

Intervention

The Flood

Eleri Connick¹

Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory, and Material Culture

University of Amsterdam

e.connick@uva.nl

So basically, one of the employees, my co-workers called me at 7.30 in the morning. So, I was like, “Good morning, Hisham.” He’s like, “Man, what’s good morning? We don’t know what’s good morning; you haven’t seen the news?” I was like, “What happened, man? Tell me, please.” He’s like, “Man, Palestine is on fire.”

Unlike others who I interviewed in Amman, Abasan was one of the few who did not wake up to the events of October 7 through a news notification or Instagram. Following the phone call, Abasan like many others not only in Amman, but across the world, then spent the rest of October 7 glued to a television, laptop, or mobile attempting to understand what was happening after the events of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. In their 18-page report, Hamas describe that the operation name for October 7, “Al-Aqsa Flood” centred on a focusing on the increasing and intensification of settler incursions and violence on the Palestinian holy sites including Al-Aqsa Mosque as well as being a “defensive act in getting rid of the occupation”.² Abasan surmised what I think many of us have since come to understand that

¹ Eleri Connick is a PhD student at the Amsterdam School for Heritage, Memory and Material Culture. She was the PhD Fellow at Darat al Funun (<https://daratalfunun.org/>) from February to July 2023, where she piloted a participatory heritage workshop to explore Palestinian exile in Amman (see <https://cbrl.ac.uk/research-blog/can-we-add-the-future-to-the-map> [last accessed 12 January 2024]). Her doctoral project, titled “The Palestinian House: The Materiality of Exile in Jordan and Lebanon”, proposes a radical conceptualisation of home and all that it can provoke.

² Source: <https://www.palestinechronicle.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/PDF.pdf> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

“This Al-Aqsa Flood, honestly, is a world-flood. It started from Gaza, but it sent vibrations to the whole world.”

But here’s the thing about floods and their effects: water seeps into all the cracks and even those that appear secure can very quickly start to disintegrate or have their foundations weakened.³ In 2017, *Antipode* published Mark Griffiths’ descriptive analysis of Hebron as a strangled city and how fear can be harnessed towards political agency and resistance to oppression. I find Griffiths’ piece theoretically very helpful in understanding the affective nature of Amman as a unique city of Palestinian exile—particularly so in the weeks that followed October 7. Griffiths (2017: 618) discusses the concept of “critical hope”, and this hope being key to responding to the Occupying Forces’ oppressive strangulation—a way to maintain political potential. The stories from Amman indicate how “hope” has become just another redundant word invoked by the Global North in discussing Palestine, alongside words such as resilience and peace. These words with no real tangibility in responding to the gross violence and words which appear to support Palestinian agency, but as the impact of the flood has shown they diminish the reality or silence – contributing more to the status quo rather than in the end of decades of settler-colonial violence. Instead, what has come with the flood is how *anger* has been mobilised and become part of this new emancipation from many of the assumed systems which have contributed to the continued colonial power imposed on Palestinians everywhere.⁴ This understanding of the mobilisation in Amman is helpfully conceptualised through Wendy Pearlman’s (2013) influential work on emotions and social

³ I was asked by *Antipode*’s Editorial Collective to add to this piece by connecting it to wider scholarly discussions taking place, but it feels difficult to do so when “[u]pholding the Israeli narrative of denial [of an occupation] is still seen in the West as neutral, while anything more critical is seen as biased” (Masalha 2012:5). When this is *still* the starting point in much of the Global North institutions, when we have seen how conceptual framings have been weaponised or used to perpetuate epistemic violence against Palestinian knowledge and the astounding silence regarding the destruction of every university in Gaza; we have seen the guises of Western institutions sink. We now know that for many decolonialisation in the academy was merely a metaphor (Tuck and Yang 2012). The impact on myself as a young scholar has been a total disbelief at the system I am working “in” and, therefore, I felt disappointed at the thought of having to add scholarship to this piece because I truly wanted the voices of Palestinians in Amman to be enough. I hope that even now with the additions you read this seeing Palestinian voices as the real creators of knowledge production and meaning making.

⁴ On the uses of anger, see Lorde (2012).

movements—work that showcases how anger, as an emboldening emotion, plays a microfoundational role and supports political agency.

