



Three Generations, One Story: Palestinian Women, Resilience, and Survival

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Abstract

This article explores the intergenerational narratives of three Palestinian women: a grandmother displaced from Lydd in the Nakba in 1948; her daughter, who came of age during the 1967 Naksa and the First Intifada; and her granddaughter, whose formative years unfolded under siege in the Second Intifada, military occupation, and digital warfare. Drawing on the feminist narrative/testimonio method and genealogical analysis, the study weaves oral histories with theoretical reflection to examine how memory, resistance, and survival are transmitted across generations of Palestinian women. By situating these lived experiences within a framework informed by Frantz Fanon's analysis of women in anti-colonial struggle, the article highlights the gendered continuities of dispossession, resilience, and political agency. The narrators' stories, collected through testimony, personal archives, and embodied remembrance, illustrate how Palestinian women negotiate trauma through labor, education, motherhood, and storytelling, producing alternative epistemologies of survival. In tracing these narratives, the article argues that intergenerational memory is not merely the inheritance of loss but a praxis of resistance that transforms pain into political consciousness.

Keywords Intergenerational memory · Palestinian women · Feminist testimonio · Resistance · Anti-colonial framework

Introduction

The study of Palestinian women's narratives has long highlighted the centrality of gendered experiences of dispossession, endurance, and resistance in shaping both personal lives and collective memory. From the Nakba of 1948 through the Naksa and the First and Second Intifadas to the present, Palestinian women have inhabited roles that exceed conventional domestic framings, acting as political agents, cultural bearers, and intergenerational transmitters of memory. Building on the extensive scholarship on Palestinian women's experiences of displacement, resistance, and memory, particularly within feminist oral history and ethnographic traditions, this article advances a specific intervention: a three-generation feminist genealogy spanning 1948 to the digital era, attentive to how narration and transmission

shift alongside changing colonial technologies. It conceptualizes intergenerational storytelling not only as remembrance but as counter-archival practice in contexts where institutional and material archives are structurally hostile or inaccessible, and it treats testimonio, read genealogically and alongside family archival materials, as a site of theory production linking intimate recollection to settler-colonial governance, mobility control, and epistemic erasure.

By focusing on intergenerational memory transmission, the article situates Palestinian women not only as witnesses but as narrators whose storytelling becomes a form of resistance. This aligns with Hirsch's (2012, p. 6) concept of "post memory," where descendants inherit memories of traumatic events and carry them forward, transforming them into new forms of political and cultural meaning. Similarly, Hammami (1990, p. 25) shows how women in the First Intifada used everyday practices to sustain political struggle, blurring the boundaries between domesticity and activism. In this study, narratives of exile, motherhood, education, and political mobilization are not merely private recollections but testimonies that challenge the erasures of colonial power.

This article makes three contributions. First, it adds to feminist oral history by presenting Palestinian women's

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voices in their own narrative form, reflecting Beverley's (2005, p. 548) argument that *testimonio* functions as a counter-hegemonic mode of knowledge production. Second, it develops a genealogical analysis of intergenerational storytelling, showing how experiences of loss and resistance are reinterpreted across time. Finally, it demonstrates how the intimate sphere, family memories, songs, and daily practices operate as a site of political socialization, echoing Collins' (2000, p. 264) insights into Black feminist thought and its parallels with Palestinian women's agency.

Generational Memory, Genocide, and Palestinian Histories

This article draws selectively on comparative memory scholarship to clarify mechanisms of intergenerational transmission, how trauma and political consciousness travel through narration, silence, embodied practice, and everyday ritual. This is a methodological use of the field, not a historical analogy or a moral template. In the Palestinian case, intergenerational memory is produced within an ongoing structure of settler-colonial domination rather than in a "post-" frame: violence is not simply remembered after rupture, but continuously organized through regimes of mobility control, dispossession, and periodic intensifications of military force. For that reason, the article's theoretical grounding is located primarily in Palestinian oral history, feminist testimonio, and decolonial feminist approaches to memory as counter-archive and survival practice. Unlike the post-Holocaust families described by Bar-On (1995) or Jacobs (2016), whose generational trauma occurs in the shadow of survival, Palestinian families live within a still-active structure of occupation. Trauma is not inherited from the past; it is relived daily. The difference is not merely temporal but ontological: while Holocaust studies often trace how trauma is internalized psychically, Palestinian testimonies demonstrate how it is institutionalized politically, through checkpoints, demolitions, and restrictions on mobility.

In the Palestinian context, oral history has long served as a counter-archive to colonial historiography (Swedenburg 1995; Sayigh 1994). Palestinian scholarship has also emphasized that intergenerational memory in Palestine is shaped by the condition of ongoing domination rather than a completed rupture. In this frame, memory transmission is inseparable from the reproduction of everyday endurance under settler-colonial structures, an argument that complements oral history approaches by foregrounding how "history" remains politically active in the present. Bashir Bashir's work on history and memory in Palestine, for example, highlights how memory is not only commemorative but contested and regulated within asymmetrical political contexts, shaping what can be narrated and how (Bashir

2016). In parallel, research in psychology and public health has developed the concept of continuous traumatic stress to describe Palestinian life under chronic threat, where the violence is not simply remembered after it ends but persists as an ongoing horizon that structures daily experience and anticipatory fear (Farajallah 2022; Zedan 2025). Bringing these insights into dialogue with feminist testimonio helps clarify the article's central distinction: Palestinian women do not only inherit trauma from 1948; they narrate within an environment where dispossession, surveillance, and mobility control continue to generate trauma in the present.

