

Epilogue

The Presence and Potential of Palestine

A Palestinian prisoner sits on the threshold step of a doorway of, what one might assume to be a jail, surrounded by three British soldiers (fig. 6.1). His name is Karam bin Saba al-Shamma'. We know little about him. We do not know why he is there. We cannot discern what he has in his hands. Is he a political prisoner? Aren't all prisoners under colonial rule political prisoners? We do not know the reasons for the rather informal, over-exposed, vertical photograph, likely taken by an amateur photographer. We only know al-Shamma' because Wasif Jawhariyyeh included this photograph in his albums and told us about him in the albums' index:

The prisoner Karam bin Saba al-Shamma' is from the Orthodox community in Jerusalem. This young man was brazen and uneducated. Like they say, 'every wedding has a blemish.' He was very active and one of the jail's best clients. His end came when the 1948 Revolution happened. He exited the Old City from Bab al-Jadid (The New Gate) and entered into Atallah Storeroom. Its owner, Lutfi, sold Eastern souvenirs. The violence between the Arabs and the Jews intensified in front of this store and Notre Dame. A bomb hit him and ended his life. Dead, he sat on a chair for the duration of three days. No one was there to save him or pull him from the store.

Jawhariyyeh's explanation of al-Shamma' might suggest the reason why he seems almost as at ease as his captors. Al-Shamma' was a ne'er-do-well, although one that became a martyr, a *shahid*—a term that Jawhariyyeh does not use to describe him. This image and its story are deceptively confusing. Why would Jawhariyyeh, so concerned with men of repute (and they are almost all *men*, in his albums) in Palestine include an image of an urban layabout in jail, not even referencing his martyrdom except in the index? The inclusion of this image tells us much about the organizing logic of the albums itself. Namely, Jawhariyyeh, while desperately faithful to



FIGURE 6.1. Prisoner Karam bin Saba al-Shamma' in "special detention". Jawhariyyeh Album 2, IPS Beirut.

the elite ruling class that he and his father served, could genuinely understand the crisscrossing of various members from particular classes with colonial administrators and functionaries to form the basic social fabric of Jerusalem.

Edward Said's contemplation in *After the Last Sky* about his relationship to a number of different classes in Palestine comes to mind. Perhaps similar in ways to Jawhariyyeh, Said acknowledges that he, as a son and even grandson of "doctors, business people, and professionals," had "no direct personal immediacy" with a "population of poor, suffering, occasionally colorful peasants," who he confesses as having perceived as "unchanging and collective."¹ He realizes that "this perception of mine is mythic . . . (de)formed by the specific inflections of our history and the special circumstance out of which my identity emerged."² This self-reflection of a fellow Jerusalemite calls us to think about Jawhariyyeh's own engagement with other classes in Jerusalem, classes and social groups that, as with women, are largely absent from his visual narrative.

As his diaries show us, Jawhariyyeh's social life and activities cut through all strata of Palestinian society. In those pages, he narrates—both as a musician and a *petit-fonctionnaire*—his movement through social and physical spaces that transcend the class divide. Women, too, and his interactions and social relationships with them, are more robustly represented in these diaries, given depth, color, and dimension. Yet, on the surface, Jawhariyyeh's albums represent where the urban political and economic elites, communal and sectarian leadership, and the *effendi* class intersect with Jerusalem and its surroundings as a lived space and Palestine as a society and geographic space under transformation and considerable political challenges. Yet, a closer and more deliberative look at these albums brings to fruition a number of realizations, including that other social actors and players weave themselves in and out of the images. Photography acts as a means to animate the social relations and their narratives, imaginaries, histories and stories, stories that are told and remain untold.

