

The CROSS and the OLIVE TREE

Cultivating Palestinian Theology amid Gaza

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Introduction

Palestinian Theology

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It is a great honor to introduce this book. At the same time, we wish we never had to write it. Writing about Palestinian theology amid genocide is neither an easy task nor does it give us any sense of pleasure. We wish this book did not have to exist, and the stakes of the book are undeniable. The weight is impossible to bear, and we feel that we cannot do justice to all the people who have been viciously killed. Fortunately, this burden is not carried alone. This is a joint effort of eight Palestinian theologians who come from all over Palestine: Gaza, Beit Sahour, Hebron, Nazareth, al-Lydd, and Jerusalem. We are all trying to wrestle with the tragedy unfolding around us and attempting to formulate it in theological language—yearning to utter Job’s words, “I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you” (Job 42:5). The contributors to this book have written their chapters as they watch their families being bombed and starved in Gaza, facing death threats, under erasure by a military occupation and a system of apartheid, and possibly facing punitive measures by the Israeli authorities for speaking out for justice and reconciliation.

Every word in this book is accompanied by the screams of children, images of destruction, bodies torn by violence,

torture, and rape, stirring in us a profound sense of guilt rooted in our despair and the inability to stop the forces of evil. Alongside these horrors, the hypocrisy of the West, the incompetence of world leaders and international institutions, the gaslighting, the apathy of bystanders, and the performative activism done for self-importance or career advancement stir a deep sense of rage and disgust. Truly, the crucified people of Palestine are living the profound mystery of the cross under the weight of the empire. Mary's cries echo through the bereaved families.

We, Palestinian Christians, often call ourselves the living stones of the land of resurrection, believing in the good news of Christ. Yet leaping from Good Friday to Easter Sunday without fully entering the long silence of Holy Saturday may risk overlooking or even glorifying suffering. It feels as if God is absent in these moments, and we experience the paralyzing effects of fear with horrors still unfolding. Still, our faith calls us to love our enemy and remain faithful to the God of the oppressed, even when everything feels uncertain and dark. We hope, like Mary Magdalene, in the darkness and pain, that we, too, will one day discern the voice of resurrection, giving us the strength to endure and to empower others. Palestinian theology, like the narrative of the Bible, is encountered in these experiences. In essence, this book is written during crucifixion and in the expectant hope of resurrection.

Olive Trees and Palestinian Theology

As we write this introduction, it is the olive-picking season in Palestine. Olive trees are not just plants. They are spiritual entities, bearing both the pain and the beauty of our land with grace. Geris Khoury introduces Palestinian theology using the figure of olive trees: "Let me give you an image to illustrate local Palestinian theology. It is like the olive tree—

rooted in drought and stone, yet it endures. It lives for generations, growing steadfastly. Even when its branches are cut, new life emerges.”¹ Therefore, in the spirit of this important season, we would like to extend Khoury’s analogy of the olive tree by employing olive oil as an analogy through which to introduce Palestinian theology and to situate this book in the rich tradition of this heritage.

Every year since we can remember, we would pick olives as a family. We would then use our grandmother Samira’s recipe to make enough olives to eat for the whole year, with plenty left over to share with friends. On one occasion, our grandfather Jacob visited us in our family’s fields, which had been confiscated by the State of Israel. While too old to pick the olives, he told us about the painful experience of losing many olive tree groves in 1948, during the Nakba (Arabic for catastrophe). Our father made sure we listened as our grandfather continued in his storytelling, explaining how the family managed to find refuge in the Church of Saint George in the city of al-Lydd. In many ways, this simple tradition of picking olives went beyond simply making our annual supply of tasty olives. It connected us to the land, to our family history and roots, and to St. George, who for us represents indigenous Christianity in Palestine. Our family, the land, and theology are all intertwined, with one always informing the other.

The way that picking olives connects us to God, to our family, and to our roots serves as a metaphor for how Palestinian theology ought to connect us to God, to one another, our tradition, and our land. We understand theology as contemplation on and praxis in relation to the mystery of God. We also contend, as other liberation theology practitioners do,

1. Geries Khoury, “Theology of the Olive Tree Rooted in the Palestinian Land,” in *Introduction to Palestinian Theology*, ed. Munther Isaac (Bethlehem: Diyar Press, 2018), 69–82. Translation by the authors.

that praxis and contemplation feed into one another.² In that sense, all people who talk about and act in relation to God are theologians. Like picking olives, all can be and are involved in such endeavors. We wish to break out of the assumption that theology is exclusive to those with formal education in churches and universities. Picking olives requires entire families and communities to be involved, and doing theology should not be any different. Khoury, when writing to Palestinians, comments that “Our (Palestinian) theology must be a communal theology.”³ In fact, theologians never operate as isolated individuals but are always part of a broader community and movement. Palestinian theologians should model Palestinian Falahin (Arabic for farmers or peasants), who work in community and for the community. Thus, the olive groves can be understood as the context in which the farmer/theologian does Palestinian theology.

