Peled’s father, General Mattiyahu (Matti) Peled (1923–95), who fought with the Palmach and rose up the ranks of the Israeli military to become a member of the IDF’s general staff during the June 1967 war. However, this is not the story of a son turning against his father, as the title might seem to suggest, but rather the continuation and expansion of the father’s legacy. Matti Peled retired from the military in 1968 and embarked on a second career as a founding member of the Department of Arabic Literature at Tel Aviv University. He became a vocal opponent of the occupation and developed personal relationships with many Palestinians, earning him the name, his son reports, of Abu Salaam.

Miko Peled, born in 1961 and based in the United States since 1987, presents his father’s story as one worthy of recounting to an English-language audience in its own right. Yet the general’s story also serves as a preface to Peled’s own narrative, which relates his training with the Israeli Special Forces, his emigration from Israel, his participation in U.S.-based dialogue groups, his increasing involvement with humanitarian activism and nonviolent protest in the West Bank, and his eventual renunciation of Zionism in favor of a single democratic state. The book contains a foreword by Alice Walker and an endorsement from Walid Khalidi (a friend of Matti Peled’s), which mark its explicit links with international solidarity efforts, as well as the Palestinian national movement.

The General’s Son begins with the death of Miko Peled’s thirteen-year-old niece, Smadar, in a 1997 suicide attack on Ben Yehuda Street in Jerusalem (also commemorated in Simone Bitton’s 2000 film The Bombing). Peled identifies this tragedy as his moment of political awakening: the conflict becomes “deeply personal,” and he is “no longer content to sit still” (p. 107). The rest of the book is narrated chronologically: the first third covers his father’s story and the rest describes Peled’s own journey. This structure allows for a nuanced representation of the passage from an identitarian sense of belonging to a principled political stance. Peled’s conversion is paralleled with his father’s. At the end of the memoir we learn, with Peled, that his father left the military after the Israeli leadership ignored his report of an IDF massacre of civilians in Rafah in 1967: it was at this point that Matti Peled became an early advocate of a two-state solution. Forty years later, this revelation helps to persuade his son Miko of the more challenging position that “there was no point, indeed no future, in dividing the people and the land” (p. 212).

It is fitting, then, that in the final pages of the book Peled’s story gives way to those of the Palestinians he meets—Nader Elbanna, Jamal Mansur, Bassam Aramin, Abu Ali Shahin—who are presented as everyday heroes and agents of their own lives. The liberal notion of cultural “dialogue” that dominates the earlier sections of the book shifts to an emphasis on political justice, which includes the Palestinian right of return (p. 218). This shift reflects Peled’s own progression toward a more radical form of commitment and offers it as a worthy model for his readers.

THEORIZING PALESTINIAN DECOLONIZATION


Reviewed by Steven Salaita

Nur Masalha has spent many years as one of the foremost analysts/historians of modern Palestine. His hallmark methodology is the amalgamation of historical rigor with material analysis and commitment to the human and international rights of the Palestinian people. Masalha is not what those ensconced in university offices like to call an “objective” scholar, but one with a distinct point of view he does not endeavor to hide. That point of view is carefully backed by considerable evidence and sharp, intelligent analysis. Masalha’s engagement with his subject

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matter is one of the most exciting features of his work.

*The Palestine Nakba* follows in this tradition, exhibiting Masalha’s typical clear-sightedness and superior organization of facts. The book is both synthesis and historiography, underlain by a sharp analysis of Israeli misdeeds and Palestinian discourses of nationhood. He does not mince words: “Much of the Palestinian material culture, landscape, toponymy and geography, which had survived the Latin Crusades, were obliterated by the Israeli state” (p. 2). The suggestion, supported by many pages of argument, is clear: Israel has been a more destructive force in Palestine than even the notorious Crusades.

The major contribution of *The Palestine Nakba* is Masalha’s use of extant scholarship to produce an original and complex theory of Palestinian decolonization. Masalha organizes his condemnation of Israel around a heterogeneous methodology, combining “reference to a wide range of historical sources with the study of knowledge and power; historiography and popular memory accounts; oral, subaltern and resistance narratives; indigenous, counter-hegemonic, post-colonial and decolonizing methodologies” (p. 9). While this range of approaches might appear exceedingly ambitious, Masalha organizes them into a coherent critique of Palestinian decolonization.

This critique encompasses the totality of Palestinian dispossession, but focuses on the 1948 Nakba as the crucial moment of modern Palestinian history. Within this excellent critique is an especially valuable analysis of naming and renaming as modes of colonial control. Masalha examines the “Hebrewization” of Arabic place-names and the expropriation of indigenous spaces into the identity of modern Israeli society, lending it an air of antiquity and historical possession through the very process by which it separates Israeli society from its “primitive” neighbors by deploying the major tropes of modernity. In the case of Israel, Masalha argues, the move toward modernity necessitates the appropriation of a reinvented antiquity. Thus we can see settlements based on the functionality of American planned communities but designed in such a way as to recall the romantic agrarian structure of village life.