The interviews from Amman presented here will ensure you visualise people. Because that's critical here: Palestinians are people and should not be spoken about abstractly or just as mere numbers. Doing so plays into one of the weapons being utilised by the Zionists but also the media, in dehumanising Palestinians.⁵ This dehumanisation is used to suppress and censor these stories—promoting a narrative that Palestinians are subhuman and thus, less worthy of space and voice. This is heightened when we think about how Palestinian voices from Amman are usually framed, where for the most part, within a wider Orientalist frame imposed on the Middle East, these individuals are represented as objects rather than as subjective creators of complex and multi-faceted identities. Doing so, this article will contribute to two main needs that have emerged from the war on Gaza. Firstly, the need to document honestly. Secondly, the need to think about knowledge production and meaning making when so many assumed norms have sunk. Nur Masalha (2012: 253) famously drew upon the example of Edward Said in stating that “to write more truthfully about the Nakba is not just to practise professional historiography; it is also a moral imperative of acknowledgement and redemption”—a struggle for justice. This clarion call for writing more truthfully has never been clearer, because if injustice remains, violence will continue to occur. For me, this “world-flood” has seriously destroyed any notion that the academy was truly trying to respond to epistemic injustice.

In the Jordanian context, where the state was just weeks away from signing a major (and controversial) agreement with Israel—the so-called “water for energy deal” (Al Jazeera 2023)—it seems even more pressing to think about the aftermath of the flood. Jordan is the

⁵ Such a technique is not new—Ilan Pappé described this reality in his powerful conversation with Chomsky in 2015 where he stated “anyone who has been in Israel long enough, as I have, knows that the worst corruption of young Israelis is the indoctrination they receive that totally dehumanizes Palestinians. When an Israeli soldier sees a Palestinian baby he does not see an infant—he sees the enemy” (in Chomsky and Pappé 2015:31).

second most water scarce country in the world, and the stakes are high with the country drying at a rapid pace. While it is, thus, a significant deal, Al Quds⁶ states:

I don't think people are worried at this point. I don't think people care anymore. I mean they're opposing the deals we have with Israel. We have a dumb deal for water ... so people asking the government not to sign this deal at the end of November, it's a big deal. We've already, we've felt it. We feel the lack of water. You don't get water as often. But this is gonna be like a big smack on the face ... I think people just don't care. (Interview, Al Quds, 2023)

The same sentiment can be seen on the stickers which started appearing across the city:



Figure 1: Sticker spotted in Amman and shared across social media—"The blood does not become water"⁷
(source: photo and translation by author, 2023)

⁶ All names have been changed to pseudonyms—replaced with the villages, towns, and cities in which those I interviewed originate from. It becomes an example of one of the most well-known forms of Palestinian commemoration as noted by Laleh Khalili (2007).

⁷ Such a statement, in discussion with those in the Amman community, alludes to the notion that no gain will ever come from abandonment of kin.

What Al Quds describes cannot be dismissed in the larger dynamics of Al-Aqsa Flood because it echoes what many in Jordan have been critiquing for decades—the ever increasing relationships the state has with Israel and how Palestinians in Jordan are ready (and willing) to deal with less water or whatever other repercussions come from these actions. This is a big shift from the protests in the summer of 2023 against the water for energy deal which were small and easy to maintain. This increasing boldness of those in Amman is a central part of the moment we are witnessing in the capital—a sentiment which is not expressed through the Jordanian state or its media—but rather in the interactions of its people. A moment that relates both to all that has followed the flood, as well as to the world’s reaction to it. These actions and sentiments should not be taken lightly as the stakes in Amman—a city with a vivid consciousness of the Palestinian loss of homeland and exile—are real (Massad 2001).

October 7 has caused an unravelling of assumed values. Assumed red lines have been violently crossed, and Palestinians have continued to be addressed as numbers despite it being their lives and their future at stake. The same can be said for Palestinians in exile across the world—and in Jordan with increasing censorship, as Al Quds elaborates: “It’s a private profile with like my friends on it. Why the hell would you shadow ban me and they’re like most of them [my followers] are Arabs?” (Interview, 2023).

