions, land confiscation, and settlement expansion. Following the 1967 occupation and later annexation of East Jerusalem, over 236,000 illegal Israeli settlers have moved into fourteen settlements in East Jerusalem, contrary to international law, increasing their presence from zero to 39 percent of the East Jerusalem population by 2021, compared to 370,500 Palestinian residents.[7] Palestinian residents of the city have been subjected to home demolitions and settler takeovers of their properties while over 14,500 Palestinians have been stripped of their Jerusalem residency rights altogether.[8] It is clear that the presence of one community comes at the expense of the other. Indeed, the book's images present idyllic glimpses of the city that reinforce the bold heading of a shared Jerusalem, but the Israeli flag in the book's aerial shot of Jerusalem is the only flag permitted to fly over the city – flying the Palestinian flag has been outlawed.[9]

The authors suggest that fierce arguments around ownership – "about who and what came first" – are futile, as there will always be prior claims. In their words:

"Food is a basic, hedonistic pleasure, a sensual instinct we all share and revel in. It is a shame to spoil it."[10] Instead of addressing the structural conditions that mediate the inequality between Israelis and Palestinians, Jerusalem's normalization work focuses on bringing people together surrounding topics of coexistence and food. In doing so, the powerful party ostensibly sets the rules and bounds of the partnership, forcing the less powerful party into submission. I argue that it is in this sense, *Jerusalem* falls. While claiming the futility of ownership debates, *Jerusalem* asserts its own ownership claim by whitewashing occupation and apartheid and engaging in a selective historicization of the city.

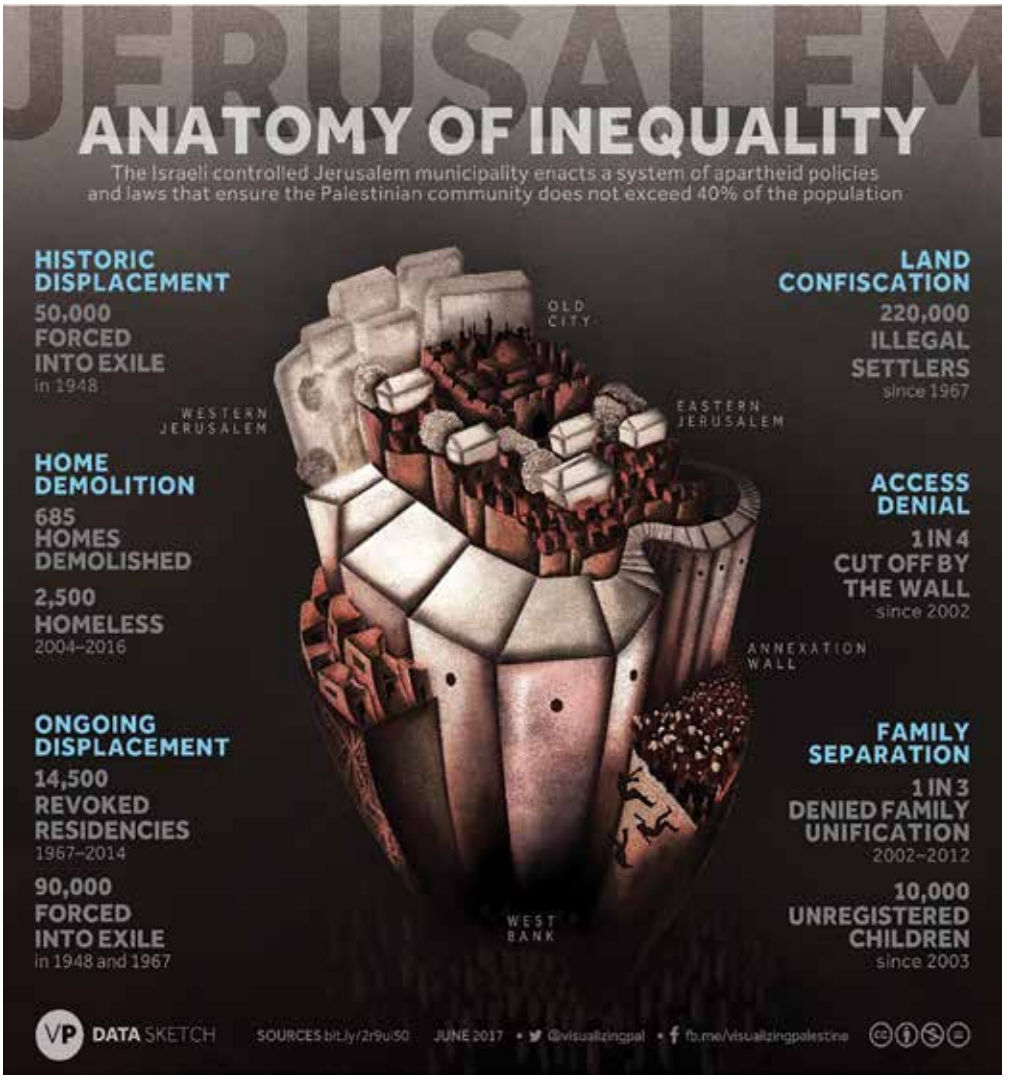


Figure 2. Visualizing Palestine, "Anatomy of Inequality," infographic on systematic occupation and apartheid in Jerusalem, June 2017.

This practice of depoliticization has been adopted by emerging international Israeli chefs or restaurants that usurp Palestinian and Arabic food discreetly, while marketing sustainability practices or site-specific cooking to appear politically liberal. As Ilan Zvi Baron puts it: "This narrative is paradoxical, in the sense that the text is clearly political, but is also ostensibly apolitical."[11] This "apolitical" approach allows international audiences to enjoy a cuisine without consciously engaging the politics of culture. Baron has likened this process of cultural commodification in *Jerusalem* to bell hooks' theory "eating the Other" whereby colonial powers eat "primitive" identities in pursuit of authenticity.[12] The utility of a Palestinian chef's co-signature catalyzes appropriation through identity blurring. As Baron writes, "*Jerusalem* can be treated as overcoming [a] kind of cultural theft because it is also authored by a Palestinian."[13] Thus, normalization weaponizes a liberal politics against Palestinians by deploying soft diplomacy while enforcing the reality of Zionism, a tactic of appropriation that in effect erases Palestinian claims to the cuisine. Further, the appropriation of Palestinian food by Israel is part and parcel of a settler-colonial movement to consume Palestinian land and culture while simultaneously dispossessing Palestinians of the land.

Food traditions in Jerusalem have evolved with the imprint of settler colonialism on its physical and social landscape. In an effort to define a cuisine for the city, the book asserts that "Jerusalemites tend to eat seasonally and cook with what grows in the area."[14] However, this ignores questions of access to agricultural land, technology, and markets. For example, the construction of the apartheid wall around the city cuts it off from the West Bank, limiting movement of people and food and, more importantly, access to land and the resources. This is part of a broader system of apartheid that also includes checkpoints, the widespread theft of agricultural land, and a permit regime that prevents farmers from accessing the city to sell their produce and to obtain resources needed to grow food.