Philip Gourevitch and Errol Morris remind us that photographs themselves "cannot tell stories." However, what they may provide is "evidence of stories," evidence that might be dampened, displaced, repressed or excluded from consideration; evidence in an image where its indexical nature might have been purloined by the colonial eye but awaits liberation from the native inhabitants' experience. Jennifer Tucker allows us to think about Gourevitch and Morris's insights as an interpretative process, where "a photograph can best be understood not as an answer or an end to inquiry, but as an invitation to look more closely, and ask questions."³ The photograph as evidence, the photograph as document, the photograph as history, the photograph as narrative, the photograph as indeterminant, and the photograph as momentary, all rest on one empirical constant. That is, the photograph is a mark of presence as much as absence and obfuscation. Against the onslaught of negation of Palestinian existence, indeed Palestinian being, this realization underwrites our examination of Jawhariyyeh's photography albums.

POTENTIAL HISTORY, UNDENIABLE PRESENCE

The enigmatic photograph and story of Karam al-Shamma' opens multiple possibilities for reading Jawhariyyeh's albums but also multiple avenues to explore Palestinian existence, life, and culture, not only within a particular historical moment or era but as a sustained, contiguous, and unbroken ontology of Palestine and its inhabitants. The method by which we approach our mapping of the unbroken Palestinian presence in Palestine is to develop a variety of contrapuntal readings that connect spectators throughout time to particular places and fixed moments in Palestinian history. In this sense, we engaged the various ways in which photography broadens our scope of history, but also broadens the very possibilities in which photography and the photographic archive can help us decolonize Palestine.

Our assorted methodologies for exploring the multiple dimensions of photography place Palestine at the center stage of its own history and wrench it away from the Orientalist and Zionist narratives and the concomitant colonial gaze that has dominated the field of "Holy Land" photography since the nineteenth century. This book as a whole denaturalizes Zionist settler-colonial logic and colonialist hegemony by recentering Palestinian lives, but also by re-franchising these lives with the archive that the "history of Middle Eastern photography" attempts to extract from them. This book and its photographs offer the possibility to envision Palestine without having to "imagine" it as a colonized country. This possibility becomes apparent if we consider what Ariella Azoulay called the "potential history," which is not just history that could have been but the history that "creates new conditions both for the appearance of things and for our appearance as its narrators."⁴

Building upon Walter Benjamin's concept of "incomplete history," Azoulay argues that from our present vantage point, we are able to "render the past potentially reversible." In other words, the act of "watching" photography "entails dimensions of time and movement that need to be reinscribed in the interpretation of the still photographic image."⁵ The photographs in Jawahirriyeh's albums, therefore, have the power to re-inscribe—literally, rewrite—the way we understand the temporality and materiality of Palestine. Our various methodologies of approaching the photographic image and archive unambiguously assert the centrality of the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine, while illustrating potentialities in history that tend to be displaced through the violence to which Palestinian society and lives were and are subjected.

At the most fundamental level, the albums present us with the opportunity to de-exceptionalize Palestine, to approach it empirically as a "normal" country that has a past, present, and future with a vibrant society. Certainly, the photographic archive can allow us to understand that Palestine could have developed into an independent country if it had not been derailed by Zionist settler-colonialism.

However, this too may be a misstep in thinking about the full potentiality of looking at photographs from the late Ottoman and Mandate periods; namely, the very concept of Palestine as an independent state arises only with the violations of the Arab body politic by the Sykes-Picot Agreement and the Balfour Declaration. In other words, although we have no pretensions to have initiated the project, we hope that this book contributes to witnessing a Palestine that traverses history and geography and binds individuals, families, and communities to institutions and social formations within Palestine but also that reaches beyond what would have been an independent Republic of Palestine. If nothing else, the images in this book, and Jawhariyyeh's albums in general, enable us to envision a decolonized Palestine and Palestinians outside the hegemonic confines of considering Palestinians as stateless and static victims of trauma, held in suspension since 1948. Instead, the albums present the Palestinians as citizens of their own country, a country not circumscribed by colonial rule or imperialist dictates nor by Zionist colonization but by defined by its own dynamics, histories, coherences, and tensions that cross class, gender, and religious sects as well as intermingle with the polities that are now known as Syrian, Lebanese, Jordanian, and Armenian societies.