Dismissed, overlooked, lied to, and silenced are some of the resounding responses from those I interviewed in Amman in October 2023. It is important here to distinguish the varying parties which these feelings are being evoked by, whether it is the West, the wider Arab region, or the Jordanian state itself. The increasing use of arrests by the Jordanian state of particularly young Palestinians in the city cannot be dismissed⁸—arrests which have for the most part been able to happen rather deceptively. So, what are Palestinians in Amman to do when institutions, leaders, and states around them are, in their eyes, failing?⁹ How should

⁸ See <https://www.hrw.org/news/2024/02/06/jordan-arrests-harassment-pro-palestine-protesters> (last accessed 29 February 2024).

⁹ A recent post on Instagram by MetrasGlobal, a volunteer-based entity for news on Palestine, “How is the Jordanian regime failing Gazans?”, received over 20k likes. Arabic version: https://www.instagram.com/p/C3QkmqqtB3n/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFiZA== English version: https://www.instagram.com/p/C3VsfRZNr0c/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link&igsh=MzRlODBiNWFiZA== (last accessed 29 February 2024).

those in Amman support the resistance in an increasingly crushing civic space?¹⁰ By focusing on the quiet change. The daily changes. Though they might not hit the Zionist agenda like a tidal wave, they do provoke a slow and steady drowning. However, the impact is multi-fold not only hitting the Zionist agenda but additionally, making clear the frustration at Jordan and the Arab region's growing normalisation with Israel in the last decade and sending a clear tidal wave to Western institutions and media.

Disclaimer: there has of course been noise in Amman. It was the unprecedented scale of the protests in Amman and the changing demographics of attendees and discussing this with Palestinians and Jordanians in the city that made me first think about the specific moment we are witnessing in Amman.



Figure 2: Protests in El-Rabiyeh outside of the Israeli Embassy (source: photo by Jude Al-Safadi, 2023; reproduced here with permission)

¹⁰ The recent publication by Jillian Schwedler, *Protesting Jordan: Geographies of Power and Dissent* (2022), is key to understanding the way in which Amman's geography has altered to support diminishing public space to quietly make mass gathering to protest harder. It also provides an in-depth historical background to the vital role protesting has in Jordan and its ability to create change within the political system.

I went to the protest just to breathe. And I did, *Alhamdulillah*. Seeing everyone, seeing all the young. And the difference between now and as a child ... and I went alone, I didn't even take pictures, I just took a taxi alone and the driver was like, "Where are your friends? You are going there by yourself?" I didn't even text anyone that I was there ... I just couldn't think, I just wanted to breathe. It was something selfish, but I just wanted to breathe. But seeing them [the young people] screaming for the resistance and against the normalisation. It was amazing. (Interview, Dawaymah, 2023)

Dawaymah, in her mid-twenties, grew up in a heavily political family in which Palestine was the first cause, spending her childhood going to protests with other families from Wihdat, and so I knew her story would cement if this time really was *different*. Dawaymah always believed it will be "us [Palestinians] who are going to get Palestine back ... we are enough". These recent protests in October and November 2023, have shown her a new form of fearlessness, from young people, from the large groups of young women at the protests who've led chants, and has cemented to her the power in the Palestinian collective to do just that, liberate Palestine. A liberation which means more than just liberating the land, but also liberating Palestinians everywhere from the colonial narratives that have gripped their entire lives (Masalha 2012), as Yaffa described:

My perspective to life has completely changed. Actually, I used to say also on a political perspective, I used to say, let's have the, let's just have the peace ... but now no, let's die for our dignity ... it's about our dignity, it's about our pride, it's about our existence. (Interview, Yaffa, 2023)

There is such power in Yaffa's sentiment and yet it resonates through all six of the interviews—despite feelings of a whole Palestinian population being dismissed (Interview, Al Quds and Zibabdeh, 2023) and being abandoned by most powers around the world (Interview, Abasan and Yaffa, 2023), what has emerged is not a hopelessness but an

important rage. A rage for dignity for Palestine and Palestinians. In Amman, the rage emerges where it can be most powerful and lasting—in the mundane, in the everyday.