Food in this context cannot be separated from politics. The rise of "Israeli food" as an upmarket international brand in global kitchens is arguably complicit not just in the appropriation of Palestinian food practices. As Palestinians are violently displaced from their land and food sources, much of their Indigenous food practice is also criminalized. For example, Israel has manipulated nature protection laws to outlaw the foraging of *'akkub* (edible wild thistle) and *za'tar*.[15] Meanwhile, Israeli cuisine on the global scale uses these as unique global culinary exports. While Ottolenghi has now expanded his culinary empire in the United Kingdom to include selling fifty-gram pots of *za'tar* for nearly £5, Palestinians are left unable to forage for it. These vast disparities not only shape the material relationship upon which Ottolenghi's global fame is based, but the lack of engagement with it further cements the appropriation of Palestinian food practice. Within the book, the authors propose that "hummus will bring us all together," suggesting that food is the grand unifier.[16] These examples illustrate, on the contrary, that in Palestine food is a major fault line, and cannot be divorced from politics, precisely because it is so entwined with the land.[17]

Nameless Palestinians and the Selective Distribution of Diversity

Jerusalem's text hinges on convincing the reader that despite occupation and segregation, Jerusalem is "a melting pot" where inevitable tensions are merely the product of diversity. At the same time, diversity is selectively attributed to suit particular historical narratives. In its description of the city's communities, *Jerusalem* differentiates between Christian and Muslim Palestinians, referring to Christians as "Arabs" rather than Palestinians. Christian and Muslim Palestinians are then placed alongside a long list of new Jewish migrations from diverse ethnic backgrounds, confusing ethnicity and religion, flattening the complexity of rich Palestinian social histories and migrations, and erasing non-Arab Palestinian minorities such as Greeks and Syriacs.[18] The conflation of new and old migrations and traditions makes it seem like Israeli food evolved with or alongside Palestinian food, when it came much later as part of a project of colonization. As Yael Raviv notes, "Falafel was not assimilated into Israeli society by a long, slow, natural process. Rather, its transformation into an icon of Israeli culture was rushed and deliberate."[19] By erasing the systematic displacement of Palestinians and their replacement by "diverse" settler communities in the interest of keeping politics at bay, *Jerusalem* distorts the experiences of Palestinians and their food histories.

A pattern that emerges in *Jerusalem* – and in Zionist culinary appropriation more broadly – is the distinct overrepresentation of Jewish Sephardic food and the subsuming of Palestinian and Sephardic Jewish foods into a broader Mediterranean or Middle Eastern cuisine. Then, rather than situating specific culinary traditions within the cultures and regions in which they originate, such as Tunisia, Morocco, or Iraq, they are labeled Israeli. This editorial decision or subtle rebrand is how normalization paves the way toward culinary appropriation. In *Jerusalem*, dishes such as stuffed eggplant or beet salads found in Palestinian households are ultimately attributed to Sephardic Jewish communities or a Turkish or Iranian Jewish version of the dish. Reem Kassis, a Palestinian chef from Jerusalem and author of *The Palestinian Table* explains that Palestinians object to the use of the term "Israeli food" due to the dynamics of erasure. She writes: "In many restaurants and cookbooks, Israelis have no problem including such items as 'Yemeni schug,' 'Iraqi sabich,' or 'Tunisian salad.' But the absence of the word 'Palestinian' from their menus and books is a glaring omission."[20] She goes on: "The irony is that the newly constructed Israeli food culture prides itself on being a byproduct of many influences and immigrant forces while failing to highlight the most important influence – that of the local Palestinian food culture."[21] *Jerusalem* clearly falls within this trend, emphasizing a selective diversity to lay claim to the various foods of Jerusalem, while marginalizing Palestinians.

This marginalization takes place in subtle ways throughout the cookbook. For example, almost every recipe is prefaced with a note on its source or inspiration. What is striking is how most recipes referenced as Jewish or Israeli are attributed to a person with a first and last name, like "Helen Goh's Latkes," or to institutions,

as in the case of "Machenyuda's Seafood and Fennel Soup."[22] In contrast, the recipes sourced from Arabs or Palestinians are rarely attributed, not even using first names. They are loosely traced to Tamimi's relatives in Jerusalem or as something witnessed or experienced in the Old City and are often left uncited, the blurbs referencing some distant anecdote. For example, the charred okra recipe was made by Tamimi's nameless grandmother, but the parsley and barley salad was made by "Tami Rosenbaum, the mother of Yoni, [Ottolenghi's] childhood best friend."[23] Palestinians are nameless and faceless, melding into an undifferentiated homogenous mass, with diversity ultimately residing in the individualism of Jewish cooks, each with their own story to tell.

The Dynamic between the Authors: Frame and Subject

Food narratives reflect political contestations about identity and are thus shaped by the power relations of those who narrate them.[24] The relationship between Ottolenghi and Tamimi reveals how they navigate power in relation to one another, and how they are presented and perceived. A 2012 *New Yorker* profile of Ottolenghi ("The Philosopher Chef") highlights his career from a student writing his dissertation in aesthetic philosophy, to rolling puff pastry at the Cordon Bleu, to the window shop of Baker and Spice where he first met Sami Tamimi.[25] Tamimi emerges as a secondary character among a growing cast. Despite having introduced Ottolenghi to the world of Middle Eastern cooking in the international context, a brand that Ottolenghi would soon make his own, we only get to know Tamimi through his connection to Ottolenghi.

In *Jeruaslem*, the two are described as leading "parallel lives," but this obscures a disparate gulf. Ottolenghi served in the Israeli army's intelligence unit and joined a "genius program" at Tel Aviv University. Tamimi had to get a paying job at sixteen, eventually found a kitchen job at Mount Zion hotel, and worked himself up in the business. Tamimi's rise against all odds was no small feat. He grew up relatively poor, Palestinian, and gay in Jerusalem, then climbed up the ranks of Tel Aviv and London kitchens. But this is not recognized as a sign of Tamimi's ingenuity. Whereas Ottolenghi has embraced his status as "celebrity chef," Tamimi has not achieved a similar degree of fame. The restaurant they dreamed of together, and their first cookbook together, are named only after Ottolenghi. When asked if he feels he should have his name on the door, Tamimi was unequivocal: "I didn't have money to invest. [Ottolenghi] risked everything he had. A few years later, I became a partner, but regardless of the cookbooks we do, regardless of our friendship, I'm still working for Yotam. He's my boss."[26] This inequality plays out from Jerusalem to London to New York. While they present themselves as co-authors or business partners, Ottolenghi's dominance is explicit.

