

**Memory, Identity, and Urban Heritage in
Jerusalem: A Book Review of Al-Quds wa al-Bint
Shalabiyya Jerusalem and the Shalabiyya Girl by
Aida Ali Najjar**

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Abstract: This study aims to examine Al-Quds wa al-Bint al-Shalabiyya written by Aida Ali Najjar. This is actually and critically a seminal work documenting both cultural as well as social life in Jerusalem before 1948. Through oral narratives, personal observations, and archival records, Aida Najjar reconstructs urban memory. She highly paid a great attention to women's roles in daily life situations. This book review, which is guided by qualitative evaluative approach, thoroughly evaluates the thematic ideas and focus, methodological method along with contribution to local studies in Palestine. This book obviously promotes methodological questions about certain historical memory reliability as a source in spite of it presents valuable and rich insight into the social fabric of Jerusalem, the sacred city. The study clearly situates the work within more broader scholarship regarding Palestinian identity. Additionally, cultural heritage and gendered memory were highlighted through

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shedding light on its value for scholars in Middle Eastern social history and literature which concerns with memory studies.

Keywords: Jerusalem, Palestinian cultural memory, Middle Eastern cultural studies, Narrative identity, Urban heritage, Women's history, Palestinian literature.

الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة النقدية إلى استعراض كتاب القدس والبنات الشلبية للدكتورة عائدة علي نجار؛ هذا الكتاب الذي يوثق الحياة ثقافيا واجتماعيا في المدينة المقدسة في فترة ما قبل 1948. ومن خلال الروايات الشفوية والملاحظة الشخصية والوثائق الأرشيفية يعيد الكتاب بناء قيّم ذاكرة القدس المدينة المقدسة. ويوضح بتركيز دور المرأة والتقاليد والممارسات الاجتماعية اليومية. وهذه القراءة النقدية تتبع منهجية التقييم النوعي التحليلي لمؤلفة الكتاب، وتقوم بتقييم الأبعاد والمحاور الموضوعية للكتاب مع إبراز درجة إسهامه في إثراء الدراسات المحلية الفلسطينية، كونه يركز على تاريخ المدن والدراسات التي تتعلق بالذاكرة. كما تناقش هذه الدراسة أهمية الكتاب التي تتعلق بالذاكرة، بما يعكس أهميته في المجال الدراسي أدبيا واجتماعيا وثقافيا في الشرق الأوسط.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الذاكرة الثقافية الفلسطينية؛ القدس؛ التراث الحضاري؛ الهوية السردية؛ تاريخ المرأة؛ الدراسات الثقافية في الشرق الأوسط.

1. Introduction

Jerusalem, the sacred city, according to both Khalidi (1997) and Tamari (2009), has occupied unique role in studies that highly focus on cultural memory, social history, and identity in Palestine. Despite the main concern regarding palestinian focus on political and religious literary works, putting the daily social practices alongside experiences unexplored, especially women's roles as noted by Abu-Lughod (1998). "Jerusalem and the Shalabiyya Girl, *Al-Quds wa al-Bint al-Shalabiyya* by Aida Najjar covers and completely addresses this clear gap. Thus, through the realistic documentation of cultural and social dimensions in Jerusalem prior the period 1948". Aida Najjar highly depends on archival records, oral experiences alongside historical issues, in addition to precious

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personal observation. The author of this book offers an detailed personal report of urban memory. Following this exploration of women's roles and social network to gather social and cultural real practices (Halbwachs, 1992).

1.1 Review Method

This book review is fully guided by a qualitative evaluative method. Focusing on the analysis of Najjar's work by drawing on literary structure of narration, thematic emphasis, and scholarly contributions. The basic dimensions conclude book assessment regarding strengths and weakness. Such assessment of the book's treatment of urban heritage, gendered experiences, and collective memory employs deep minded analysis for evaluating assumptions, practices, and emotions to acquire new insights. This critical reflection aims to understand "why" and "how". Also, this is very important in social and educational domain. Adding to this, "critical reflection on limitations alongside the strong methodology situates Najjar's work within wider debates for researchers. Discussions on urban history, identity, and cultural memory for Palestinians" as Said (2000) affirmed.

2. Book Overview

The clear thematic structure of Najjar's valuable book fully examines social life from the perspectives of community, family, as well as neighbourhood in Jerusalem. It clearly presents and "foregrounds the women's practices and experiences, their crucial roles in sustaining and preserving memory whether socially or culturally. It focuses on their social engagement" as stated by (Najjar, 2011). "Oral personal and official evidences or testimonies dominants unique role the narration. Exploring central complementation by archiving records that relate to personal memory in historical contexts".