It seems strange and weird to speak of “mundane” in the current crisis. Yet, in the mundane what manifests is the small acts of resistance that are now widely practised in Amman—practices very much at the heart of *sumud*. The word, *sumud*, meaning “steadfastness” or “perseverance” in Arabic, has become a way to reflect the enduring and varying ways Palestinians resist dispossession and domination. It is a term which focuses on the enduring, the continual, and as Khalili (2007: 101) describes “does not aspire to super-human audacity ... [but] consciously values daily survival”. *Sumud* as a mode of everyday resistance responds to the violence against Palestinians, like a water leak which aims to showcase the insidious infrastructure in place.

Through the nuance and details of these individual stories from Amman in the immediate aftermath of October 7, we understand that these actions belong to Palestinians, who have their own exilic stories, and own experiences, but belong to a larger collective. These changing practices will be of huge significance in how these events will be remembered and commemorated, offering an alternative narrative to grand headlines.

Gaza taught me a lot this time, a lot, and one of the things I thought to myself, by the way, let’s talk about the smallest and like minor things. I always say I only drink Nestle water, I cannot drink anything but Nestle ... Imagine, I once went to Syria three days [and] I did not drink water because they didn’t have Nestle. And I remember in 2021, everybody was like, “You’re still drinking Nestle, oh my god, how dare you.” And I used to say, “It’s only one bottle of water...” But the day I started seeing the videos on Instagram about what’s happening in Gaza, I swear I stopped drinking Nestle, Pepsi, and every time I see whoever is drinking one of these things, I go like crazy on them. I’ve never been like that. (Interview, Yaffa, 2023)

“This action came out from the anger, yes, but this is the least I can do, and this is why it’s going crazy here in Jordan.” Yaffa’s story points to one of the huge changes witnessed in Amman, the huge upsurge and support for the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) movement. Visible changes in the city space can be seen from this increased engagement

with BDS, with the many Starbucks and McDonald's which filled the city being empty. For years, these establishments were one of the most popular spaces in which individuals from across the class divide in Amman could be seen. "Take into consideration that we're not allowed to be self-sufficient with wheat and with basic necessities" (Interview, Abasan, 2023). This boycott of food and drink spaces is highly influential and a real push back against the reliance Jordan has had on Israeli and Western, especially the US food and beverage suppliers. Thus, whilst projects had increasingly emerged in the last several years to increase Jordan's food sovereignty, particularly the efforts of Al-Barakeh Wheat,¹¹ such projects were usually deemed to be something for the Amman elite to engage with.¹² In a city with increasing prices but wages which stagnate and do not cover the basic costs of living, cheaper supplies from the US were the go-to, particularly the cheap fast-food chains. To see these spaces empty, and an increase in support for Jordan's own products, will have a lasting impact on attempting to lessen the control and grip (of Israel and the US) many I interviewed feel on the basic everyday necessities for life. These boycotts have repercussions not only for the companies themselves, but also particularly for the student population of Amman.¹³

This surge to be reliant on oneself and one's community extends into language practice and the entire way in which culture is used. Most drastically seen through language:

What frustrates me the most is all these Arabs over social media who just talk English. And like, you know, stories and all influencers now, there's this trend where like, we're going to speak in English so everyone would hear us. (Interview, Dawaymah, 2023)

¹¹ See <https://www.instagram.com/albarakehwheat/?hl=en> (last accessed 12 January 2024).

¹² The Darat al Funun 2022 exhibition "Re-rooting" was a publicly available exposé on issues of food insecurity, questions of food sovereignty, and colonial power in Jordan and Palestine. See <https://daratafunun.org/?event=re-rooting> (last accessed 12 January 2024).

¹³ During a visit to Amman in January 2024, I was informed by a programme officer from a local NGO that around 1,500 Jordanians had lost their jobs from large companies that were being boycotted (McDonald's, Starbucks, KFC, for example).