If we understand a text's frame to be the overarching structure and intonation, then Ottolenghi's Israel is *Jerusalem*'s frame, and Tamimi's Palestine exists as a subject

within this frame. This is apparent in the cookbook, where Ottolenghi's pen and voice infuse the narrative. The *New Yorker* profile compares the roles of the two chefs: "It was "Ottolenghi who did the traveling, the interviewing, and nearly all the writing, but it was Tamimi who in many ways talked him through the experience."[27] The profile also quotes Ottolenghi's friend Noam Bar: "Yotam is inventive; he has the ultimate, the most discerning, palate. Sami is more traditional, but he's the kitchen authority; his hand goes into the salt, and his fingers know it's the right amount."[28] This interplay between the recipe and its dissemination, or Tamimi's salt and Ottolenghi's palette, plays into deeply Orientalist notions of "instinct" versus "intellect." It illustrates the power dynamics between the two authors in how they are represented and received internationally in addition to the chasm of material differences in their rights and upbringing in Jerusalem.

The expectation that Ottolenghi and Tamimi's relationship is or should be equal is perhaps built on the pretense of equal partnership that normalization markets. Tamimi's participation as a co-author representing Palestine was thus a necessary component of *Jerusalem*. However, normalization projects are characteristically based upon ignoring inequalities at the foundation of the relationship. In a recent article, Kassis shares her experience of self-censorship as a Palestinian chef: "Always careful, always trying to build bridges, always feeling the need to justify and qualify my words. I would see 'both sides' in a conversation even when the power imbalance of occupier versus occupied was obvious."[29] If for Ottolenghi, Tamimi's involvement served to mask these imbalances, for Tamimi, this erasure was the cost of inclusion.

Conclusion

Nine years after *Jerusalem*, Tamimi published the cookbook *Falastin*, co-authored with Tara Wigley. *Falastin* departs from *Jerusalem*'s narrative to reclaim Tamimi's cuisine and land in its phonetic spelling. It is also part of a burgeoning genre of English-language Palestinian cookbooks asserting their culture on the global stage. From Leila Haddad's *The Gaza Kitchen* (2013), to Joudi Kalla's *Palestine on a Plate* (2016), Kassis's *The Palestinian Table* (2017), and Lama Bazzari and Farah Abuasad's *Craving Palestine Cookbook* (2020), and, most recently, Fadi Kattan's *Bethlehem* (2024), Palestinians have broken through the barriers of Israel's appropriation, presenting their food as their own and, through it, reclaiming their land and culture for an international audience.

This reclamation has never felt more urgent. A war of genocide continues to subject Palestinians in Gaza to endless bombing, assassinations, and the prevention of food and medical aid. Since 2007, with the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, Israeli authorities have controlled food imports through calculations of civilian calorie intakes. Now it uses starvation and food aid as weapons of war, setting off the world's fastest growing famine. The political nature of food has never been so clear and, as always, it is inextricably linked to the land.

Since 7 October 2023, Tamimi has been using social media to post daily about the genocide, amplifying the voices of Palestinians on the ground. Moreover, in light of the policy of starvation in Gaza and his role as a Palestinian chef, Tamimi now emphasizes food as being political. In contrast, Ottolenghi, who shared a post on 8 October primarily about the Israeli hostages and then about "both sides" some three weeks later, has remained silent about the genocide, and at the time of writing, is steadily promoting the U.S. tour of his latest cookbook.

Reem Farah is a researcher, writer, and artist. With degrees from the University of Toronto and SOAS, University of London, she has focused on power relationships in culture and society, specifically the political economy of Palestinian embroidery and the responsibility of tatreez in art, and the contradictions of mobility in transnational humanitarianism.

Endnotes

1 Julia Moskin, "'Jerusalem' Has All the Right Ingredients," *New York Times*, 30 July 2013, online at www.nytimes.com/2013/07/31/dining/jerusalem-has-all-the-right-ingredients.html (accessed 19 September 2024). On *Jerusalem*'s popularity, see also: Paula Forbes, "Here Are the 10 Best Selling Cookbooks of 2013," *Eater*, 10 January 2014, online at www.eater.com/2014/1/10/6299093/here-are-the-10-best-selling-cookbooks-of-2013 (accessed 19 September 2024); and "Why 'Jerusalem' Is Becoming the 'Harry Potter' of the Cookbook World," Eat Your Books, 1 August 2013, online at www.eatyourbooks.com/blog/2013/8/1/why-'jerusalem'-is-becoming-the-harry-potter-of-the-cookbook-world (accessed 19 September 2024).

2 Yotam Ottolenghi and Sami Tamimi, *Jerusalem: A Cookbook* (London: Ebury Press, 2012), 18.

3 See, for example, Rochelle Davis, "Ottoman Jerusalem," in *Jerusalem 1948: The Arab Neighborhoods and Their Fate in the War*, ed. Salim Tamari (Jerusalem and Bethlehem: Institute for Jerusalem Studies and BADIL Resource Center, 2000), 10.

4 Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 21.

5 See, for example, Tamari, ed., *Jerusalem 1948*.

6 Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 21. The narrative does not take into consideration the work of Palestinian historians, nor revisionist Israeli historians, who have long demonstrated the Zionist movement's deliberate and intentional plans to displace Palestinians. That the narrative ignores the mass displacement of Palestinians from their land, in an effort to eschew the "political," illustrates particularly clearly how narratives of normalization and "two sides" come at the expense of the Palestinians.

7 Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends, 2023* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 2023), 15.

8 See: B'Tselem, "Statistics on Revocation of Residency in East Jerusalem," 11 January 2011 (updated 19 April 2023), online at www.btselem.org/jerusalem/revocation_statistics (accessed 19 September 2024); BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, "End Israel's Policy of Discriminatory Child Registration in Jerusalem," 6 August 2014, written statement submitted to the United Nations Human Rights Council, 27th session, online at documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/g14/147/97/pdf/g1414797.pdf (accessed 19 September 2024); and Tamara Tamimi, "Israeli Appropriation of Palestinian Cultural Heritage in Jerusalem," 1 July 2019, written statement submitted on behalf of MIFTAH to the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, online at www.un.org/unispal/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MIFTAH_Submission_1July2019.pdf (accessed 19 September 2024).

