

Continuous Learning

التعلم المستمر

beständiges Lernen

By Viola Attallah

We Document, Narrate and Resist.

نُدون فنروي فنقاوم

Flying a paper kite was our favorite playtime. My friend and I used to play in our neighborhood (Haritna / حارتنا) when we were young. Crafting kites of various shapes and vibrant colors brought us immense joy. We'd run to let them fly freely on breezy summer afternoons. From then on, my love for flying grew and I dreamt of becoming a flight attendant to travel and explore diverse cultures, meet new people, experience different accents, and taste various cuisines. However, upon entering university, I realized that in Palestine, there were no faculties specializing in tourism nearby, nor an airport for departure.

Airports are not Essential for Exploring

Since 2019, as part of my work with the Rozana Association, I've had numerous opportunities to fly several times to rural villages, discovering the beauty of the authentic heritage of Palestine. My focus has been on learning about and documenting our heritage to revive the fabulous old sites and share the oral history narrated by its people. Throughout this five-year learning journey, what I've learned and cherished the most has been meeting the local people, especially the elder women whom we consider our "Guardians of Heritage" / "حارسات التراث".

A Palestinian woman warmly greets you wearing her old embroidery thobe (the traditional Palestinian dress), adorned with its unique patterns that set it apart from others in the region. With a wide smile, she gently pats your hands and asks, “*Where are you from? You are so pretty* (محللكي ماشالله).” She will invite you to enjoy her handmade biscuits, insisting that you must be hungry. In those initial five minutes, you’ll find yourself wishing to spend the entire day by her side, feeling the desire to stay there, enjoying her affection and care. Umm Musa Badha was an example of this.



I interviewed Ratibah Al Badha, also known as Umm Musa, born in 1935 and a resident of Dier Ammar, a small village situated 17km northwest of Ramallah in the West Bank. The purpose was to document one of the Palestinian stories/myths about the Nabi Gaith shrine¹. The people of the town believed that he was a saint and would invoke his blessing in their prayers for rain whenever it was delayed.

According to Umm Musa, “*What I know is that Nabi Gaith was a good saint². Fifty years ago, about 100 young men and women used to visit the shrine every summer. We would walk there on foot. As a very young, I went with my parents. I dressed neatly and took care of my appearance, joining in singing with them.*”

Umm Musa recalls, “*We used to take along our ‘kit’, similar to what the scouts did. We displayed long white banners inscribed with the name of God and some Quranic verses, pleading and praying for rain. We would chant:*

¹ For more information about the shrine please visit this link:
<https://www.palestinalesofhospitality.com/deir-ammar/>

² Umm Musa Interview:
<https://www.facebook.com/rozana.association/videos/2679855038972954>

O our Lord, bring rain to our village
O our Lord, we are very young to have sinned
يا ربنا جيب المطر ع بلادنا يا ربنا واحنا صغار شو ذمينا

The documentation of this story has enriched the content of the “Museum of the Picture”, a mobile museum that offers insights into Palestinian culture and identity. It creates opportunities to discover the rich heritage regardless of your location or age.

Lifelong Learning Under Occupation

Living a life under occupation entails constant danger, where one’s life can be lost at any moment. Thousands of Palestinians have died due to ongoing wars and displacement since 1948. Alongside these losses are the stories and social traditions, vanishing with individuals without any record. This terrifying reality has encouraged cultural organizations, creatives, and intellectuals to strive to preserve their rich heritage through art, music, literature and traditional practices. These endeavors serve as a means of resilience, amplifying the voices of people.

We firmly believe that one of the key methods of preserving heritage involves documenting oral history by connecting with our elders, reviving their memories and traditions, and recording these narratives. This effort aims to revive heritage and disseminate stories using engaging tools that increase audience reach and engagement.

The restriction on the Palestinian freedom of movement is a significant obstacle due to Israeli occupation policies that separate communities within the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza Strip. This challenge has enhanced stronger partnerships among cultural experts, local communities, musicians, and organizations across Gaza, Jerusalem, and towns/villages in the West Bank.