Since the 1970s, scholars such as Rosemary Sayigh, Lila Abu-Lughod, and Julie Peteet have documented the ways Palestinians preserve history through embodied practices of storytelling, work, and kinship. Sayigh's *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries* (1979; 2011) and *Too Many Enemies* (1994) established oral testimony as a site of political consciousness, where memory is a means of reconstituting selfhood under exile. Her later writings (1998) describe women's oral narratives as acts of resistance to the Zionist erasure of Palestinian presence, creating what she terms "a people's history told from below."

Abu-Lughod (1990; 1993; 2010) and Peteet (1991; 2005) expanded this framework by exploring how gender, class, and space intersect in the making of Palestinian subjectivities. Peteet's ethnography of Palestinian women in the refugee camps of Lebanon showed that women's labor, mobility, and dress became encoded as political symbols, what she calls "the body as a sign of the nation." Similarly, Abu-Lughod (1993) demonstrated that storytelling in Bedouin societies serves as a form of moral discourse, where women's narratives of suffering articulate critiques of patriarchy and power.

The methodological contribution of these scholars lies not only in recording stories but in reading them as theory, as epistemological challenges to colonial and patriarchal knowledge systems. This article builds upon that tradition by positioning women's intergenerational storytelling as a genealogical archive, one that transmits ethical, political, and affective knowledge across decades of occupation.

Nadia Abu El-Haj's *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (2001) offers a critical lens through which to understand how power operates through claims to history and material evidence. Abu El-Haj demonstrates that Israeli archaeology is not a neutral scientific endeavor but a colonial practice that constructs the land as "Eretz Israel," a space purified of Palestinian history and re-inscribed with biblical temporality. In her view, archaeology functions as a technology of state-building, producing "facts" that authorize dispossession (Abu El-Haj, 2001, p. 283).

Her analysis is central to this study's theoretical foundation because it exposes the epistemic violence that

accompanies material erasure. If the land itself has been excavated to obliterate Palestinian presence, oral testimony becomes the counter-material archive, an act of re-inscription through words. The grandmother's recollection of Lydd, the mother's memories of Jericho, and the daughter's narratives of Ramallah's siege collectively produce a geography of memory that challenges the cartographies of settler colonialism. Each story reclaims fragments of place, roads, houses, and olive trees, that archaeology seeks to bury under nationalist myth.

In this sense, Abu El-Haj's critique converges with the feminist narrative method: both expose how knowledge production itself is colonized and insist on the authority of subaltern epistemologies. The family stories gathered here resist being "facts on the ground"; instead, they are "truths in the air," spoken, transmitted, and kept alive through orality and affect.

However, while Palestinian oral history has often focused on the first generation, the witnesses of 1948 or 1967, this study extends the scope to three generations of women whose lives span from the Nakba to the digital age. In doing so, it bridges the gap between historical testimony and contemporary ethnography, showing how memory practices evolve as resistance strategies in response to changing colonial technologies.

Building on these perspectives, Procter's (2024) work, *"My Grandmother Has Her Keys, Now I Have Mine,"* demonstrates the methodological potential of real-time documentation in contexts of ongoing genocide. By preserving messages and audio testimonies from over 30 individuals in Gaza since October 2023, Procter captures the granular details of life under bombardment, displacement, and siege, including the everyday struggles of securing food, water, and shelter. Her database approach situates testimonies as both historical evidence and as lived narratives that convey resilience, fear, and agency amid extreme precarity. Unlike retrospective Holocaust narratives, these testimonies unfold in the midst of violence, revealing the continuous and immediate nature of trauma for Palestinians. The work also underscores the ethical dimensions of testimony collection in conflict zones, balancing the need for documentation with the avoidance of additional harm to contributors (Procter, 2024).

Moreover, Procter's focus on Gaza highlights how narrative acts as a form of social reproduction under siege. Similarly, the women in this study transmit their memories during blackouts, sieges, and curfews, transforming storytelling into a survival strategy. As the daughter recounts the Ramallah siege to her own children, she participates in what Nora (1989) terms "lieux de mémoire," sites of memory where lived experience crystallizes into collective heritage. However, unlike Nora's European sites, which are institutionalized and monumental, these Palestinian sites are intimate

and domestic, formed in kitchens, sewing rooms, and around kerosene lamps.

The present study extends this analytical trajectory by tracing the lives of three generations of Palestinian women, from the Nakba through the Naksa, first and second Intifadas, to contemporary genocidal violence in Gaza. By linking historical displacements with contemporary lived experiences, this approach foregrounds the intergenerational transmission of trauma, political consciousness, and resilience. Grandmothers narrate the Nakba and early occupation; mothers recount experiences during the Intifadas, embedding lessons and memory into everyday family life; and daughters confront contemporary violence while negotiating inherited knowledge and survival strategies. This multi-generational perspective enables a critical dialogue between the retrospective scholarship on Holocaust survivors and the ongoing documentation of Palestinian genocide, highlighting both continuities and ruptures in collective memory, trauma, and survival (Procter, 2024).

Furthermore, integrating these Palestinian narratives with broader theoretical frameworks, such as Fanon's analysis of women's resistance under colonial regimes (Decker, 1990; Haddour, 2025), enriches the methodological approach. Fanon's insights into how Algerian women navigated violence, oppression, and political agency illuminate the complex intersections of gender, resistance, and generational memory in Palestinian contexts. The incorporation of feminist and postcolonial perspectives allows this study to move beyond conventional trauma-focused approaches, situating personal narratives within structural and political frameworks that account for systemic oppression, resilience, and ethical survival.

