

Comments on the dissertation by Dorota Woroniecka-Krzyzanowska entitled
“Extended Exile: Daily Life in a Palestinian Refugee City-Camp”

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In what follows, I will provide some comments on selected issues, as well as on particular sections of the dissertation.

The historical framework/context: understanding how Palestinians became refugees

Given that this dissertation is about a community of Palestinian refugees, one of the notable omissions in the first sections of the dissertation is a discussion of how the refugee issue came to be, how Palestinians became refugees. One would expect this to be dealt with in the first chapter or even in the introduction. It is not until chapter 2 that the matter is discussed, even though in previous pages there are references to refugees who “fled” (p. 24), “the flight” (p. 56), refugees being forced into the camp by “historical circumstances” (pp. 36-37), and the point that the camp was established in the aftermath of the 1948 war (33). Given this, I believe that it would have been better if the agents in the “war” and of the “historical circumstances” had not remained obscure at the beginning. After all, it was not a force of nature that was responsible for what happened to the refugees.

When the dissertation does go into detail to examine the issue in chapter 2, what I find problematic is the overall framing of the “conflict” over Palestine. How do we describe and conceptualize the confrontation between the Zionist settler colonial movement (and later state) and the indigenous people of the country? Why is this portrayed as a “conflict”? Does the use of what may be called the “conflict paradigm” suggest parity and the commensurability of the claims of the “two sides?”

I suggest that looking at the situation as a struggle of the natives against a settler colonial regime is more productive and closer to the historical record. Using phrases such as “intercommunal violence” (p. 74) masks the colonizer-colonized confrontation. Also, using phrases such as “outburst of violence” (72) for the Arab

“native anthropology” in practice (p. 47). I think that at least the master’s thesis should be considered a piece of academic writing and listed in the bibliography.

Most notably, and while the Arabic-language book *Small Places and Big Issues* is listed in the bibliography, it does not seem that any of the chapters in that book were in fact consulted. The articles by Johnson and Abu Nahleh and by Abu Duhou, which deal directly with al-Am’ari, the site of the dissertation research, would have been very useful. The discussion in chapter 4 of the dissertation might have benefited from a reading of the results of the household survey conducted by Birzeit University researchers (2004) in al-Am’ari and two other adjacent communities. Comparing data would have given more richness to the discussion in this chapter. The survey is described in chapter 2 (Abu Nahleh and Johnson) of *Small Places and Big Issues*

Also neglected are the several potentially useful and relevant working papers, books, and conference proceedings touching on the issue of refugees and refugee camps produced and published by Birzeit University’s International Studies Program (see the list of publications on the website of the Institute (<http://ialiis.birzeit.edu/etemplate.php?id=72> and <http://ialiis.birzeit.edu/atemplate.php?id=86>), as well as publications by the now-defunct Palestinian Diaspora and Refugee Centre, Shaml. Incidentally, some of the works produced by the Birzeit center are in English. Many more articles on refugee camps can be found in the Arabic-language journals *Majallat al-Dirasat al-Filistiniyya* and *Hawliyyat al-Quds*, published by the Institute for Palestine Studies. The IPS has also published several books that touch on this theme.

I think the discussion about commemorations of Am’ari residents’ original villages in chapter 3 could have benefited from a reading of Rochelle Davis’s *Palestinian Village Histories: Geographies of the Displaced*, which analyzes a collection of “village memorial books” written by Palestinian refugees about their villages of origin, most of them destroyed. It might have been interesting to see if there are any such books by village historians (in Arabic) for the villages of Na’ani, and ‘Innaba and others that Am’ari refugees originate from. These books may have been mentioned in the interviews and it would be worth investigating. Davis has some interesting insights on these village memorial books, and it would be interesting to compare observations.

Spelling and typographical errors should be corrected, as well as grammar (particularly the absence of the articles “the” and “a” throughout the text). Some other examples: it is better to use café rather than cafeteria; the word “data” should be in the plural; “Arab,” not “Arabic” (p. 140); reminiscence visits, not reminiscent visits (pp 135, 137); and many other errors of usage and/or grammar.

However, if the dissertation is not going to be published in English, then this becomes less important.

Some notes on transliteration/translation are in order: the spelling of the word on p. 149 is “uzi,” not “quzi” (there is no “qaf”). On pp. 184, 188 and elsewhere, I doubt that the interviewees meant “immigrants” when they said “muhajirin.” They probably used the word “muhajjarin,” which is different from “muhajirin.” The former means those who were forcibly exiled. This is probably what was meant.

Another point has to do with the alphabetization of the references in the bibliography. All Arabic author names that begin with the Arabic definite article “al-“ should be alphabetized under the name without the “al-“ (e.g. al-Khalili under K, al-Qudsi under Q). Also a note on the author Saleh Abdul Jawad: the last name is Abdul Jawad, not Jawad. On pp. 293-4 it should be “popular committees” and not “people’s committees”(lijan sha’biyya), and Qur’an, not Koran (p.258).

Overall Assessment:

This is a highly readable and engaging piece of work. It is well executed on the theoretical, methodological, and empirical levels, and is a good contribution to the growing field of Palestine studies. On the whole, the dissertation embodies thoughtful engagement with the theoretical and methodological literature, as well as the social science literature on Palestine. Some gaps exist in the latter area, and have been commented upon above. The empirical content of the dissertation is rich, and reflects a good understanding of the social and political dynamics of the research site, a unique community of Palestinian refugees. Woroniecka seems to have fostered a relationship of mutual respect with members of the community, and this reflects well on her skills as a person and as a researcher and her attempt at empathetic understanding (I would recommend reading Bourdieu’s essay on “understanding” in the volume by Bourdieu et al, the *Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society*). She may wish to reflect on the issue of power relations in the research setting, if there is time for that.