9 Amnesty International, "Israel/OPT: Flag Restrictions Are the Latest Attempt to Silence Palestinians and Reduce Their Visibility," 11 January 2023, online at www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2023/01/israel-opt-flag-restrictions-are-the-latest-attempt-to-silence-

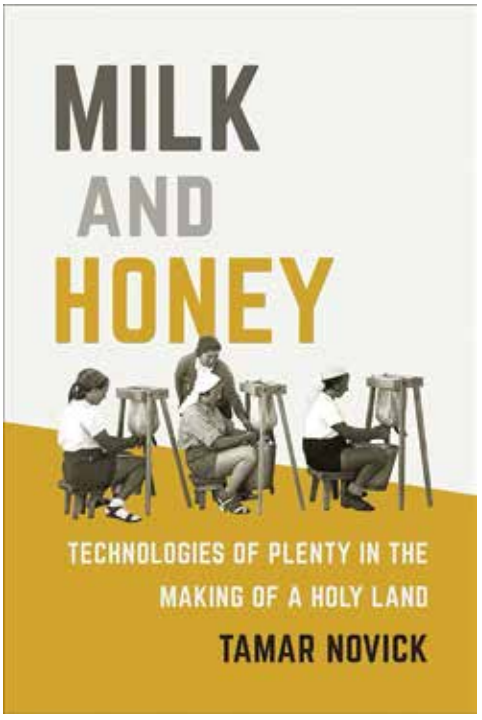
palestinians-and-reduce-their-visibility/ (accessed 19 September 2024).
10 Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 16.
11 Ilan Zvi Baron, "Eating Jerusalem: Politics, Food, and Identity," *Jewish Studies Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (December 2016): 282.
12 Baron, "Eating Jerusalem."
13 Baron, "Eating Jerusalem," 282.
14 Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 18.
15 The criminalization of foraging has been extensively documented. See: Rabea Eghrabiah, "The Struggle for Za'atar and Akkoub: Israeli Nature Protection Laws and the Criminalization of Palestinian Herb-Picking Culture," presented at the June 2020 Oxford Food Symposium, online at www.oxfordsymposium.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/Eghbariah.pdf (accessed 19 September 2024); and Jumana Manna, dir., *Foragers* (Palestine, 2022), 64 min.
16 Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 14.
17 Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 14.
18 Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 10.
19 Yael Raviv, "Falafel: A National Icon," *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture* 3, no. 3 (Summer 2003): 20.
20 Reem Kassis, "Here's Why Palestinians Object to the Term 'Israeli Food': It Erases Us from History," *Washington Post*, 18 February 2020, online at www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/food/heres-why-palestinians-object-to-the-term-israeli-food-it-erases-us-from-history/2020/02/14/96974a74-4d25-11ea-bf44-f5043eb3918a_story.html (accessed 19 September 2024).
21 Kassis, "Here's Why Palestinians Object."
22 Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 92, 136.
23 Ottolenghi and Tamimi, *Jerusalem*, 74, 81.
24 Ilan Zvi Baron and Galia Press-Barnathan, "Foodways and Foodwashing: Israeli Cookbooks and the Politics of Culinary Zionism," *International Political Sociology* 15, no. 3 (September 2021): 344, online at doi.org/10.1093/ips/olab007.
25 Jane Kramer, "The Philosopher Chef," *New Yorker*, 25 November 2012, online at www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/12/03/the-philosopher-chef (accessed 19 September 2024).
26 Kramer, "Philosopher Chef."
27 Kramer, "Philosopher Chef."
28 Kramer, "Philosopher Chef."
29 Reem Kassis, "They Ate at My Table Then Ignored My People," *Atlantic*, 16 March 2024, online at www.theatlantic.com/family/archive/2024/03/palestinian-food-diplomacy-gaza/677773/ (accessed 19 September 2024).

REVIEW

Cultivating Catastrophe

Review by Tom Selwyn

Milk and Honey: Technologies of Plenty in the Making of a Holy Land, by Tamar Novick (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2023). 278 pages. $45.00 paperback.



Abstract

Tamar Novick skillfully examines the transformation of agriculture and animal husbandry adopted by the early Zionist settlers of Palestine, encouraged by the British, and continued post-1948 by the Israelis. These practices involved the conversion of Ottoman Palestinian agriculture to a form of European capitalist-driven agrarian farming, involving draining the Hula Valley, getting rid of black goats and buffalo, inducing greater milk production from cows, and other such science-based agronomic developments. The two overall aims of this were/are to achieve a modern version of an imagined biblical land "flowing with milk and honey" and to fortify the borders between what became Israel and its neighbors. The replacement of Palestinian farming by the Israeli "pursuit of plenty" was central to the Nakba itself and leads readers to ask whether Novick's narrative sheds light on the contemporary genocidal events in Gaza.

Keywords:

Arable farming; black goats; Nakba; shepherding; settlers; border fortification; Gaza.

Milk and Honey is a remarkably subtle book that addresses two substantive questions and raises a third. First, how did the notion of a land "flowing with milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8) inform assumptions by late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jewish settlers to Palestine about which modes of agricultural development to adopt? Second, in what ways do agriculture and

animal husbandry lie at the heart of histories (including recent ones) of the Holy Land? Third, what might we learn, if anything, from *Milk and Honey* about contemporary genocidal events in Gaza and the West Bank? This third question builds on Tamar Novick's sharp reflection on the symbolic elision made by Jewish settlers (before and after 1948) between black goats and Palestinian people (61). She observes that significant efforts by Jewish settlers to control and reduce the numbers of black goats took place at the same time as the Nakba and that the two events were closely linked symbolically in settlers' imaginations. The largest part of this review pursues the first two questions, coming to the third toward the conclusion.

Novick demonstrates in *Milk and Honey* how "modern technoscientific [farming] projects were shaped by a religious idea of the past [which] then became a tool for realizing that idea" (147). The early Jewish settlers, she claims, considered the land into which they had been delivered (many on seacraft propelled by Palestinian oarsmen, we might add) not so much a land flowing with milk and honey, but rather a sparsely populated landscape, part desert, part wetland (think Naqab and Hula Valley), in urgent need of modern European modes of development to return it to its biblical richness. For Novick, this "plenty pageant," as she terms it, entailed (as it continues to entail) the extraction from Jewish-farmed animals of the maximum amounts of honey and meat and, from both Jewish-farmed animals and Jewish women, of milk and babies. This strategy is skillfully described and summarized in the book's introduction and conclusion. Between these two foundational pillars lie five historico-ethnographic chapters recording settlers' relations to bees, goats, sheep, cows, and female humans, and an "interlude" that contains the tragically terminal story of the water buffalo.

The chapter devoted to bees tells the story of the Baldenspergers, a family of Christian missionaries from Alsace. They came to Palestine to settle and join the Swiss Pilgrimage Mission of St. Chrischona. Their aim was to "teach the people of Palestine better ways not by preaching the Word, but by exemplary life and work" (25). Accordingly, they sought the most productive type of bee and a new form of beehive. Following contact with two entrepreneurial American beekeepers, the family came up with a highly productive species of bee together with a new mobile hive to replace the older clay hives built into village walls, which restricted the temporal and spatial range of honey production. Both innovations resulted in a radical expansion of honey available throughout the country and abroad. Novick tells us that at the time of this advance a religious argument was taking place among biblical cognoscenti about whether the "honey" spoken about in the Bible derived from dates or bees. She draws attention to the recent discovery of Iron Age apiaries in the Israeli archaeological site of Tel Rehov, thus confirming active honeybee production in biblical times. The connection was thus enforced practically and symbolically between Euro-American innovation, ancient Hebrew beekeeping, and early twentieth-century settlers' animal husbandry.