This move to appropriate Palestine while cleansing it from modern consciousness is evident in places of worship. Masalha observes that an “important tool of the Israeli colonization project has been the consecration of Muslim shrines—shrines which had never been part of the Jewish tradition—as Jewish shrines” (p. 113). These moves aren’t always straightforward, Masalha illustrates. The medieval city of Asqalan, named al-Majdal by its Arab residents, was depopulated and named Migdal-Ad by the new Israeli settlers, who eventually circumvented the long non-Jewish history of the town by christening it Ashkelon. “Since then,” Masalha notes, “it has been kept as a purely Jewish city” (p. 116). Yet its Palestinian history, as throughout the Holy Land in general, is impossible to fully suppress.

Another interesting element of the book is Masalha’s analysis of memory and oral history. Despite the best-laid plans (fantasies, really) of the Israeli architects of 1948, the memories of villages and communities survive with no indication of abating anytime soon. Masalha explains, “The depopulated and destroyed villages and towns were often kept alive by passing place names down through generations of Palestinian family members. Inside Israel, those internally displaced refugees regrouped in different localities to create new definitions of kinship structures” (p. 207). The long history of Palestinian decolonization, then, has been built into the basic structures of everyday culture: something as innocuous as passing along a traditional place-name that has been erased or Hebrewized by Israel provides the groundwork for a resistance rooted in lived experience. Palestinians resist merely by communicating.

This seemingly simplistic but profound observation accounts for the general tenor of Masalha’s book. He moves beyond the truism that 1948 will always remain a part of Palestinian consciousness, exploring instead the meanings of 1948 as both symbol and event, assessing the many ways that the attempted erasure of Palestinian nationalism and peoplehood has failed. Masalha’s methodology might best be described as interdisciplinary, as he draws from numerous theoretical and empirical...
traditions. The writing is clear and the analysis sharp. The Palestine Nakba is appropriate for those who want to learn more about modern Palestinian history, as well as those who possess advanced knowledge of the Middle East.

GENDER AND CITIZENSHIP


Reviewed by Leena Dallasheh

In recent years, analysts across the political spectrum have observed the growing hostility of Israeli policymakers and legislators to the Palestinians citizens of the state. This minority, which until now has received little attention in English-language academic circles, has taken center stage in an exciting wave of scholarly works that explore various aspects of Palestinian life in Israel such as Rhoda Kanaaneh and Isis Nusair’s edited volume, Displaced at Home: Ethnicity and Gender Among Palestinians in Israel, and Ilan Pappé’s The Forgotten Palestinians: A History of the Palestinians in Israel. Nahla Abdo’s new book, which examines the place of the Palestinian minority through a gender and comparative lens, offers a welcome addition to this literature. It contributes to a gendered and historically grounded understanding of Palestinian citizenship in Israel, and highlights women’s lived experiences, as well as the discrimination leveled against them. In doing so, the book joins academic and activist works seeking to advance equal citizenship in Israel.

A self-defined Arab feminist activist, Abdo draws on her work with various women’s and civil society groups in Palestine-Israel that are struggling for women’s and civil rights (p. vii). Building on earlier works, she makes a compelling case for using settler-colonialism as a frame of analysis both for the pre-state Zionist movement in Palestine and its post-state policies toward Palestinians and Mizrahi Jews after 1948. But unlike others who have examined the consequences of land expropriation on Palestinian society, Abdo is particularly interested in its long-term ramifications on Palestinian women. She argues that in this settler-colonial state, it is land policies that differentiate the marginalized: while Mizrahi women are marginalized and racialized, it is the Palestinians who lost an “integral part of their indigenous identity” in the Israeli exclusionary process that led to the loss of most of their lands, leaving them with only 2.5% of the land (pp. 45, 103).

At the center of her argument, Abdo insists on the importance of historicizing Palestinian women’s citizenship in Israel. Critiquing existing literature for the undue weight accorded to culture in explanations of Palestinian marginalization (particularly explanations that rely on patriarchy, family, and religion), she stresses the structural and institutional forces that have limited women’s rights and citizenship. In doing so, Abdo argues for a consideration of “economic citizenship,” which can “open a wider space for challenging the present and envisioning the future without existing forms of oppression” (p. 19).

One of the book’s strengths is its deep and extensive engagement with the scholarship on citizenship, particularly Israeli citizenship, as well as Israeli feminist writings. Abdo critiques Israeli (and Palestinian) ethnocentric approaches to explaining the inequalities in Israeli citizenship, asserting that such an approach “overemphasizes demography” at the expense of geography (p. 18). She saves her strongest criticism, however, for a particular group of Ashkenazi feminist writers whose analysis she criticizes as Orientalist and ahistorical, and whose approaches to citizenship, she argues, reinforce Israeli attempts to segment Palestinians into Muslims, Druze, Christians, and Bedouins (pp. 56, 79). Instead, Abdo stresses that women’s citizenship should be understood as gendered and classed and calls for an analysis of Israeli policies as racializing and ethnicizing.

After laying the theoretical grounds for her argument, Abdo presents a brief historical description of Palestinian and

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