Frantz Fanon's writings on the Algerian liberation struggle offer a productive, though not unproblematic, theoretical lens for reading Palestinian women's narratives across three generations. In *A Dying Colonialism*, Fanon (1965, pp. 86–101) emphasizes the critical role Algerian women played in resistance, transforming spaces conventionally coded as private into arenas of political struggle. Women used domestic and social positions strategically, through concealment, mobility, and everyday labor, to facilitate revolutionary action. This analytic is useful here because it foregrounds how colonial domination saturates intimate life, making ordinary practices politically consequential.

Yet Fanon is not adopted as an unqualified authority on gender. Decolonial feminist scholarship has cautioned that anti-colonial nationalist frameworks can retain masculinist grammars of liberation, risking the symbolic elevation of "woman" as an emblem of the nation while leaving the specificity of gendered labor, vulnerability, and agency under-theorized (Mohanty 2003; Lugones 2010). This also resonates with decolonial feminist critiques that warn against feminist projects that abstract gender from colonial

violence and racial capitalism, insisting instead on locating women's lives within the material infrastructures of empire (Vergès 2019). Read through this critical tradition, Fanon's value lies less in offering a finished gender theory than in naming the colonial reorganization of everyday life, an insight that this article supplements by centering women's testimonies as theorizing survival rather than merely illustrating struggle.

Within this calibrated frame, the grandmother's management of household life, her economic contribution through sewing, and her resilience amid displacement echo Fanon's depiction of women sustaining struggle through domestic and social labor (Fanon 1965, pp. 92–97; Decker 1990, pp. 5–26). Similarly, the mother's acts of protection and coordination during the First Intifada, signaling military movements, obstructing military convoys, and nurturing children's involvement in cultural resistance, mirror Fanon's observation that ordinary gestures can become strategic practices under colonial rule (Fanon 1965, pp. 95–100; Haddour 2025, pp. 78–102). In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1963, pp. 179–200) underscores the psychological and symbolic dimensions of decolonization, emphasizing that liberation is sustained through both public and intimate acts; this perspective illuminates the daughter's navigation of siege, early independence, and her dual role as student activist and mother. Here, storytelling and political pedagogy in domestic space operate not as private coping alone but as practices through which political consciousness is reproduced across generations (Decker 1990, pp. 12–18; Haddour 2025, pp. 90–95).

The parallels between Algeria and Palestine nevertheless require careful limits. Fanon is used heuristically to illuminate a shared problem, how colonial power reorganizes intimacy, mobility, and everyday moral worlds, rather than to map Algeria onto Palestine. What transfers is the analytic of colonial saturation, whereby domination enters the ordinary and makes social reproduction a political arena; what does not transfer wholesale are the historical specificities of each struggle, the organizational forms of resistance, and the gender regimes shaping women's roles. Attending to these limits strengthens the theoretical contribution and situates Palestinian women's agency as negotiated under occupation, articulated through care and labor, and enacted through everyday practices that transform survival into a mode of resistance.

Finally, the article contributes methodologically by integrating feminist testimonio, genealogical analysis, and Fanonian theory to articulate a decolonial framework of intergenerational resistance. By positioning the family as a living archive, it challenges both colonial erasures and disciplinary compartmentalization, refusing to separate memory from resistance, domesticity from politics, and gender from nationhood.

Counter-Archives of Survival: Feminist Testimonio and the Politics of Knowledge

This study employs a feminist narrative methodology, drawing heavily on the Latin American tradition of *testimonio*. *Testimonio* is understood not as an isolated autobiography but as a narrated life that bears witness to collective struggle, injustice, and survival (Beverley 2004, pp. 32–33). In this sense, the personal story of a woman is always also a political account, linking her individual experiences to structural realities of displacement, gendered violence, and colonial oppression. Feminist scholars have long argued that centering women's voices disrupts dominant historical narratives and challenges epistemic erasure (Mohanty 2003, p. 50; Collins 2000, pp. 21–23; Abu-Lughod 2010). The oral stories of women are treated here as repositories of knowledge that reveal both everyday survival and broader socio-political conditions.

In Palestinian contexts, oral history and women's testimonies have been especially crucial in reconstructing histories silenced by state archives (Sayigh 1994, pp. 15–16). As Rema Hammami observes, women's narratives function as “counter-histories,” reframing collective memory through the lens of intimate, gendered experience (Hammami 1990, p. 25). This article situates three intergenerational narratives within this tradition, approaching them not as mere biography but as *testimonios* of Palestinian endurance across shifting historical and political landscapes.

Moreover, feminist and postcolonial scholars emphasize that knowledge is not neutral but bound up with power. In the Palestinian context, this is especially visible in the politics of archaeology and history-writing. As Nadia Abu El-Haj demonstrates, archaeology in Israel/Palestine has functioned as a political practice that territorializes the land and erases alternative narratives (Abu El-Haj 2001, pp. 11–14). Against this backdrop, women's oral testimonies and intergenerational narratives can be read as *counter-archives*: forms of historical knowledge that resist erasure and assert Palestinian presence through memory, storytelling, and material practices of everyday life.

To deepen this narrative approach, the study incorporates genealogical analysis. A genealogical framework enables tracing the continuities and ruptures across generations, showing how memories, traumas, and survival strategies are transmitted and reworked within a family line. In doing so, the analysis follows scholars of intergenerational memory who argue that trauma and resilience are not only remembered but also inherited, shaping descendants' identities and orientations to the world (Hirsch 2012, pp. 5–6).