Goats played a central role in Palestinian animal husbandry until the mid-twentieth century but attracted an increasingly bad reputation from British Mandate officials and Jewish settlers. In 1950, Israel passed the Black Goat Law with the aim of reducing the

supposed environmentally damaging effects of the goats' presence: their partiality to young pine tree shoots was especially irritating to Israelis attempting to plant forests in large parts of the country. Goats became widely regarded as "interruptions of the balance of nature," as Novick puts it (51). Furthermore, from the early part of the century onward, black goats increasingly became symbolically and politically linked to the Indigenous population. Thus, for example, a British railway official in 1936 complained that grazing animals routinely harmed land around railways and Novick comments that such harm was thought to be "interlaced with the harm caused by local people to British rule" (53). Moreover, like Bedouin, goats *crossed borders* – quite the wrong thing to do in an emergent state keen to establish well-defined frontiers. In the second half of the century, goats were given a racial dimension after a species of white goat (originally imported from Switzerland and Romania) were invested with positive characteristics, leaving black goats stuck with their bad reputation. Novick concludes:

> Along with biblical notions, government and settler understandings of goats and grazing in Palestine along with the legal practices that accompanied them were entangled with ideas about race, control, and rationality. Black goats came to be seen as destructive, rebellious, and Arab; white goats were productive, polite, and Jewish. (74)

There is, however, a final twist to the story. In the last twenty years, the Israeli government has come round to the view that the Black Goat Law was a mistake. The latest scientific advice is that goats of all kinds are necessary for the balance of nature and particularly important to prevent forest fires. The law was rescinded and Bedouin shepherds are being encouraged to bring their flocks back to the Carmel and Jerusalem forests.

Compared to goat herding, early Jewish settlers, Novick tells us, "considered shepherding to be the most ancient and biblical of all traditions" (78). Novick reminds us of the plurality of biblical references to sheep and points up both Jewish and Christian preoccupation with shepherds. Bedouin were thought to be near incarnations of ancient Hebrews and thus allies – figurately speaking – in Jewish plans to reconstruct a biblical land and landscape. Before World War I, a significant number of Jewish settlers were drawn to study and live with Bedouin shepherds, which required learning local Arabic dialects. But the war and its aftermath witnessed "the lure of scientific shepherding" (84). Sheep and shepherding were not only incorporated into a vision among Palestine's growing Jewish population of a mixed farming economy but also promoted as essential features of guarding and taking over the land. The 1954 report of the activities of the Hebrew Shepherds Association (HSA) declared: "Our way is the way of settling the land, making its deserts bloom, and fortifying its borders" (90). This was a time when political and military divisions between Israeli settlers and Palestinians grew exponentially: Jewish members of the HSA were sent across national borders to buy sheep while Palestinian shepherds were expressly forbidden from doing so.

Part of the "scientization" of sheep farming involved the increasing use of sheep

pens in Israeli agricultural settlements (*kibbutzim* and *moshavim*) – the better to count both sheep and milk as part of the overall aim to increase the quantity of animal production. While describing this shift, Novick recounts a moving story written by Bar-Adon, a first-generation Hebrew shepherd who lived in the middle of the twentieth century. In the story, a sheep named Shatra (meaning clever or smart in Arabic) grew up in a flock that moved around with its Palestinian shepherd in the open Palestinian hills and valleys. Shatra was a happy lamb until she was purchased by a Jewish settler at a sheep market, placed in a sheep pen, and given a new Hebrew name. She became morose and gloomy. Eventually, enraged by her captivity, Shatra encouraged her fellow sheep to break out of their pen and regain their life in the open spaces of the hills, once more bathed by the wind and sun.

The trend to scientize, economize, and Europeanize settler/Israeli animal and human production emerges, too, in the book's discussion of the "Hebrew cow" and the Jerusalem-based Hormone Research Laboratory (HRL). The "Hebrew cow" is personified by Stavit, a crossbreed (Dutch bull and Syrian cow) who lactated thrice a day and was inseminated annually. Influenced by the Christian German Templars and the Jewish settler community, the race was on in the early twentieth century to produce greater and greater quantities of milk – in the now familiar effort to make the land plentiful. Institutes, films, and instructional scientific literature were introduced to popularize the centrality of cows and milk to the Jewish vision of a plentiful land of milk and honey. But as early as the 1930s a problem emerged among both cows and women: infertility. After all, Novick explains, "infertility not only jeopardized the efforts to increase milk production but also threatened the very creation of a land of plenty: it was important for women to be fertile as well" (118). Discussions about infertility in both animals and humans grew in intensity in the following years and were (inevitably perhaps) layered by debates about crossbreeding.

Under the leadership of its founder, Professor Bernhard Zondek, the HRL played a significant role in the Christian and Jewish settlement project. Zondek became well known for his proposition that "the female anterior pituitary gland is the motor of the sexual function" – that female urine was the container of sex hormones (127). If the urine of a pregnant woman was injected into mice, the mice's ovaries would develop bluish-black points, prompting a limerick to this effect: "When a virgin indulges in vice, to Zondeck she runs for advice. He asks the young miss to examine her piss, since the blood points in mice are precise" (129). The climax of this endocrinological story was that female urine "emerged as a savior substance" (144). Global pharmaceutical companies in Europe, the United States, and settler Palestine/Israel had "found gold in the urine" as it "contained the largest amount of sex hormones needed for managing infertility problems" (144). Zondek became hugely sought-after in Jerusalem and the wider Middle East as possessor of a magic touch in rescuing fertility from infertility – especially for the rich. As Novick wryly observes, there ensued "an orgy of materialism and speculation" (145).

So far, we have covered the first two questions raised by *Milk and Honey*. The story of the water buffalo in the book's "Interlude" helps us move toward our third

question: what, if anything, can we learn from the book about current events in Gaza and the West Bank?

Records show that during the four hundred years or so of Ottoman rule, the water buffalo was a prized animal: its milk was delicious and excellent for making butter, its hide was perfect for making leather containers, it drew ploughs, protected villagers from lions, and carried loads and wagons throughout the region. Historians have written of the water buffalo as the single most valuable animal in Ottoman Egypt and Palestine (19). Most buffalo herds were found in the Palestine wetlands later termed the Hula Valley. All this favorable testimony about the buffalo gave way to its opposite under British rule and occupation by the early twentieth-century settlers. Not only did the animals come to be regarded as lazy and destructive as they wallowed in the marshes, but those marshes themselves came to be seen as potentially fertile but only if they were drained to give way to arable farmland. Buffalos were antithetical to draining as they trampled on the banks of the artificial channels required to transform wetland to arable land. The Hula drainage was completed by the Israelis in 1958, and water buffalos disappeared from the valley and its surroundings.