For Dawaymah, the use of English language in sharing stories from Palestine brought up the dilemma of “responsibility”:

I just, and I thought for so long that it’s my job to talk to people and keep telling them, no, it’s not my job and it’s not our job. I would educate my nephew, who’s seven years old, about Palestine and spend two hours talking to him or to her, like my nieces, how to free Palestine because it’s our job. (Interview, Dawaymah, 2023)

But what Dawaymah made concretely clear was that it is not her responsibility to educate the West. All those I spoke with shared the fatigue of constantly attempting to educate the West and the feeling of constant dismissal.¹⁴ Instead, the teaching has turned inwards with film screenings in popular cultural spaces in Amman, spaces usually filled with foreigners, being held in Arabic. Now, the focus is not on finding stories to share with Westerners, but instead changing practices, so the energy continues.

Trying to keep the locals with the same feelings, we keep on telling them this is not a trend, please don’t go crazy for two weeks and then stop, this is a real cause that we have to keep on fighting. (Interview, Yaffa, 2023)

For me, Yaffa’s description of “the real cause” is the key to understanding the moment in Amman—the dignity, the pride, the agency. In these last few weeks, Palestinians have been spoken about as mere numbers. Dehumanised, to suppress and censor these stories—promoting a narrative that Palestinians are less worthy of space and voice. The actions taking place in Amman are fighting against this:

And it made me realise that I think I’d like to put my effort in my country, in my, in the Arab world, instead of like giving it to the West. (Interview, Yaffa, 2023)

¹⁴ Readers have to understand that many described how the education took as its starting point that Palestinians should be able to exist.

And within the reengagement with Arabic language and the efforts to protect cultural practices, what has been created is a moment which will not end when the media turns away from Gaza. The renaming of Amman city spaces like Paris Square in Jabal Weibdeh to Gaza Square showcases that whilst the world may have turned away from Gaza, Amman has turned towards Gaza in myriad ways: spatially, linguistically, collectively, and more.

These everyday, mundane, and small efforts of changing eating practices, listening habits, re-engagement with cultural practices, street murals, protesting, and more have become part of the process of water filling up the cracks that emerged in thinking that Palestine is just a (passive) space of violence. Since Gaza and Palestine have never just been a space of conflict, and Palestinians have never just been victims of gross colonial violence but a land and collective in which there is much to learn from—individually, collectively, and (for readers of this journal in particular) the academy.

Epilogue



Figures 3 and 4: From the “We won’t leave” exhibition at Darat al Funun, Amman (source: photos by author, 2024)

It is not an over-exaggeration to state that there now seems to be a pre-October 7 and post-October 7 world. Even this intervention feels as though it were written in a different time. The first version of this piece went to *Antipode* in November 2023. In January 2024, I returned to Amman, a place I called home for 18 months between 2022 and 2023. While violence against Palestinians is not new, this event has truly shocked many who have been engaged with the long history of Palestine—never before have we carried these violent crimes in our pockets—watching these acts, feeling helpless, and questioning our capacity to do something. I sit in Amman, reflecting on this intervention and making the final edits, aware that all around me the walls are speaking loudly against the gross crimes being committed. Barely any wall in Jabal Amman, Downtown, and Jabal Weibdeh not reminding you to boycott. We are witnessing unprecedented levels of erasure of lives, ecologies, cities, and more in Palestine. Darat al Funun, one of Amman’s largest cultural heritage spaces, has just opened the new exhibition “We Won’t Leave”.¹⁵ The exhibit is striking visually because the exhibition space, which is usually white, has been painted red, confronting the visitor immediately with the feeling of blood on one’s hands. But it’s also striking its call to action to amplify Palestinian voices and contribute to the archive. The exhibit focuses on *renaming* all the individuals (artists, journalists) and institutions which have been destroyed, erased, or silenced simply for being a voice speaking out for Palestine. I found there to be two feelings of anger visualised through the exhibition—anger at having to once again *prove* that this violence has been taking place, and, secondly, anger that this exhibition is in Amman, in a city where everyone knows in minute detail all that has been taking place not just since October 7, but for the last 75 years in Palestine. I hope, as you read this intervention in the midst of all this erasure, it also provokes some sort of *anger*—when we have anger, we are empowered, we act, we do. As scholars we have a huge responsibility to respond to and remediate this erasure, and we must do so quickly. In responding, justly and truthfully, we can start to float again in the new waters which will (and have already begun to) emerge from this flood.

¹⁵ See <https://daratalfunun.org/?event=we-wont-leave> (last accessed 12 January 2024).

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