This method allows the grandmother's forced displacement from Lydd, the mother's navigation of widowhood

and exile, and the daughter's experiences during the Intifadas to be read together as layers of memory that produce a gendered genealogy of Palestinian struggle. Such an approach emphasizes the "temporal depth" of women's narratives, foregrounding how historical upheavals become embedded in intimate family life and passed on as both burden and resource.

The material traces within these narratives, the grandmother's sewing, the family bakery, and the construction of a new house never lived in, also resonate with Abu El-Haj's insights about how material culture is inseparable from political struggle. Where official archaeology claims the land for one people, genealogical storytelling anchors it in lived practices, familial continuity, and embodied histories of Palestinian women (Abu El-Haj 2001, pp. 272–74).

Central to this project is a relational mode of knowledge production in which the researcher is not positioned outside the narrative world being studied. Feminist methodology has long challenged the insider/outsider binary and the assumption that proximity necessarily undermines rigor; instead, it emphasizes situated knowledge, embodied research, and the co-production of meaning as epistemologically productive (Haraway 1988, pp. 581–82; Abu-Lughod 1991, pp. 147–48; Collins 2000, pp. 21–23; Mohanty 2003, p. 50). In this study, being embedded within the family archive and its practices of remembrance enabled access to forms of memory work, pauses, silences, sensory detail, and material traces that are often inaccessible to extractive research encounters.

Reflexivity here is therefore not an apology for closeness but a method of transparency and accountability: an explicit account of how narratives are shaped through relationship, care, and intergenerational transmission. Rather than collapsing into autobiography, the analysis treats personal testimony as a situated lens through which broader patterns of dispossession, endurance, and political socialization become readable.

My positionality shaped not only access to these narratives but also the conditions under which they were told, selected, and interpreted. Because one narrator is my mother and one narrative is my own, the interview process was not a neutral extraction of "data" but a relational event structured by family roles, trust, affection, and the ethics of care. This proximity raises specific analytic and ethical challenges: idealization of family members, the smoothing of contradictions to preserve coherence, and the reproduction of "canonical" family stories through repetition. It also raises the possibility of selective memory, where certain episodes become foregrounded because they carry moral weight or because they have been retold often, while other experiences remain less narratable, less remembered, or deliberately withheld.

To address these challenges, I approached narration as co-construction and built reflexive checks into both collection and analysis. First, I relied on repeated conversations

across time, attending to consistencies, shifts, and moments of hesitation or silence as analytically meaningful rather than as errors to be corrected. Second, I triangulated narrative details with family archives (photographs, letters, and material traces) and, where the grandmother's story is reconstructed, with corroborating accounts from other relatives. Third, I distinguish between memory as factual recall and memory as moral-political narration: even where details may be partial, the narrative form itself, what is emphasized, what is omitted, and how events are linked, reveals how political consciousness and survival strategies are transmitted. These practices do not eliminate subjectivity; they render it visible and accountable, aligning with feminist *testimonio's* insistence that truth is produced through situated witnessing rather than detached neutrality. I also remained attentive to ambivalence and constraint within the narratives, resisting the impulse to convert endurance into uncomplicated heroism.

As a participant, I hold insider knowledge that allows deeper engagement with the lived realities of the family and their socio-political contexts. As a researcher, I employ reflexivity to remain critically aware of how my subjectivity shapes both the narration and the analysis (England 1994, p. 82). This reflexive stance recognizes that my testimony is not merely an individual account but part of a collective history of Palestinian women. By situating my story within an intergenerational genealogy, I avoid collapsing into autobiography; instead, the personal is framed as a lens into broader patterns of memory, loss, and resistance.

This positionality aligns with the *testimonio* tradition, where narrators often speak not only for themselves but on behalf of a collective, collapsing the boundary between the "I" and the "we" (Beverly 2004, p. 39). Thus, my dual role strengthens rather than undermines the credibility of this research. It ensures the analysis is grounded in lived experience while remaining critically aware of the interpretive act.

The narratives were constructed from oral testimony, memory work, and family archives (letters, photographs, and material culture). Each woman's story was recounted through a process of storytelling that foregrounded her own voice, rather than imposing external categories. The grandmother's testimony is reconstructed from accounts given by surviving family members, as she was killed during the occupation. The mother's and daughter's testimonies are based on oral narration and memory work, including repeated conversations that emphasized accuracy, reflection, and contextual detail.

This qualitative material is analyzed thematically, attending to how each woman narrates displacement, labor, survival, and agency. Themes are situated within the socio-political context of their time: the grandmother's forced displacement in 1948 and subsequent life in Jericho; the mother's navigation of exile, widowhood, and motherhood

during the Intifadas; and the daughter's coming of age during sieges and uprisings. The analysis is thus both micro (the intimate family story) and macro (the socio-political structures shaping those lives).

Given the deep personal nature of these narratives, ethical responsibility is paramount. The decision to use family stories is grounded in consent and recognition of their importance as historical testimony. The narratives are handled with respect to dignity, memory, and loss. By presenting them in the form of feminist *testimonio*, the research resists voyeurism and instead positions women's voices as acts of resistance and historical documentation.