The three complementary analytic contributions to *Camera Palæstina* interlock through mapping the contours of the social, political, and economic relations within Palestinian polity and geography. Let us approach one additional image from Jawhariyyeh's albums that illustrates the multiple ways contrapuntal readings emerge from these images. Wasif, as we have seen, spends considerable time on the 1929 Buraq Revolution. He provides three images of an ad hoc Spontaneous Committee for Emergency Aid (*Lijnat al-is'af al-munbathiqah*) that organized during, or at least in the immediate wake, of the revolution. The first image is that of a typical group of besuited, cravated, mustached, and largely un-tarbusheffed effendis sitting on chairs and a small desk. Jawhariyyeh numbers and, in his index, identifies them: Thabit Khalil Darwish, Fu'ad al-Imam, Safwat Younis al-Husseini, Adel Bey Hassan al-Turjman, the lawyer Hassan Sidqi al-Dajani, Ismail Haqqi al-Nashashibi, the lawyer Subhi Abu Khudr, Ishaq Darwish, and Shakib Musa al-Nashashibi.

Two more images depict the committee members statically posing with "peasants" in villages where the Committee distributed aid. An array of second-tier elites poses in front of the *fellahin* while "distributing aid" in the village of Beit Safafa, a *nahiyah* of Jerusalem (fig. 6.2). The photograph is terribly underexposed, blacking out or making it very difficult to identify the faces of those pictured. But again, Jawhariyyeh provides the identities of these committee members: Tunnas Shalhit, Shakib Musa al-Nashashibi, al-Sheikh Muhammad al-Salih, Khalid Bey al-Duzdar, Muhammad al-Sabasi, Raghbi 'Abd al-Qadir al-'Afifi, Ibrahim Isma'il Bey al-Husseini, Thabit Darwish, and Izzat Tannus.

How to read such a static, enigmatic, and poor-quality image? Does it even matter that the image is underexposed? Those that are worthy to be identified, namely the elites, are named. The peasants remain characteristically quiet, anonymous,



FIGURE 6.2. Spontaneous Committee for Emergency Aid, Beit Safafa. Jawhariyyeh Album 2, IPS Beirut.

and unidentifiable. Through the lens of *Jawhariyyeh*, the figures in the photo were the men of his community with whom he regularly fraternized, served, and interacted. They were notables along with the “new men” of the Empire, as Peter Gran has called them.⁶ These were the men of means, access, and capital, as Sherene Seikaly identifies them.⁷ None of those pictured are particularly famous, although they each came from notable Jerusalemite families, mostly Muslim. Many of them were moving out of the Old City and building homes in the new suburbs of al-Quds such as Baq’a, Abu Tur, and Musrara. The family names attached to these members reinforces our knowledge of the interconnected social network of mid- and upper-tier elites with one another, but also their ability to organize despite personal and family rivalries. We know that a number of these men were “professionals,” likely educated in Palestine’s post-*nahdah* educational curriculum. Hassan Sidqi al-Dajani, for example, in the initial image of the Committee, was part of the leadership of the nationalist cultural “club,” *al-Muntada al-adabi*, and close to the Nashashibi family. *Al-Muntada*, along with *al-Nadi al-‘arabi*, were important youth organizations that galvanized “a new generation of political activists” in Palestine in the immediate aftermath of the First World War.⁸

The Committee’s members likely participated in these or similar cultural-political groups. The images allow us to speculate with considerable confidence