In terms of Najjar's style, it is distinguished by integration of historical documents along with narrative storytelling. Focusing on the creation of a hybrid combination , which definitely bridges social history and literature. Her themes "transmit and occur across, offering shrewdness into collective and personal or individual aspects of social life in Jerusalem. These enthusiastic and realistic themes encompass urban

heritage, identity, and memory” (Tamari, 2009; Halbwachs, 1992). “The language of this valuable book is accessible. This will makes it align with audiences academically as well as generally while keeping strong scholarly rigor”.

3. Critical Analysis

3.1 Themes & Contributions

Najjar’s precious book highly contributes to some disciplinary domains. This book, in the first place, presents a very significant lens on urban identity. It fully clarifies “family structures, social networks, and neighborhoods form communal memory” (Halbwachs, 1992). secondly, Najjar’s book sheds light on preservation of cultural memory in Palestine. As “documenting daily real life in Jerusalem before the period 1948 as Khalidi (1997) asserted. In his turn, Abu-Lughod (1998) underscores that this book fills a gap in urban social history since it firmly focuses on women’s experiences. This gap may marginalizes female perspectives”.

Thirdly, “Najjar’s utilization of oral literary works demonstrates gendered memory practices as (Abu-Lughod, 1998) noted. This obviously concentrate on women as responsible for documentation or custodians regarding social history”. “This agrees with what Abu-Lughod demonstrates in his writings on cultural representation and feminism. Thus, connecting personal narratives to broader social structures constitutes a very effective and reflective element in authors’ life”.

4. Methodological Strong Points & Limitations

Najjar (2011) in her methodology, critically integrates and implies interdisciplinary method. That is, blending narrative observation, oral histories, and archival in her book. This work mainly enables a rich, solid depiction of social life and urban memory in one unique category. As Said (2000) emphasizes that relying on oral narration firmly provides possible limitations in methodology. Because memory overtime may be selective and reconstructed. However, “Najjar identifies and basically addresses this through cross-referencing archival sources, some parts remain fully depending on familial

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accounts. In this process, we can clearly find subjective points of view more than comprehensive social history”.

Although we find such limitations, still the design of methodology efficiently focuses on the interplay of cultural heritage, identity, and memory. This mainly remains a central contribution of her book (Tamari, 2009).

5. Critical Evaluation

By applying some smiles and metaphors in literal context, Najjar completely succeeded in presenting her style with words, visions realistic depiction to attract the readers’ attention across utilizing repetition, or symbols strong concentration, priority in general, to her style to be more significant. She foregrounded underrepresented voices. That is, she amazingly presented women in Jerusalem’s urban history as numerous studies like Khalidi (1997) and Abu-Lughod (1998) underscored. “Further, we can simply notice the thematic emphasis on real life situations, social traditions and customs, neighborhoods. Such themes highly enrich understanding of local society Palestinians. More and more opportunities for offering a real alternative to centered historical literary texts politically”.

The narrative style in Najjar’s readable book is strictly “balancing for researchers, rigor with readability, and interacting. This key features enable readers to be very close and connect with topics personally, simultaneously, keeping the narratives within cultural and social contexts” (Halbwachs, 1992).

But still a very derivative critical point is that some chapters could easily benefit from empower stronger frame theoretically. And directly connect short personal narratives into wider broader debates in both urban and memory studies. These ties or connections require to be strong enough. Thus, strengthening them highly would foster and enhance the analytical depth of the book for audiences academically (Tamari, 2009; Khalidi, 1997).

6. Strengths & Limitations

The author acknowledges some significant strengths to take into consideration: first, this book allows preserving

cultural memory along with urban heritage (Halbwachs, 1992). Second, it highly focuses on women's social practices and experiences in real life situations (Abu-Lughod, 1998). Third, Najjar's book blended oral histories and archival documentation as indicated in (Najjar, 2011) with accessible scholarly literary style. Despite the significant strong points, we found some weakness points. The identification by Said (2000) underscores reliance on memory as a main or primary source, which introduces potential subjectivity. Also, there is sounds of direct theoretical framing (Tamari, 2009). "Within neighborhoods, you can hardly find free not restricted discussion regarding socio economic diversity or variation whether culturally and ideologically".

7. Field Contribution

As Najjar's book is very distinguished and valuable resource for researchers regarding cultural studies in Palestine. Dealing with urban social history, recalling and highly offering memory and heritage studies. Concisely presents certain focus on gender studies.