The Grandmother: Survivor, Laborer, and Builder of Legacy

The grandmother's story begins in al-Lydd, from where she was forcibly expelled during the Nakba of 1948. Even before the Nakba, my grandmother described an early awareness that Jewish migrants arriving from Europe would not come to Palestine as refugees seeking shelter, but as settlers who would eventually attempt to dominate the land. She shared this assessment with my mother when she was still a child and recalled that children repeated popular rhymes in the pre-1948 period as the waves of Zionist immigration intensified. One chant she remembered was:

"Palestine is our land,
and the Jews are our enemies,
they knock on our door like beggars,
wanting a bag of flour."¹

The function of this chant was not to express hostility toward Judaism as a religion, but to capture a popular political reading of the newcomers as agents of a colonial project rather than guests. Read genealogically, this episode matters because it locates political consciousness not only after catastrophe, but in the anticipatory horizon that preceded it, an everyday form of analysis transmitted from grandmother to mother before 1948.

During the Nakba, alongside her family and thousands of others, she walked for days under the summer sun, carrying nothing but clothes on her back. Zionist militias prevented displaced Palestinians from taking even basic provisions: no flour, no oil, no sugar. Soldiers confiscated supplies,

scattered them onto the ground, and mixed them so that fleeing families could not reuse or share them. Starvation became an inevitable companion.

As my grandmother later recalled, hunger drove people to desperate acts of survival. They gathered animal droppings, picked out the undigested barley grains, washed them, ground them, and made bread from the remnants, just to stay alive.

This scene locates dispossession at the level of the body and the stomach, where exile is lived not as abstraction but as enforced improvisation. Read as *testimonio*, the episode functions as a social diagnosis: hunger is not "misfortune" but an organized condition produced through expulsion, confiscation, and forced mobility. In genealogical terms, such memories transmit more than pain; they pass on ethical knowledge about endurance, what must be remembered, and what can never be normalized.

After days of displacement, my grandmother reached the Jalazone refugee camp, where she later married my grandfather, her cousin. Their wedding took place in a tent. They soon moved to Jericho, where my grandfather worked as a baker for the owner of a small neighborhood bakery. Life, before moving to Jericho, brought new struggles, not only the pain of exile but also the alienation of class and belonging. Local farmers in Ramallah villages, who had not been displaced, often looked down on the refugees, refusing to treat them as equals. Many of the newly displaced were forced into menial work, street cleaners, domestic workers, or beggars (Fig. 1).

This tension between the *refugees* and the *locals* was captured in the biting folk songs of that era, songs that still echo the pain and humiliation of exile:

"Oh people of the mountain, may your roots be cut off
If it weren't for the Haganah, none of us would have come!"

To which the locals mockingly replied:

"Why all this arrogance, you refugees?

Your bread is wormy, and your flour is made of barley."

Amid this marginalization, my grandmother began to rebuild her dignity through her craft. She owned a sewing machine, a gift from her grandmother that had been part of her dowry when she married my grandfather. With it, she started sewing clothes for the people of Jericho. Her skill and persistence earned her a reputation as a talented seamstress. My grandfather, meanwhile, worked tirelessly at the bakery, saving every coin they could.

At that time, houses were rarely rented; families either owned their homes or lived in spaces attached to their work. My grandparents found a small room beside the bakery. They shared it with the bakery owner's donkey, even after their first child was born. They had no electricity,

¹ This chant is reproduced with one minor alteration: I replaced a dehumanizing term used in the original wording with "انءاءء" ("our enemies") to avoid repeating hate language while preserving the political meaning conveyed in the historical memory. The chant is included here as an oral-historical trace of popular perception in the pre-Nakba period, not as an endorsement of hostility toward Jews as Jews or as a religion.

Fig. 1 From right to left: my grandmother, Fatima Ibrahim Abu Raddaha; her sister-in-law, who was martyred with her, Shahrazad Abdel Salam Najm al-Din al-Masry; her brother, Ahmed Ibrahim Abu Raddaha; her mother, Ni'mah Abu Msallam; and her father, Ibrahim Abu Raddaha. Source: family album



so my grandmother would sew by the dim light of an oil lamp, turning thread and fabric into a fragile form of stability.

The sewing machine and the bakery are not incidental details; they mark what might be called survival infrastructure, gendered labor that converts precarity into continuity. They also register as counter-archival traces: where official records erase the texture of refugee life, the narrative preserves history through material objects and ordinary routines (needle, lamp, bread, one-room living), revealing how the domestic sphere becomes a site where collective life is rebuilt under constraint.

Eventually, they managed to buy both the bakery and the house above it. Slowly, their financial situation improved, and the family grew. They had nine children, all of whom slept together in one small room above the bakery, lulled to sleep by the scent of freshly baked bread.

Tragically, just when the family had managed to build a new home, my grandmother never lived to see it. A military vehicle struck her, killing her, her eldest daughter, and her sister-in-law, along with her niece. Her story ended violently, but her resilience, labor, and will to create life amid destruction remained an enduring source of strength for her daughters and granddaughters.

The grandmother's narrative shows that resilience is not a personal trait but a patterned response to structural violence. Her labor produces continuity under conditions designed to fragment family life, while her death underscores the persistent precarity of Palestinian existence under militarized rule. In this genealogy, she transmits not only a memory of loss but a repertoire of endurance, work, dignity, and the refusal of disappearance that later generations inherit and rework.

The Mother: Guardian, Activist, and Cultural Mediator

When Naksa (1967) began, my mother was only 6 years old. She vividly remembered the terror of those days, the family crowding into a small backroom behind my grandfather's bakery in Jericho as Israeli planes thundered above. The streets were dangerous; soldiers shot anyone who appeared outside during curfew. Through the bakery window, she saw a Jordanian soldier being killed. His body lay in the street for 4 days.