Yet there was, as seen before in the case of the black goat debacle, a twist to this story: no sooner had the Hula been drained than the region "ran into an ecological crisis" (20). It grew out of the fact that the many Euro-American scientific and technological achievements had been made in a country shaped, as a private Israeli company marketing embryos put it, by "extreme heat, humidity, limited land and water resources" (155). Draining the Hula Valley not only destroyed Palestinian villages but also, as Mazin Qumsiyeh has reported, led to the disappearance of more than two hundred species of migratory birds for whom the wetland was a stopping point on their way from Africa to Europe.[1] At the same time, Israeli authorities have been syphoning water from the Jordan river to feed farms and Jewish settlements in the valley itself and in the West Bank, one result of which has been the drying of the Dead Sea. Water extraction throughout Palestine, including Gaza, has become the norm, its distribution badly skewed by restricting Palestinian access to water and providing it in abundance to West Bank settlements. A decade ago, UNESCO pointed up the pollution entering Gaza along the Wadi Gaza, a ravine running from Sde Boker in Israel to the Gazan seacoast that had been deliberately dammed up, its waters diverted, and become a site for rubbish dumping. Elderly residents of Gaza speak of this once flower-bordered stream as a source of potable water in their youth, while in the present it is a stinking source of polluted rubbish flowing directly into the Mediterranean. One result, as Qumsiyeh states, is that "Israelis are swimming in the shit of Gaza."[2]

Novick writes that "Palestine was certainly flowing with milk and honey as far as Ottoman records are concerned" (15). But her book describes in detail how well-established and sustainable systems of agriculture and animal husbandry up to World War I were reshaped by British authorities and Jewish and Israeli settlers into systems based on the production of plenty: a veritable triumph of Euro-American capitalism. The fate of the Indigenous Palestinian human world has followed a comparable process to that of the indigenous natural world – a fateful destiny that was foreseeable

from very early on. The opening page of *Honey and Milk* describes the meeting of two women around 1911 which contained the seeds of what was to come and what we see in Gaza today. Zakia, whose family home was in the Galilee village of Umm Juni, and Miriam, a settler recently arrived from Russia and living in the Jewish colony of Deganya (built on the village lands of Umm Juni, and later known as the first Israeli kibbutz) came together as friends and soulmates. Miriam wanted to learn from Zakia about how to look after cows. They sang Arabic songs together at night in the cattle shed. But once Miriam had learned what she needed and become a cow and milk specialist, "Zakia disappeared from the historical record" (1).

Tom Selwyn is a professorial research associate at the Department of Anthropology at SOAS University of London and Leverhulme Emeritus Scholar. Widely published in the field of cultural heritage, he has led international European Commission research and development projects – including in Palestine – and has taught tourism and cultural heritage regularly at Bethlehem University.

Endnotes

1 Catherine Baker, "Combatting Israel's Water Apartheid," *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs*, 24 May 2024, online at www.wrmea.org/israel-palestine/combatting-israels-water-apartheid.html (accessed 28 September 2024).

2 Baker, "Combatting Israel's Water Apartheid."

REVIEW

Musical Narratives of Resistance: An Ethnomusicological Review

Review by Ruba Totah

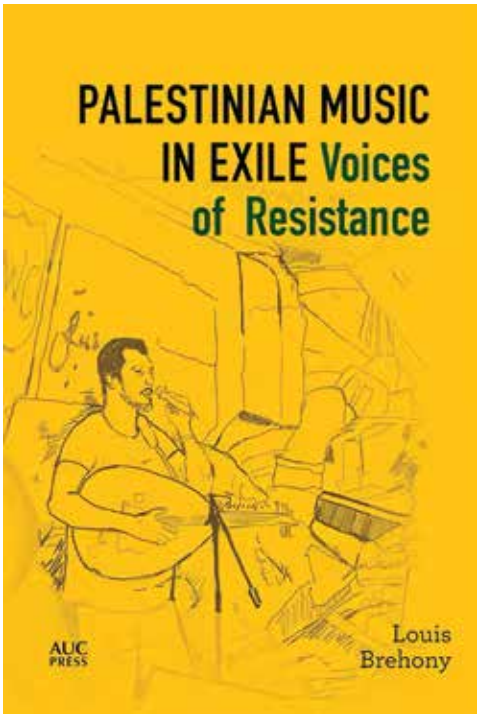
Abstract

Louis Brehony's monograph raises new questions regarding the role of music in the Palestinian liberation struggle. Focused mainly on the life journeys of Palestinian musicians from several generations, various backgrounds, and geographic locations, the book provides an ethnomusicological understanding of their musical narratives and is a valuable document on music in Palestinian history making.

Keywords:

Ethnomusicology; migratory aesthetics; cosmopolitanism; Palestinian musicians; Arab musical modalities.

Louis Brehony, *Palestinian Music in Exile: Voices of Resistance* (New York: American University in Cairo Press, 2023). 318 pages. $59.95 hardcover, $58.99 ebook.



Music has long been a medium of expression for Palestinian identity, serving as a poignant reminder of the past and a resilient force in the present. Palestinian musicians have played an important role in mediating these identity narratives by producing, reproducing, and reinterpreting music for Palestinians and other communities. It can also be said that Palestinian musicians have contributed to the raising of Palestinian national consciousness and promotion of Palestinian narratives, given the diverse styles, modalities, themes and performativity that characterize their work.

In his monograph *Palestinian Music in Exil*e, Louis Brehony offers a thoughtful exploration of the intricate relationship between music and resistance in Palestinian culture. The study explores the aesthetics of the revolution in music, raising themes such as the connection between musical

aesthetics and politics to examine Palestinian musical practice today through ethnographic fieldwork and oral histories gathered from musicians. Brehony analyzes Palestinian musicians' agency through steadfastness (*sumud*), a mechanism that allows them to challenge forms of exile (*ghurba*) they encounter. The study is a product of twelve years of ethnographic fieldwork from 2010 to 2022, in Palestine, Egypt, Lebanon, Turkey, and the United Kingdom. The ethnography is a significant contribution to studies of connections between music and collective political identity making, exploring music's role in promoting collective liberation narratives.

Brehony draws on the terminology used by the artists to expand on ghurba as a concept to illustrate the artists' state of exile. From their narratives, he understands ghurba as the anguish and loss of being separated from one's homeland but also as an experience of exile for artists living inside Palestine under colonialism. The author decides not to use alternative translations of exile, such as "diaspora" or "dispersed existence" or the term *hijra*, which signifies a journey away. His primary rationale for employing the term ghurba is its prevalence in the narratives of musicians, song titles, and lyrics of traditional folk songs. However, the monograph could benefit from dedicating more attention to the legal status of these musicians within the societies in which they reside and how this influences their self-identification, interpretations of ghurba, and accessibility to musical resources and means of learning and exchange. By doing that, further analysis of individual identity making could enrich the study of collective liberation narratives and the role of transcultural practices within it.

