

SAYIGH, Rosemary. 2015. Yusif Sayigh: Arab Economist, Palestinian Patriot. Cairo/New York: The American University in Cairo Press (388pp.). (ISBN 978-9774166716) US\$45.

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From al-Bassa (Palestine) to Kharaba (Syria), from Tiberias (Palestine) to Sidon (Lebanon) and Tikrit (Iraq), onto Amman (Jordan), Tunis (Tunisia), and Beirut (Lebanon), Yusif Sayigh's life trajectory invokes the deep connectedness of Bilad Al-Sham (Greater Syria) to itself and to the Arab Middle East, notwithstanding the Western arbitrary trimming of the region through colonial design. Recounted stories attest to the tug-of-war between Pan-Syrianism, Pan-Arabism and nation-state politics that greatly shaped Arab modernity. For Yusif Sayigh, as for many others of his time and ours, Palestine was always an Arab matter, yet never an elusive entity to be simply diluted within the vastness of the Arab nation. While the biographer's editing of her late husband's memoirs expertly sketches a postcolonial perspective of life in the region from 1918 on, the Arab economist and Palestinian patriot is a pioneer of the genre.

The book features several different angles: an unknown Palestinian child narrates his troubles and adventures in the Palestinian hinterland; a young student fights to unite his career aspirations with his political activism; a slight yet resolute prisoner narrates life in 1947-8 Israeli war camps; a brilliant scholar is bread amongst a whole constellation destined to indelibly mark the Arab thought; a passionate Arab economist narrates the difficulty in being heard by politicians; and, finally, a high-ranking but audacious policy designer narrates his remarkable political career and complex relationships with Antoun Sa'adeh, Hajj Amin al-Huseini, Chairman 'Arafat, and others. All of those viewpoints were masterfully let flourish by the biographer; all of them, enlive-

ning Yusif Sayigh. The reader quickly becomes intimate with the Sayighs – Yusif, his parents and siblings, and Rosemary – yet, the volume extends beyond them too. Through Yusif, the reader meets Walid Khalidi, Elias Sanbar, Albert Hourani, Ghasan Tweini, and many others. The breadth of this effort is structurally presented in an introduction by Dr. Rosemary Sayigh, followed by twelve chapters consisting of Yusif’s memoirs – some edited following a chronological order, some under a certain theme – and one final chapter containing Yusif’s words tailored by Dr. Sayigh as concluding remarks. This book documents a whole era in rich contextual detail, through one of the most pleasurable narratives in contemporary Palestine Studies, comparable, for example, to Salim Tamari’s *Mountain against the Sea*.

To read these memoirs is to take a deep breath of life in the region, one that invites the reader to experience the full complexity of Palestinian social life by embroidering economic needs, political engagement, ethnic belonging, nationhood, and more with Yusif’s personal dispositions, sensitivities, affects and ambitions. Most may read this book searching for the Representative of the PPS in Palestine, the Director of the Economic Research Institute and Chairman of the Economics Department at AUB, the Director of the Arab National Treasure, the President of the [Palestinian] National Fund, the Director General of the [Palestinian] National Planning Center, the Member of the PLO Executive Committee, or the creator and head of PEDRA (Palestine economic development and Reconstruction Agency, later renamed PEC-DAR). Even they, however, are likely to be captivated by the charming cosmopolitan man – once a village boy discovering his sexuality, later the General Manager of Hotel Tiberias (where Asmahan used to sing) – and the rare entourage echoing behind his public figure.

As Dr. Sayigh asserts, some of the best parts of the book emerged when she directed Yusif to record sections about his boyhood to entertain his own children and grandchildren. These are found especially in Chapters 1 through 4, which emphasize family life. The book, however, packs much more than tales about Yusif’s age of innocence. The defining key of chapters 5 through 8 is his involvement with the PPS and Antun Sa’adeh himself. Chapters 9 and 10

are perhaps the most penetrating reads, as they deal directly with the Arab-Israeli war of 1947-8 and Yusif's several months sojourn as a prisoner in Israeli war camps. Chapter 11 briefly reunites Yusif with his family, before time swiftly reclaims the lives of many of his siblings along with his mother. Chapter 12 is unique and does not flow as easily as the others. It could not have been otherwise, however, as the reader must bear along with Yusif the weight of 56 pages of his life dedicated to make a Palestinian state feasible, an effort critically hindered by 'Arafat's lust for power. Despite the heavy burden described in these pages, here is where the reader learns in greater detail the intricacies of Palestinian politics, this chapter being thus the climax of the entire book for those thirsting for the political nitty-gritty. Chapter 13 finally highlights Yusif's astounding academic achievements and legacy, a career well ahead of its time epitomized by his effort to unite economics and economic development with social planning and social science research. Dr. Sayigh tags this effort through the title of one of Yusif's own books, *Bread with Dignity* – the first of more than a couple dozen composing his legacy amid more than 80 articles and a lifetime of teachings.

What is perhaps missing the most here is Dr. Sayigh herself. Actively writing about Palestinians, first as a journalist in the 50's and then as an anthropologist from 1970 on, she is also an anthropology and oral history pioneer, unwaveringly committed to document and theorize the Palestinian dispossession, especially among the refugees. Yusif – we learn – would never have been impervious to Rosemary's own intellectual allures, as she was not to his. One can only hope to find more of these Sayigh snippets, one day, in a volume dedicated to Dr. Sayigh's own memoirs.