My grandmother, overwhelmed with compassion, wove a wreath of mulberry leaves in the small yard and, risking her life, ran out briefly to place it on his body before rushing back inside.

When the curfew was lifted, my mother ventured outside and saw the aftermath of war. A burned bus still stood near the road; inside, the driver's charred body remained in his seat, his hands frozen on the steering wheel.

To hide any sign of life at night, families smeared their windows with blue dye, ensuring that no candlelight could be seen from outside. They listened secretly to *Voice of Palestine*, broadcast from Lebanon, to hear news about their people. Later, they tuned in to the Jordanian radio program *Salamat* ("Greetings"), which aired daily messages between Palestinians in the homeland and those displaced abroad, an emotional thread stitching together a fragmented nation.

These practices show how occupation reorganizes sensory life and temporality, when light must be hidden, listening becomes political, and the home becomes both shelter and a site shaped by surveillance and threat. Radio, coded routines, and the discipline of curfew are not merely background conditions; they form an infrastructure of endurance

that keeps social bonds intact under fragmentation, turning ordinary domestic space into a channel for collective memory and political orientation.

Twelve years after the Naksa, my grandmother took my mother on a journey to Lydd, to show her the family's original home. Iraqi Jewish families now lived there and refused to let them even stand by the gate. Yet, the mulberry tree, the *tūtah* that shaded her childhood, was still there. Everything else had changed, but that tree remained, silently witnessing exile's unending repetition.

Years later, tragedy struck again when my grandmother and my mother's sister were killed in a military vehicle attack. Suddenly, my mother, only 18 years old, became the eldest daughter and caretaker for her siblings. She began working as a teacher in a private school in Jericho while also running the household.

Despite this early burden, she carried forward her mother's resilience. During the First Intifada,² her younger brothers joined the resistance, throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Israeli buses. Both were arrested, one sentenced to 5 years, the other to 2, and the family home was ordered demolished. My mother traveled long distances to visit them in the Negev prison, leaving at dawn and returning after midnight, leaving her children behind in Beitin.

Like many Palestinian women of her generation, she also played a vital role in the civil resistance. She would watch the roads, alerting the youth of incoming military jeeps by knocking on electricity poles, a signal that would echo from one street to another. She and other women placed empty shoe boxes in black plastic bags on the roads to delay the soldiers, forcing them to bring bomb-detection robots and giving the young men time to flee.

What appears here as improvisation is collective technique: women's micro-actions interrupt the logistics of military control, creating small temporal openings in which others can survive. At the same time, the prison visits, demolition threat, and constant movement reveal how women's care work becomes political labor under occupation, less visible than confrontation, yet essential to sustaining family life and community resilience amid carceral governance.

Beyond resistance, she was deeply committed to her children's empowerment. She encouraged her daughters to pursue higher education and to learn self-defense at a young age, something uncommon at that time. One of her daughters became the lead singer of an Islamic nasheed group, performing at festivals, memorials, and cultural events across the West Bank throughout the 1990s. The mother herself



Fig. 2 My mother, along with her four children, at Al-Aqsa Mosque. The daughter is the second child to the left. Source: family album

supervised and accompanied the group, ensuring their safety and discipline (Fig. 2).

The mother's narrative clarifies how intergenerational resilience is transmitted as practice rather than slogan, through risk management, mobility under constraint, prison visiting routines, and the deliberate cultivation of education and embodied confidence as protective resources. Her life links the intimate sphere to macro-structures of domination: curfew, demolition orders, imprisonment, and the gendered burden of sustaining family continuity. In this genealogy, she becomes a bridge between the grandmother's dispossession and the daughter's coming of age under siege, translating inherited loss into a lived pedagogy of endurance, discipline, and political consciousness.

² The First Intifada (1987–1993) was a mass uprising marked by popular mobilization, strikes, and street-level confrontations, alongside extensive arrest campaigns and collective punishment.

The Daughter: Inheriting Resistance, Embodying Continuity

The daughter's life unfolded within the geography of occupation and the memory of her foremothers' endurance. Born into the late years of the First Intifada, her childhood was marked by the soundscape of military incursions, curfews, and whispers of defiance. Her earliest memory remains the most indelible: she was 3 years old in 1989, walking in her village beside her mother, who carried her baby sister on her hip. A military jeep passed by. The little girl, having watched the older boys in the village raise their fingers in victory signs, imitated them with innocent joy. Her two small fingers rose high, declaring an unspoken allegiance to the collective dream of liberation.

The jeep screeched to a halt. Soldiers reversed, jumped out, and surrounded the family. Her mother's voice trembled, but she stayed calm as she told her daughter to hold the baby tight. The soldiers took her mother away, leaving the toddler and her sister alone in the dusty road. The child stood frozen, clutching her sister, watching the jeep disappear into the horizon.

This moment became one of the most retold stories in her family, passed from mother to daughter, then to the next generation. It became an origin story of defiance. What the soldiers read as a provocation was, for the child, an act of imitation, yet it revealed a crucial truth of colonial encounters: under occupation, even innocence is politicized. As Frantz Fanon observed in *A Dying Colonialism*, the colonizer perceives every act of autonomy as a potential rebellion; the simplest gestures, the smallest expressions of joy or pride, become "signs to be interpreted, punished, and controlled" (Fanon 1965, p. 44; Haddour 2025, p. 113).