The book's conceptual framework draws inspiration from Palestinian Marxist figures such as novelist Ghassan Kanafani, artist Naji al-'Ali, and national liberation fighter Leila Khaled. It relies on their understanding of revolution and sumud in art as a form of cultural resistance within liberation movements. By understanding the musicians' experiences as revolutionary, the analysis centers an anti-imperialist approach to cultural analysis. Within this, Palestinians' shared understanding of sumud across several geographical locations enriches and reverses a capitalist-based understanding of cosmopolitanism. At the heart of this understanding lies the acknowledgement of a common project of resistance in which both Palestinian and non-Palestinian musicians participate, presenting an alternative vision of international struggle.

From his ethnographic work, Brehony proposes a definition of Palestinian music as "an oral tradition, harking back to poetic song-forms, troubadour wedding singers, and accompaniments to the yarns of the *hakawati* (storyteller) in social gatherings" (6). Providing that the lyrics set to Palestinian music are filled with political messages, the book demonstrates that music and politics are intertwined, enabling exiled musicians to act as powerful agents of resistance. The agency of the musicians translates alternative political visions through their musical narratives, which is an important contribution to the anti-colonial struggle.

Such an in-depth view of musicians' agency converses with scholarship in the discipline of ethnomusicology, in which numerous scholars have studied the connection between identity and music making.[1] The study does not ground itself

within ethnomusicology; instead, it conducts a political analysis of Palestinian musical practice primarily through musical historiography. For example, the book engages in a section that offers a chronology of critical moments in the history of Palestinian music making and how it influences Palestinian narratives of sumud. In addition to this chronology, the author provides historical background to music making in several geographical locations inside and outside Palestine. Despite this, however, the study could have benefited from a deeper investigation of the connection between music and individual identity making to enrich the analysis and speak directly to literature and debates within ethnomusicology.

Each chapter provides a detailed historical examination of Arab regimes' political stance concerning the Palestinian cause. It also offers a comprehensive account of Palestinian cultural activism under these regimes, drawing upon oral history gathered from musicians. In doing so, Brehony's work sheds light on the role of music making as a form of resistance, alongside the literary and artistic resistance of Kanafani and al-'Ali, among others, and as a contributor to the historical narrative of Palestinian displaced communities.

In each chapter, Brehony provides an ethnomusicology of Palestinian musicians in a state of exile. The chapters describe the exilic route of the musicians, their connections with home, and the social circles and artistic networks in their current residence. As the chapters progress, comparisons are drawn between the various Palestinian musicians. This provides a multi-sited examination of musicians' narratives and their revolutionary motivation through music. The chapters also focus on how the musicians acquired their musical knowledge through training or cultural context, which is an important addition. While not within the book's purview, a musicological analysis focusing on how ghurba shaped the characteristics of Palestinian musicians' tonality would have enhanced the study.

Chapter one charts Reem Kilani's migratory trajectory from Palestine to Kuwait and then London, demonstrating the development of her innovative musical repertoire, which draws upon traditions of Eastern music in Lebanon and Egypt, as well as Western music. Chapters two, four, and five follow a similar pattern, tracing the journeys of Ahmad al-Khatib, Tareq Salhia, Baha' al-Juma', Tamer Abu Ghazaleh, and Huda Asfour in Jordan, Syria, Egypt, and Lebanon. The life journeys of these individuals illustrate the transnational connections between exiled communities and those in Palestine, explaining the social and political context of their upbringing in these countries and its contribution to their musical learning and pathways. Here, we learn the extent to which their life journeys have impacted their awareness and choices regarding the politicization of their music.

Importantly, these chapters provide the book's ethnomusicological foundations, illustrating each musician's path and situating their work within an underexplored layer of transnational dialogue between Arab musical schools. These connections have significant potential for developing a critique of cosmopolitanism analogous to that which emerged following the Arab Music Conference in 1932 concerning modernism. At the conference, a call for modernizing Arab music included an attempt to diminish

Indigenous musical tonalities and the diversity of musical experiences of communities in the region, favoring enhanced connections with Western musical styles.

Moreover, these chapters continue the critique of modernism by re-examining the institutionalization of musical teaching and the rise of music conservatories in the Arab region. Brehony criticizes them as overly traditional or oriented toward the West and uses Khaled Jubran's term "Breaking the Pyramids" (130) and the accompanying movement of musicians to critique established Arab musical pedagogy in the past century to do so. "Breaking the Pyramids" advocates for a distinctive musical narrative with a transformative approach to Eastern music, and, further, lays a foundation for postmodern analysis in Arab music. Postmodern musical practices call for a bottom-up understanding of identity formations and their impact on music, withstanding Western theories and critics.

Brehony engages with this postmodern critique through ethnomusicology. For example, the chapters examine the concept of "repetition" (134), as emphasized by Edward Said as a measure of literary worldliness and by Kanafani as a means of reiteration and sumud against colonialism and betrayal of reactionary regimes in literature. Brehony's work offers insights into the role of musical repetition in traditional music and Arab *maqam*s, the distinctive Arab tonal framework, achieved by the Palestinian musicians – something still attempted in exile through transnational connections. He also discusses the potential for innovation in indigenous musical forms through improvisation, providing an example in his analysis of Tamer Abu Ghazaleh's approach (133).

Chapters three, six and seven present a detailed analysis of the social challenges of pursuing sumud as a transformative musical practice. The musical routes of Umm 'Ali, Umm Jabr and other people from internally displaced communities across historic Palestine during the first intifada are examined as experiences of sumud. The book explains sumud as a form of resilience against the multifaceted sociopolitical challenges faced by Saied Silbak, Said Fadel, Reem and Fares Anbar, Rawan Okasha, and Ahmed Haddad within the context of conservative, gender-based, and colonial regimes during the first intifada inside Palestine. It engages with some of the challenges these artists face when crossing Arab countries' borders and encountering their regimes. These chapters demonstrate that musicians grapple with the same identity markers generation after generation, particularly those associated with class and gender roles. Brehony describes how these markers expand the political meaning of sumud in ways that illustrate the intersection between politics, class and gender.

The book's examination of the life experiences of Palestinian musicians alongside their musical forms reveals that ghurba has given rise to a multitude of imaginative and politically charged responses through music. These include forming connections to other schools of Arab musicality, exposure to global sounds through the dissemination of cassettes, and the reconfiguration of meanings when musically reinterpreting earlier songs (233). Furthermore, the study concludes that sumud is conceptualized through the musical experiences of the musicians in question as "the preservation of narratives pertaining to the land, the dissemination of hope and ingenuity among the masses,

and the pivotal role played by women in its transmission" (237). The conjunction of sumud and the musical practices of Palestinian musicians gives rise to a novel interpretation of musical internationalism, which is both vital and radically subverts the conventional Western notion of cosmopolitanism by elevating the oppressed Palestinian and non-Palestinian musicians' agency internationally.