that these members could so quickly and efficiently create rather large spontaneous groups that actually could, with equal acuity, distribute aid to the “needy” during the Revolt, not only because they enjoyed social relationships but because they shared actual organizing experience around nationalist issues. For example, we know little about Raghīb ‘Abd al-Qadir al-‘Afīfī, casually leaning against the wall of blocks in the present image. Jawhariyyeh mentions al-‘Afīfī in his diaries as the supervisor under whom he worked in al-Baladiyah (Jerusalem’s municipality). He looks incredibly similar to Ibrahim Isma‘il Bey al-Husseini, next to him. Ibrahim is likely to be the grandson of Musa al-Husseini, late nineteenth century Jerusalem’s chief magistrate and one of its most powerful businessmen, who was the father-in-law of an Ottoman Grand Vizier, and father of Ismail and Shukri.⁹ While Ibrahim’s father, Ismail, was a respected merchant of the city, his brother Shukri is renowned as an early nationalist, forming the Arab-Ottoman Brotherhood and becoming one of the leading political figures in Ottoman Palestine.¹⁰ The photograph is not only a “document” but also a field of certainty, and indeed materiality, that allows a “potential history,” or perhaps a “more likely history,” to emerge. While we may know little detail about the *Lijnat al-is‘af al-munbathiqah* or its members, we are able to quickly assess a collective fact: namely, the organization of Palestinians during the Revolt were not capricious or even spontaneous at all, but rather the result of a sustained political culture of nationalist activism that had been forged in an intellectual, social, political, and economic network within Palestinian Arab society since the beginning of the century, if not before.

Finally, a contrapuntal reading also proceeds from other elements of the photographic image. The most obvious is, of course, that we contrast the relative anonymity of these notables to the absolute anonymity of the peasants. If we are able to designate certain histories of the social networks of politics, mobilization, from the scant information that Jawhariyyeh provides in his albums and index, we can determine significantly less about those “needy” who are receiving aid. The opaque composition of the photograph, the indiscernible underexposed faces of peasants who stand behind the effendis and even the rocks and wall, parallels Jawhariyyeh’s own narrative obfuscation. Yet this does not mean that these men were marginal. It only means that they were being positioned as the needy “peasants” at a time of the formation of a modern national discourse, as Rana Barakat and Sherene Seikaly have most recently shown.¹¹ This obfuscation draws us to think, then, of who these Palestinians were, most notably as connected to their village Beit Safafa.

Beit Safafa’s history is illustrative of the Palestinian experience. A Muslim village on the road between al-Quds and Beit Laham (Bethlehem), the village was attacked in 1929 by Zionists from the nearby settler colony of Makor Haim, built only three years before by Polish Jews. Jawhariyyeh himself, it seems, bought a plot of land adjacent to Makor Haim in 1940.¹² In 1948, the Green Line divided Beit Safafa, previously “a village of farmers and stone cutters.”¹³ The village was

captured, colonized, and annexed by the Zionists in 1967, absorbed into metropolitan occupied Jerusalem. Several thousand internally displaced Palestinian “refugees” settled there, some of whom have Israeli citizenship while others have blue ID cards, or “temporary residency” in their own country. The photograph surrenders little to us regarding the social history and lives of the people of Beit Safafa at the time it was taken, but perhaps that is the way that they must maintain their presence in the village. If we can draw such confident speculation about the relationship between Jawhariyyeh’s visual narrative as articulating a national bourgeois vision, perhaps we can also extend such an analysis to the rare, and always anonymous, appearance of the *fellah* in these albums. In particular, just as Jawhariyyeh does not provide any information about these Palestinians, we see that the members of the Committee, in their magnanimity of delivering aid, stand explicitly in front of the villagers to block them from the camera. Matching written to visual narrative, we can infer that the complex social networks of notable and rising middle-class families, while undoubtedly interacting with them on a daily basis, actively sought to overshadow, block, and obfuscate the presence of working and peasant-class Palestinians from a national narrative.

If the 1929 Revolt was initiated and largely led by peasants and “villagers”—those from villages within Greater Jerusalem—it is also important to highlight how the Palestinian ruling class initially disavowed and steered away from the violence.¹⁴ The approaches in this book seek not only to break from the gravitational orbit of Zionism and British colonialism as the determining forces of Palestinian life, but also to interrogate and make visible the class, sectarian, and gender forces that, as in the case of this image, literally stand in the way of us seeing the Palestinian working and peasant classes, which include the expropriated and wage labor of women.