This episode shows how colonial power does not merely police acts of organized resistance; it disciplines ordinary life by turning the body, especially the child's body, into a readable political surface. In genealogical terms, the event matters not only because it happened, but because it is repeatedly narrated: retelling becomes a form of political socialization, transforming a moment of fear into a lesson about power, vulnerability, and the meanings imposed on everyday gestures.

Years later, the daughter would recall that incident when she became a mother herself. She recognized that her mother's body had been doubly marked, by the physical violence of the soldiers and by the invisible weight of motherhood under siege. This, as Peteet (1991, p. 32) notes in her study of Palestinian women during the First Intifada, is the dual occupation of the Palestinian female body: it is both the vessel of national reproduction and the site of political repression. Yet within this duality lies a profound resistance. Each act of survival, carrying a baby through a checkpoint,

lighting a lamp during curfew, and narrating stories of martyrs to children, constitutes an unrecorded but deeply political performance.

The daughter grew up to inhabit that performance with both defiance and tenderness. The geography of her youth was defined by checkpoints, closures, and the daily negotiation of danger. During the 2002 siege of Ramallah,³ imposed by Ariel Sharon's government, her world narrowed to a few kilometers, as curfews and closures disrupted daily life and schooling across the West Bank (Washington Post 2001). To reach her school, barely 10 min away, she was forced to travel for hours through back roads and unpaved detours, crossing the infamous *Surda* checkpoint that separated Ramallah from its surrounding villages. Sometimes it took 4 h each way. Eventually, when the journey became unbearable, she was forced to live in a teachers' dormitory far from her family, learning at an early age to translate absence into strength.

Here, the checkpoint does more than delay movement; it produces a politics of time that reorganizes education, family intimacy, and the horizon of aspiration. Forced early independence is not simply a personal virtue; it is a structured outcome of immobilization regimes that manufacture separation and then normalize it as the cost of ordinary life. The macro-architecture of control is lived at the micro-level as exhaustion, detour, and interrupted schooling.

Her early independence, imposed by occupation, became a form of resilience. The experience of living apart from her family, caring for herself at 16, shaped her sense of self and her understanding of what it meant to resist structurally, not only emotionally. As she matured, resistance evolved from instinct into an ideology. At university, she joined the student movement, becoming an active member of the student council. There she learned to debate, to organize, and to bridge ideological differences between Islamic, leftist, and independent blocs, experiences that mirrored the pluralistic resistance her grandmother and mother had also lived, each within their own historical moment.

Her activism intensified during the years of the internal Palestinian division, following the 2007 split between Fatah and Hamas. She participated in sit-ins and hunger strikes opposing the suppression of student voices on West Bank campuses. She slept in university halls alongside her colleagues, refusing to return home until their right to free political expression was respected. It was a painful irony that she was protesting Palestinian security forces, not the occupation army. This internal repression deepened her understanding of what Saba Mahmood (2005, p. 38) calls

³ The Second Intifada (2000–2005) intensified Israel's closure regime, producing prolonged curfews, raids, and checkpoints that restructured education, work, and family life across the West Bank.

the paradox of agency: resistance is not only against external domination but also against internal structures that reproduce forms of power and silencing.

Less than a month after her marriage, her husband was arrested, not by the occupation but by Palestinian security authorities, victims of political factionalism.⁴ She visited him weekly in prison, continuing to teach at the same school she had once attended as a student. Her greatest sorrow was that his cell was not in an Israeli jail, where imprisonment had long been framed as resistance, but in a Palestinian one, a cruel reversal of the liberation struggle's moral code. The daughter's endurance during that time reflected what Fanon (1965, p. 84) described as the transformation of colonial violence into a recursive internalization, a violence turned inward upon the colonized body politic.

Years later, she completed her postgraduate studies, gave birth to her first child on the same day she received her master's degree, and earned a prestigious scholarship to pursue her doctorate in Germany. When the occupation prevented her husband, a former student activist, from traveling, she made the difficult decision to go with her daughter and mother. This intergenerational journey, grandmother, mother, and child, represented both rupture and continuity. As Abu-Lughod (2002, p. 783), Kanaaneh (2002, pp. 10–11), and Mahmood (2005, p. 152) argue, women's acts of endurance are not merely responses to oppression but articulations of ethical and political subjectivity. The daughter's decision to migrate for knowledge while holding her family together across borders exemplifies this agency of continuity.

Her life was not only an individual struggle but a continuation of the collective narrative of Palestinian women who, across three generations, have translated loss into legacy. The story of her early childhood, the raised fingers of victory, and the abduction of her mother became the first chapter in a lifelong genealogy of defiance. As Diana Allan (2021, p. 11) describes in *Voices of the Nakba*, oral histories among Palestinian families function as “living archives” that transform trauma into moral instruction. Through storytelling, the daughter turned memory into pedagogy.

During the Ramallah siege, she found herself repeating the same ritual her mother once performed during the First Intifada. When the electricity was cut off, she gathered her children by the light of a gas lamp and told them stories, not of fictional heroes, but of real martyrs, their courage

chronicled in the book *Green Birds: Shining Examples of the Martyrs of the Blessed Intifada in Palestine* (Anon. 1989). Her children memorized the stories, just as she once had. The circle closed: storytelling became both survival and socialization.

