



The DUO Newsletter

dialogue under occupation

February 2010, Issue 1

WELCOME TO DUO!

by Razvan Sibii

This is the inaugural issue of the *DUO* Newsletter. The conference has been growing exponentially with each new reincarnation, and it was only fitting that the many academics, students and activists associated with it acquire an avenue to keep the dialogue going. This newsletter is an attempt to maintain the lines of communication open between past and future *DUO* participants, in the hope that the connections forged on the ground, during conference presentations and coffee breaks, can continue on the web and elsewhere.

The last two *DUO* conferences, held in Abu Dis, East Jerusalem and Bogotá, Colombia, proved the organizers' commitment to break with the tradition of ethnocentric, navel-gazing, Marriott-hosted conferences that many of us are so familiar with. The fascinating presentations and countless conversations that *DUO* has repeatedly featured clearly required an online forum where they could be pondered further, elaborated on, challenged and otherwise engaged. Together with an upcoming *DUO* blog, this newsletter strives to be that kind of a forum.

Each issue will carry a handful of texts written by, or in collaboration with, past and future *DUO* participants. Some articles will consist of updates about the professional activities of *DUO* members, while others will deal with issues deemed by the authors to be relevant to *DUO*'s mission statement. Anyone with an interest in the work carried out by *DUO* is welcome to contribute a story or an idea. Welcome, once again, to *DUO*! We would love to see you at *DUO IV*, to be held in Washington D.C. between June 1 – 4, 2010.

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A Century of Grace

by Amy Hamar

Amy Hamar (DUO II, Abu Dis) teaches English Composition in Doha, Qatar. She is interested in how holding on to cultural identity can help people remain sane throughout, as well as recover after, conflict situations.

When I was asked to write a small segment of the newsletter, I had no idea what I could, or would, write about. I could write about so many different topics related to dialogue, conflict, language, communication, education, and so forth. In the end, I've decided to tell the story of my husband's grandmother in Palestine who is somewhere between 105-107 years old. She has seen more than most people alive, and has endured more emotional pain than most, especially when her son was accidentally killed by a neighbor at the age of 14. Amazingly, she bears it without the bitterness that usually accompanies catastrophic realities.

She has lived through the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire, World Wars I and II, the creation of Israel, the displacement of her and her family before and after this time, known to Palestinians as *al-nakba* (the Catastrophe), as well as the ensuing effects of the occupation on her life. Just looking at her, one can feel history living in the room. She wears traditional Palestinian dress, and bears tribal tattoos on her hands and face. We don't know the origins of these tattoos, but it seems they are from a time when Bedouins would travel through the villages of Palestine, giving the women these tattoos to signify

beauty. She is a wealthy woman in terms of land, and she was a shrewd business woman, looking out for herself and those around her. Prior to meeting her, I knew she had suffered a stroke in 1996, losing mobility of her legs and going blind in one eye.

I knew she wasn't mobile, but didn't realize there was no furniture. Therefore, I didn't expect my meeting her to go quite as it had (traditional Palestinian



"She has seen more than most people alive."

homes do not have furniture apart from stuffed cushions on the ground).

We walked into her room, watching her, wondering what she thinks of this American wife, coming into her room. My mind was flooded with thoughts about

measuring up to what they all thought I should be, especially as many were not for our marriage, labeling it a mistake, telling him to just come home and marry a good Palestinian wife. Once our eyes met, however, there was a moment of unspoken kinship between us. I knelt down to kiss her hands and the top of her head, and she started crying, pulling me to her, saying "habibti, ya habibti" (my beloved, oh my beloved). All of the thoughts I had about being inadequate, or not enough for them to accept melted away with the touch of her hand and the sight of her tears.

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Palestine's Scrambled Eggs

by Razvan Sibii

Jamal Dajani (DUO I, Chicago and DUO II, Abu Dis) is a Palestinian-American political analyst and an award-winning journalist. He produces documentaries and other programming for *Link TV* and contributes to numerous other media enterprises, including the *Huffington Post* and *Al Jazeera English*.



Source: jamaldajani.com

“I call it the scrambled eggs situation: once you’ve scrambled the eggs, you can’t unscramble them,” says Jamal Dajani (*photo*). He is talking about Israel’s policy of “creating facts on the ground” in the Palestinian territories by erecting a highly contentious separation barrier and by encouraging the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank.

As a Palestinian-American born in Jerusalem and currently residing in

California, Dajani has written and produced hundreds of media programming about the Middle East conflict, and has delivered talks on the subject to many thousands of people all over the world. He has just returned from a trip to Israel/Palestine, where he spent two weeks researching the most recent political developments in the region, including the ongoing expansion of the settlements and the blockade of Gaza. In other words, he went to assess for himself precisely how scrambled those eggs are.

The possessor of an American passport, Dajani has the ability to travel unhindered throughout the West Bank, unlike most of the Palestinians who live in the territory. And he is acutely aware of how much of a privilege that freedom of movement really is. “When I drive on roads that are forbidden to Palestinian

cars, I am suspicious,” Dajani says. “But the Israeli soldiers grudgingly give me permission to pass through the checkpoints because of my passport. However, they often do not allow my Palestinian cameraman to pass too, so I end up not going any farther either. I was born in Jerusalem, and I was humiliated like this every day ever since I was 10. Now, I see this kind of thing again every time I go back to the West Bank.”