To mitigate isolation and enable movement into Gaza, establishing partnerships with Gaza-based organizations like Rozana and Youth Without Borders is crucial. The unique rituals stemming from the Palestinian Bedouin heritage in the Gaza Strip are an example of these rich practices.



Aida Alwan Ali Almalalha, a shepherd from the Bani Amer tribe, immigrated to the Gaza Strip in 1948 from Ber Sabe' due to the Israeli Occupation of Palestine at that time. Approaching her 90s, Aida now resides in the Khan Younis District in the Gaza Strip, living alongside her children and grandchildren while

preserving and adhering to their Bedouin customs, traditions, and the structure of clans and extended families.

Because of her age, Aida can't herd sheep or work as she used to. In a gesture of comfort, her son gifted her two sheep. Despite this, she remains fond of singing, joining in celebrations, and actively taking part in all clan events.

For Eid Al Fitr, their celebration begins with what they call "Ayadat", 10 days before the feast during the final days of the blessed month of Ramadan. All tribe members participate, with each shepherd bringing one or two of his camels for a total of around 30 being slaughtered, according to Aida. The women start preparing rice and groats to be served with the meat.

Come, O Eid, blessed you are, blessed O Eid

Come with henna and splinter the maghadef, O Eid

Eid came in unexpectedly; we have no henna, nor we got a kiss

أقدم يا عيد قدمك مبارك يا عيد... أقدم عالحنة ورش المغادف يا عيد...جانا العيد عغفلة لا حنة ولا قبلة

"This means that when the Eid arrived, we did not prepare for it. We did not dye with henna, nor did we embroider our dresses"

As a result of documenting this vibrant Bedouin heritage and in partnership with the Rozana Association and Youth Without Borders organization, a song has been created, produced and shared among diverse audiences.

<https://www.facebook.com/ywbpal/videos/210776778169574>

Sharjah Rich Cultural Experience

SAWA Program provided me with the opportunity to take part in the Haq Al Lailah³ celebration (حق الليلة، القرقيعان) at Bait Al Naboodah⁴ in February 2023. This museum, with its authentic architectural designs showcasing traditional Emirati houses, hosted a special event organized by the Sharjah Museums Authority. The event held every 15th of Sha`ban –15 days before the holy month of Ramadan, was attended by Sharjah's community, including women and children who joyfully celebrated Emirati traditions and received nuts and sweet delicacies.

What I enjoyed the most was the warm welcome extended by the elderly women. They adorned themselves in the Abaya thobe (traditional dress), wore unique jewelry, had henna drawings on their hands, and sang their traditional songs. Their hospitality enhanced the learning experience and revitalized this unique heritage, fostering a strong sense of community spirit.

Part of the joyful songs that echoed the Eid spirits:

Give us, may God give you... And with His grace, may He send you to Mecca.

Give us from what God has given you... May He protect your child (Abdullah)

..عطونا الله يعطيكم.. بيت مكة يودّيكم

عطونا من مال الله .. سلم ولدكم عبدالله

³ Haq AlLailah Occasion <http://www.bayut.com> | <http://www.bayut.com> | <http://www.bayut.com>

⁴ <https://www.sharjahmuseums.ae/en-US/Museums/Bait-Al-Naboodah>

Moreover, during my walk in the old souq of Sharjah, I discovered a lovely selection of gifts for children celebrating Haq Al Lailah.

Sharjah provides a rich cultural experience in preserving Emirati Heritage. It inspired me through the various and diverse museums it supports, the skills of museum professionals,



and the opportunities provided to women by cultural authorities. Additionally, the allocation of budget and infrastructure to culture stands out. This experience is distinctive and deserves global recognition.

Lastly, writing this blog in an occupied country and amidst the latest Israeli genocide that started in Gaza last October, resulting in the death of more than 13,000 people and ongoing hourly massacres, leaves me wondering if Aida is still alive, if she's been injured, or if she was forced to evacuate her area, living far from her beloved family and sheep. I wish I could reach out to her and other Guardians of Heritage Women to document their countless stories.

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