In these nightly sessions, the line between witness and narrator blurred. She was simultaneously remembering, teaching, and healing. Storytelling thus became an act of what Foucault (1977, p. 145) might call *counter-genealogy*, the reclaiming of one's historical narrative from the disciplinary apparatus of power. The daughter's oral pedagogy also resonates with Fanon's understanding of women's political embodiment during the Algerian struggle: that their role was not only to carry messages or shelter fighters, but to “mediate between generations, making the revolution continuous” (Decker 1990, p. 17; Haddour 2025, p. 118).

The daughter's story thus anchors the continuum of resistance in the domestic and intimate sphere, where memory, body, and story intersect. The victory sign of a 3-year-old became the first spark in a lineage of endurance. Each subsequent act, crossing checkpoints, protesting repression, and raising children in diaspora, carried the echo of that gesture. This continuity embodies what Mahmood (2005, p. 175) calls *the politics of inhabiting norms*: rather than rejecting inherited practices, Palestinian women resignify them, turning motherhood, storytelling, and even waiting into forms of political agency.

Ultimately, the daughter's life demonstrates that resistance is not only performed in demonstrations or prisons but also within the home, in the retelling of stories, in the teaching of history, and in the decision to remember. As Abu El-Haj (2001, p. 287) writes, the archaeology of identity in Palestine is not about the physical ruins of the land but about “the living ruins carried in memory.” In the daughter's testimony, we see this living archaeology at work: the inherited memory of dispossession transformed into a continuous articulation of existence.

Read across the three generations, the daughter's narrative shows how intergenerational memory becomes a practice of survival under conditions where violence is not past but ongoing. The macro-structures of occupation, checkpoints, siege, surveillance, and political fragmentation enter the intimate sphere as rearranged time, forced separations, and the politicization of ordinary gestures. Yet these same conditions generate counter-practices: education as protection, storytelling as counter-archive, and domestic pedagogy as the reproduction of political consciousness. In this sense, memory is not merely the inheritance of loss, but a praxis of endurance that continually translates pain into orientation, care into agency, and survival into resistance.

⁴ Established after the 1993 Oslo Accords, the Palestinian Authority developed policing and security institutions under conditions of limited autonomy and ongoing occupation; in practice, this created an additional layer of governance through which political dissent was sometimes contained and criminalized within Palestinian official political agenda.

Storytelling and the Transmission of Collective Memory

The grandmother repeatedly narrated the Nakba and its aftermath to her children, recounting displacement from Lydd, the humiliations of refugee life, and the slow rebuilding of dignity through labor. These stories did not only describe what happened; they transmitted interpretive frames, how to name violence, how to recognize hierarchies of belonging, and how survival is built through everyday work. The mother continued this pedagogical practice during the First Intifada. On nights of electricity cuts, she gathered her children by gas-lamp light and retold stories of martyrs and resistance from a book she held dear, reading and repeating until the children memorized the accounts (Anon. 1989). In such moments, storytelling was not an escape from political reality; it was a method of living with it, disciplining attention, cultivating vigilance, and sustaining a sense of collective orientation under siege and curfew.

The daughter carries forward this tradition with her own children, narrating the Second Intifada, the Ramallah siege, and the experience of checkpoints and closures as formative conditions of family life. Yet the continuity here is not only in content but in function: narration remains a technology of endurance through which the next generation learns how to inhabit constraint without accepting it as normal. Across the three generations, storytelling emerges as both archive and practice, preserving history from below while actively shaping the political and ethical sensibilities through which Palestinian life is sustained.

Read genealogically, storytelling is the medium through which macro-structures, displacement, occupation, carcerality, and the governance of mobility enter the intimate sphere and become thinkable, narratable, and transmissible. These narratives do not simply inherit loss; they inherit ways of enduring it, transforming memory into a lived repertoire of survival and resistance.

This emphasis on narration as preservation resonates with recent efforts to document Palestinian life under extreme violence in real time. Procter's work on preserving testimonies from Gaza, collected through voice notes and messages amid bombardment and displacement, highlights how documentation becomes both evidence and survival practice: a way to keep words, emotions, and details from being lost to the violence that produces them (Procter 2025, pp. 100–106). The archive in this article is different in medium but parallel in impulse: where Procter safeguards testimonies through digital databases, this genealogy safeguards them through repeated retellings, family memory work, and material traces. Both practices resist the epistemic regime that decides what counts as

“evidence,” what can be recorded, and whose lives are readable within official frameworks (Abu El-Haj 2001, pp. 282–287).

At the same time, the genealogical frame sharpens what is distinctive about Palestinian intergenerational memory: it is not organized around a completed event with an “after,” but around an ongoing structure in which dispossession reproduces itself across time. In this sense, the women's narratives articulate not only trauma but continuity, how violence becomes cyclical and administrative, lived through checkpoints, curfews, raids, and restrictions that reshape education, marriage, and movement as everyday problems. Oral history thus becomes what some scholars describe as an emergency practice: a way of preserving history under conditions where erasure is not accidental but systematic.

Across these three lives, memory shifts from inheritance to praxis. What is transmitted is not only what happened, but how to live with what continues to happen: how to organize care, how to cultivate education as protection, how to use storytelling as moral orientation, and how to refuse disappearance by keeping the past present in speech. In this way, the family becomes a living archive whose contents are renewed with each retelling, memory as structure, and narration as resistance.

This genealogy clarifies the article's central claim: intergenerational memory is not merely the inheritance of loss but a situated form of counter-archival practice. Under occupation, narration becomes both evidence and endurance, linking intimate life to macro-structures of colonial governance while producing alternative epistemologies of survival.

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