CENTERING PALESTINIANS

Some twenty-five years ago, Beshara Doumani, in his groundbreaking *Rediscovering Palestine*, “wonder[ed]” out loud “how it is possible to underhand the social structure, cultural life, and economic development of Palestinian society during the Mandate” in the absence of sustained scholarship on the period.¹⁵ The Mandate is finally enjoying increasing and well-deserved scholarly attention.¹⁶ What is most important about this attention is that it seeks, like Doumani’s work, to emerge from the confines of a paradigm demarcated by ascribed binaries of Arab nationalism versus Ottomanism, Palestinians as nationalist exceptions versus Palestinians as Arab nationalists, Zionist settlers and British colonial rulers as determinative of Palestinian identity, and Palestinian identity as a construct or effect of the politics of notables. Indeed, these paradigms emerge not only directly from the tenacious legacies and afterlives of Orientalism as a regime of analysis, but also the epistemology of modernity itself (Arab modernity included).

Rana Barakat's work has not emerged in this conclusion by coincidence. It appears as perhaps an articulate representation of the current state and direction of Palestinian Studies. The work cited here represents an impressive wave of recent studies that carefully, rigorously, and daringly center Palestinian history as a history that is not exclusively defined in relation to Zionism and British colonialism but in relation to the continuity of Palestinian life, social networks, political formations, and economic formations over more than a century, rooted in historic Palestine but also maintained in exile and the "diaspora." In some ways, this method of history writing has been around since the 1960s. Acknowledging Palestinian history as a history of the indigenous people of Palestine, Barakat articulates something that has bound these Palestinian scholars over recent decades. Namely, she insists on "elevating Palestinian indigenous experiences and narrative" as central to the analytic, not always in dialogue or relation to Zionism and colonialism but within its own framework that arises from social, political and economic dynamics of Palestine Arab modernity.¹⁷ Indeed, she is not stating that the Zionist settler existence and British colonial rule are not relevant. Rather, she points to how "the hegemonic presence of the settler on the land is again mirrored as a hegemony embedded within the primary placement of the settler in scholarly literature."¹⁸ The current wave of scholarship, including this book, radically returns to a paradigm of Palestinian Arab history writing that implicitly understands that "indigeneity is a political category."¹⁹

Camera Palæstina, then, follows in the venerable Arab and Palestinian tradition of seeking means and methods to decolonization. In the case of Jawhariyyeh, each photograph in the album has a life of its own due not only to what it depicts, but as enhanced by the stories Wasif narrates in captions, or in the description provided both in his notebooks and memoirs. Their historical significance is amplified, for not only do we have images from the period, but also commentary. Of course, placing the images and the commentary within the historical context, as well as the context of our times as readers/viewers, increases their significance as sources, as socio-political and historical documents. The albums are situated in various times: that of the capturing of each image; of collecting them in albums; and of the modern history of Palestine, from Ottoman rule to Arab aspirations for collective independence to the formalization of Zionist colonization of Palestine to the current moment.

Still, this book aspires to be more than just a work on an individual collector or a "window into the history" of Palestine. We see it instead as an attempt to elaborate on the various possibilities that photography could provide scholars of colonialism and theoreticians of the postcolonial condition. While our use of photographs is clearly based on their role as evidence that can enhance our study of history, we offer that photographs are more than merely "historical documents."

In the analytic process of contributing to a social history of the Mandate period, we simultaneously never lose awareness of the multiple dimensions and temporalities that are presented by photography, perhaps uniquely so. In handling photographs that commute throughout time, we also highlight how they exist within multiple temporalities (that of their production, their display and exchange, their circulation, and their afterlives and survival). To be blunt, our engagement with Jawhariyyeh's redeployment of commercial photographs intends to conjure a social life that has currency today. Such a séance of meaning and life interrupts the settler-colonial logic of Zionism that seeks to eliminate and replace the Palestinians in the lived geography of Palestine. Therefore, Jawhariyyeh—who is neither hero or anti-hero—gives us albums, often in the most banal form, in order to call us to not only witness but attest. This book stands as such as an attestation; an attestation that Palestine *exists today* just as Palestinians exist today. These albums, whether as testimonial (*shahadah*) or kawshun, attest to the undeniable, material reality of Palestine as an uninterrupted, albeit traumatic and violent, history of presence in a land that belongs to the Palestinian people and a land to which they belong.