This book precisely underscores the brilliant shape of how both individual and collective memories contribute and enhance the reconstruction of urban heritage and social identity before the period 1948. "The book excludes and challenges male role, taking into consideration that male may functions as male-centered narratives historically. Providing a rather inclusive perspective on urban life" as mentioned by Abu-Lughod (1998). This book has contributed a lot by enriching social and cultural aspects across levels. It considered as significant documentation of daily life in Jerusalem. Across Palestinian community, it cares about reinforcing memory and identity orally by blogging stories, tales, that link soul with place to be a great reminder of memory. Details women roles through beautiful girl(al-Bint al-Shalabiyya) who does crucial traditionally , socially, and culturally functions. Facing and preserving Arab history for Jerusalem. It came to be a cultural tool to defend the Islamic, christian existence in the sacred city. This book dominant academic accreditation in Arab cultural sites by teaching it in several Arab universities as a source in social sciences and

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history. Additionally, it won prizes highly esteemed as the best book in humanities in Philadelphia university in 2005, and the best prize as the best book in Arab competition in Bahrain 2006. In reference to foreign society, this book contributed by presenting palestinian novel for global readers across translation, the arts of resilience , sociological documentation, and preserving international heritage by documenting architectural building in Jerusalem. Consequently, being a great source for scholars around the world (المجموعة 194, 2011; ICN, n.d.; Darat al Funun, 2017).

8. Aida Ali Najjar Biography (1938-2020) & book biography

Palestinian-Jordanian writer Aida Najjar is both socioeconomic expert of the history in Jerusalem and Palestine, and also a brilliant researcher. She was born in Lifta village, Jerusalem. Najjar became a very important voice in Palestine when she preserves the political and cultural literary works regarding the Palestinians. Her birth was on December 12, 1938, in Lifta, in palestine. Her family moved to Jordan following the period 1948 Nakba.

“Her academic background, she has B. A in Sociology from Cairo University 1960. followed by the master’s degree 1965 in Journalism and Development from the University of Kensas. In reference to her PhD, it was about Mass Communication from Syracuse University 1975”. her doctoral thesis focused on the Palestinian press and nationalism between 1920 and 1948. Najjar’s career professionally she held various high level roles within international government ministries as well as organizations. For instance, she worked as a researcher and expert for the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food & Agriculture Organization FAO. In terms of media and research, she helped establish the Research Division of the Kuwait News Agency KUNA. “Her roles in government indicate that she served in the Jordanian Ministries of Information, Foreign Affairs, and Social Development, focusing on strategic planning and sustainable development”.

Her writing often blended personal memoir with historical documentation. Her works encompass: "History of the Palestinian Press (1900-1948), Al-Quds and the Shalabiyya Girl, The Girls of Amman in the Old Times, Lifta, O Noble One.

Death: Dr. Aida Ali Najjar passed away on February 5, 2020, in Amman, Jordan, at the age of eighty-one" (All 4 Palestine, n. d. ; Wikipedia contributors, n. d.; Aidanajjar, n.d.; Jerusalem Story, n. d.).

book biography:

* *Cover size of Al-Quds and al-Bint al-Shalabiyya by Dr. Aida Najjar is 24x17cm.*

* *Publisher: Dar Salwa for publishing and Studies, Amman-Jordan.*

* *Type of cover: Soft cover paperback; colour: white and green, 3rd edition.*

* *Content: description of Jerusalem through the memory of "al-Bint al-Shalabiyya", documentation of cultural and social details in Jerusalem.*

* *Number of pages: 375 page (large), chapters: 14; date of publication: 2011, followed by edition 12 later.*

9. Conclusion

"*Al-Quds wa al-Bint al-Shalabiyya* (Jerusalem and Shalabiyya Girl) by Aida Ali Najjar is a seminal effort and appreciated work on Jerusalem's cultural as well as social memory". This book leads to be interdisciplinary methodology, highly holds the basic focus on women, alongside combining archival documentation with oral narratives. This will make it a unique source for scholars locally and globally for cultural heritage. "The book 's contributions outweigh its constraints", despite some methodological restrictions strictly exist. This study sheds light on the book's crucial role for future research academically and underscores its potential to shape and inspire more studies on memory, gender, and urban heritage throughout the world.

Overall, the book states meaningfully depiction and thorough foundation for future research on males-centered roles, memory, identity, urban heritage in the middle east.

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1. Ethical Statement

This study follows ethical research standards in accordance with APA7th guidelines. All sources are properly cited and verified to ensure academic integrity and to avoid plagiarism. As the review based exclusively on published secondary sources and does not involve human participants, personal data, or field experimentation, formal ethical approval was not required. Intellectual property rights are respected, and transparency is maintained throughout the analysis.

2. Acknowledgement

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