Ruba Totah holds a PhD in social and cultural anthropology from Johannes Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany. Her research interests include transnationalism, intercultural and cross-cultural performing arts spaces, and religiosity. Her recent research entails the ethnomusicology of performing rituals of church communities around Jerusalem.

Endnotes

1 See: Urusla Hemetek and Marko Kölbl, "On Definitions and Guiding Principles in Ethnomusicological Minority Research," *PULS* 8 (May 2023): 23–29, online at doi.org/10.62779/puls.v8i.19222; A. P. Merriam, "Ethnomusicology Revisited," *Ethnomusicology* 13, no. 2 (May 1969): 213–29, online at doi.org/102307/850146; Guilnard Moufarrej, "Maronite Music: History, Transmission, and Performance Practice," *Review of Middle East Studies* 44, no. 2 (Winter 2010): 196–215; Timothy Rice, "Toward the Remodeling of Ethnomusicology," *Ethnomusicology* 31, no. 3 (Autumn 1987): 469–88, online at doi.org/10.2307/851667; Timothy Rice, "Reflections on Music and Identity in Ethnomusicology," in Timothy Rice, *Modeling Ethnomusicology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 139–60; and Thomas Turino, *Music as Social Life: The Politics of Participation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

The Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem

The Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem is an annual award launched by the *Jerusalem Quarterly* in 2017 to honor the memory and work of Ibrahim Dakkak (1929–2016), Jerusalem engineer, activist, political leader, writer, and former chairman of the Advisory Board of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*.

It is awarded to an outstanding submission (in English or Arabic) that addresses either contemporary or historical issues relating to Jerusalem. A committee selected by the *Jerusalem Quarterly* determines the winning essay. The author will be awarded a prize of U.S. $1,000, and the essay will be published in the *Jerusalem Quarterly*.

Essays submitted or nominated for consideration should be based on original research and must not have been previously published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Essays should be 4,000 to 5,000 words in length (including endnotes), preceded by an abstract of no more than 200 words, and up to 10 keywords.

If the submitted or nominated essay is in Arabic, the abstract and keywords should be in English.

Preference will be given to emerging/early career researchers and students.

Please submit or nominate 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**, mentioning the Award. In the case of nomination, please provide a contact email address for the nominated author.

Any images should be submitted as separate files with a resolution of 600 dpi minimum, if possible. Submitted images must have copyright clearance from owners, and have captions that are clear and accurate.

The deadline for submissions and nominations is **15 January** of each year.

Submissions General Guidelines
The *Jerusalem Quarterly (JQ)*

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* accepts author submissions of original contributions about Jerusalem, its social and political history, and its current realities. Occasionally personal memoirs or works of fiction are accepted. Submissions are received throughout the year; specific deadlines for special thematic issues may also be announced.

JQ sends all manuscripts to designated readers for evaluation. Authors may also specifically request that their article be peer-reviewed. Authors should allow four to eight weeks from the date of submission for a final evaluation and publication decision.

Please direct submissions or queries to the *JQ* team: jq@palestine-studies.org

General Guidelines

Material submitted to *JQ* for consideration should adhere to the following:

- **Length**: Articles for peer-reviewing should not exceed 8,000 words; essays should be between 3,500 and 5,000 words; "Letters from Jerusalem," reviews, and submissions for other sections should not exceed 3,000 words. All submissions should include an abstract of a maximum of 200 words; a list of up to 10 keywords; and a brief author's biography of a maximum of 25 words. NOTE: the above word-count limits exclude footnotes, endnotes, abstracts, keywords, and biographies.
- **Spelling**: American English according to Merriam-Webster.
- **Text style**: Refer to *Chicago Manual of Style* (CMOS) for all questions regarding punctuation, capitalization, and font style.
- **Transliteration** of names and words in Arabic, Hebrew, and Turkish should follow the style recommended by the *International Journal for Middle East Studies*, but modified for Arabic transliteration by omitting all diacritical marks except for the ʻayn (open single quotation mark) and hamza (closed single quotation mark). No right-to-left letters are allowed, except for very limited instances of crucial need.
- **Citations** should be in the form of endnotes and written in full (CMOS), as in the original source, with transliteration as needed.

- **Book reviews**: A high-resolution photo of the book cover should be included, as well as a scan of the copyrights page.
- **Visual material**: Any photos, charts, graphs, and other artwork should be of high resolution. For details, please see the section below.

Guidelines for Visual Material

The *Jerusalem Quarterly* encourages the inclusion of visual material, wherever possible, for articles, essays, and for other sections submitted for publication. Visual material can be photographs, scans, charts, diagrams, graphs, maps, artwork, and the like (hereafter called "figures").
When including any figures, please keep in mind the following guidelines:

- **Rights**: It is imperative that authors obtain appropriate rights to publish the figure(s). *JQ* is willing to assist in this in any way possible – for instance, by providing a letter from *JQ* supporting the application for rights, and providing more details about the journal – but it is the authors' responsibility to actually obtain the rights. An email giving *JQ* the rights to publish the figures suffices as proof of rights. Please let us know what copyright acknowledgment needs to accompany the figures.
- **Resolution**: Any figure should be in camera-ready format, and should be saved as JPEG, with a minimum resolution of 600 dpi (or 700 KB). Please do not send the high-resolution figures by email, which can degrade the quality. Instead, upload figures to WeTransfer, Google Drive, or the like, and provide a link. It is also advisable to embed a low-resolution copy at the chosen place in the Word file, as guidance to editors and the designer.
- **Captions**: Authors should provide full captions (including, when applicable: source, credits, dates, places, people, explanation of content, etc.).
- **Color Figures**: Thus far, *JQ* has been more inclined to publish photos in black and white mainly because of the subject matter of the articles and essays, but for some time now we have been accepting both options. Since printing in full color is more costly, we sometimes opt to publish in black and white figures submitted in color. If this is not acceptable in the case of a specific figure, we kindly ask authors to notify us in writing.

غزّة تروي إبادتها

قصص وشهادات

تحرير

أكرم مسلّم وعبد الرحمن أبو شمّالة

تقديم

غسّان زقطان

مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية

Institute for Palestine Studies

العودة تبدأ منك

قصة ميسون سكرية ✦ رسم حلمي التوني

إشراف محمد علي الخالدي

مؤسسة الدراسات الفلسطينية

أنا والأرض Nabil Anani

The Land and I نبيل عناني

Cover photo: “Southern Palestine. Nebi Rubin (The Prophet Reuben). A Nebi Rubin restaurant. Preparing and selling cooked food.” American Colony Photo Department, sometime between 1920 and 1933. G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection, U.S. Library of Congress, online at www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/matpc/item/2019706298 (accessed 12 November 2024).

Back cover: Heba Zagout, *Jerusalem*, acrylic on canvas, 2003. Heba and two of her children, Adam and Mahmoud, were killed in their home in Gaza by an Israeli airstrike, 13 October 2023.