Dajani covered the beginning of the Israeli military incursion into Gaza last year from the vantage point of the Erez Crossing Point, one of three Israeli gateways into the Strip. Last month, he was back at the same spot, this time covering the efforts of a group of Palestinians, Israelis and international activists to protest the continued shutdown of Gaza’s borders.

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A Century of Grace

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Everyone else was crying and happy to see us, but for some reason, it was her unspoken acceptance that meant the most.

When I look back on sitting with her that first time, I think of her reaction not only to me, but to that of my husband’s absence at the time. Unfortunately, the Israelis had stopped my husband at the border, so my step-daughter and I had arrived alone for our first visit. I know she was deeply saddened by this, but she welcomed us with no irritation to her voice. No cursing out of anyone. No complaining of any kind. It was as if she

was content to finally meet me, and see her granddaughter after 8 long years. It was as if she had pushed the sadness and anger to the side, and focused on the joy and happiness that were equally present. I wish. I hope. I pray that one day I can be like her. That if I had to suffer and endure all that she has been through in life, I could still focus on the sliver of happiness being offered. Our lives could not be any different, her and I, but it is as if there is a tiny string connecting us. Every time I leave her, I don’t know if I will see her again, nor does she know if she’ll see me, but we always say good-

bye the same way we say hello. Our faces become streaked with tears, but we’re smiling the whole time through.



Photo by Amy Hamar

“We don’t know the origins of these tattoos.”



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Decoupling Archeology from Politics

by Razvan Sibii

Chaim Noy (DUO II, Abu Dis) is an “interdisciplinary scholar,” currently teaching Communication and Sociology courses at Sapir College (in the Negev). One of those courses is “Intro to Israeli Society.” “The first part of it is functional and the second part is critical. The students don’t find it very easy to combine the two,” says Noy.

Chaim Noy has recently been asked to serve on the board of Emek Shaveh, an Israeli organization that brings together archeologists, human rights activists and Jerusalem residents. The organization strives to disengage archeology from politics – a most difficult endeavor in East Jerusalem. At the present, Emek Shaveh is focusing its efforts on a particularly rich archeological site in the village of Silwan, near East Jerusalem’s Old City. The site, also known as “the City of David,” is being excavated by an Israeli right-wing organization. Noy and his colleagues argue that this organization is using archeology to prove the historical precedence of Jews in the area – and hence justify Israel’s political dominance of Arab East Jerusalem. Enter Emek Shaveh, which offers alternative tours of the site (in collaboration with the Wadi Hilweh Information Center, a local Palestinian organiza-



Noy protesting in Sheikh Jarrah

tion) and publicizes what it perceives to be an outrageous situation. “What is nice about Emek Shaveh is that it combines a discourse of archeology with a humanist discourse,” says Noy. “All branches of anthropology have historically had an imperialistic bias. But cultural anthropology, for example, has really done a lot to look into itself. That introspection has been much delayed in archeology. Maybe this is because of those heroic images of Indiana Jones-like archeologists – who, of course, went to Northern Africa and the Far East and the Levant during the age of imperialism and excavated and stole property. What Emek Shaveh is saying is archeology should not look for the ‘City of David’ itself [which would legitimize the Jewish nationalist claims to the area], but rather for all the different cultures that existed in the past on this site, leading up to the current one: the Palestinian culture.”

Blacklisted

As a result of his participation in DUO II, Chaim Noy’s name has been included on a so-called “Anti-Zionist list” by an Israeli organization called IsraCampus. Modeled after the American Campus Watch, IsraCampus seeks to identify and denounce what it calls “Israeli Academic ‘Post-Zionist’ extremists in Israel” who speak or write against Israel’s actions in the Palestinian territories.

“I don’t take such organizations too seriously,” says Noy. “They would say that all criticism leveled at Israel’s policies is anti-Israel and antisemitic. Actually, sometimes I think this organization is a good thing – whenever I need to find people in the academia with a political perspective similar to mine, all I have to do is go to this organization’s website and look into their database! But seriously, there are so many fanatics here... I just disregard them completely.”

Personal website: chaimnoy.com — Blog: <http://chaimworkshop.blogspot.com>

Palestine’s Scrambled Eggs

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From Gaza, he left for East Jerusalem and the West Bank, where he documented the story of Palestinian families evicted out of their houses by Israeli authorities. “We talked to these two families who had just been kicked out of their house,” Dajani recounts. “The Jerusalem authorities said that the house had belonged to a Jewish trust so that it was illegal for the families to live there. We

can’t verify that, but, even if it’s true, those families had moved into that house decades ago after being driven out of their old West Jerusalem houses. Israel is operating with a double-standard here.” Mindful of America’s weighty involvement in the political games of the region, Dajani is writing for a predominantly American audience. For the time being, however, he is not particularly optimistic about the Obama administration’s willingness and ability to alleviate the conflicts

wreaking the Middle East. “They talk the talk but don’t walk the walk,” he says. “Obama’s Cairo speech [delivered on June 4, 2009] resonated with many people in the Middle East. He said he wanted to bridge the gap between the U.S. and the Muslim world. But then he sends more troops in Afghanistan! He is losing popularity in America because of the health care and economy issues, but he’s losing popularity in the Arab world because he isn’t doing anything concrete to solve the conflicts.”