Those who live in or have visited Palestine know how the geographical location affects the soil, water, minerals, and wind, which all play a vital role in the quality and character of the olives. Similarly, Palestinian theology will differ according to the contexts in which it is articulated and lived. While theologies in Palestine share a resemblance, they may take on different shapes, colors, and flavors according to the theological groves they are in.

The main component to be extracted from olives is oil, which can be used for several purposes, including religious rituals, medicine, soap, cooking, and lighting. Before we expand the fitting analogy of olive oil for the different

2. See, for example, Gustavo Gutiérrez, *On Job: God-Talk and the Suffering of the Innocent*, trans. Matthew J. O’Connell (New York: Orbis Books, 1987); Leonardo Boff, *Theology and Praxis: Epistemological Foundations*, trans. Robert R. Barr (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1987); James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed* (New York: Orbis Books, 1975).

3. Khoury, “Theology of the Olive Tree,” 70.

categories of Palestinian theology, it is helpful to briefly discuss what qualifies as Palestinian oil/theology.

Not all olives in Palestine produce Palestinian olive oil. People might pick olives on stolen land, as the Israeli settlers do; some might export the olives outside of Palestine; and others may let the olives rot and fall off the trees. That is to say, not all theologians in Palestine are speaking/doing/living Palestinian theology. Palestinian theology is a theology that is made by Palestinians and for the sake of all people in Palestine: Jews, Christians, Muslims, and others. The lived Palestinian experience, encompassing both the oppression and suffering endured by Palestinians and the beauty, richness, imperfections, and complexities of their existence, is central to Palestinian theology. Likewise, the main message of the gospel is the liberation of all people from all captivity—physical and spiritual—and the inauguration of the Kingdom of God (Luke 4:16–21, 43). Hence, any theology in Palestine that does not promote liberation is not Palestinian theology. To that end, discernment is crucial when walking through the theological olive groves of Palestine, for “every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit” (Matthew 7:17–18).

Internationals are another important aspect of the theological olive groves of Palestine. Often, there are internationals who come to Palestine to help with the olive harvest. These people both contribute greatly to the workload and serve as a protective presence from Israeli soldiers and settlers. In a similar manner, international theologians have been extremely helpful in supporting the development and articulation of Palestinian theology. They have helped with writing, organizing, publishing, and funding.

With that said, Palestinians have also had a hard time with some volunteers during the olive harvest. Sometimes,

internationals do not understand Palestinian norms, have a white savior mentality, or provoke Israeli soldiers in an unhelpful manner, putting Palestinians themselves at risk. By the same token, we have seen international theologians who have similarly missed the mark in the theological scene in Palestine. Some have not worked in a culturally sensitive way and have increased tensions within Palestinian theological circles. Even worse, a number of international theologians have claimed to represent a Palestinian voice abroad or built entire careers on the back of Palestinian theology. There is also a colonial phenomenon, specifically among North Americans and Europeans who either live in Palestine for a while or think they are familiar with the Palestinian Christian community, and who begin to tell us how to do our theology. As much as we appreciate the support and collaboration, internationals, especially white privileged theologians, need to know their place and their role.

Palestinian olive groves, olives, and olive oil can be helpful in articulating a Palestinian theology that is organic to the land and its people. Three primary uses of olive oil introduce the three main theological spheres in Palestine.

Church

Olive oil holds a significant role in Palestinian churches, symbolizing the presence of the Holy Spirit, health, anointing, and blessings. For example, the tomb of St. George in al-Lydd always contains olive oil, which visitors use to make the sign of the cross on their foreheads.⁴ The presence of olive oil in Palestinian churches can be seen as a reflection of Palestinian theology itself—a theology deeply intertwined with the lived experiences of the Palestinian church. Despite its

4. Clayton Goodgame, "A Lineage in Land: The Transmission of Palestinian Christianity," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 29, no. 3 (2023): 670–91.

complexities, achievements, limitations, diversity, and struggles, the church in Palestine has, in some cases, remained a steadfast ecclesial body, carrying forth the witness of the faith since Pentecost.

For many Palestinian Christians, the clergy embody a theology that resonates with their daily lives, forming a central pillar in their understanding of the mystery of faith within the Palestinian context. The clergy, rooted in their communities and sharing a profound connection with their people, serve as “salt and light” in a land marked by adversities. Unlike the majority of clergy serving in the land, who are not from Palestine and often cannot speak the language, Palestinian clergy arise from within their communities, sharing both language and lived experience with their congregations. Through their prayers, sermons, statements, baptisms, weddings, and daily lives, some Palestinian clergy embody a form of theology that is shaped by and responsive to the needs and realities of their people. Like olive oil in the churches, they bless their people.

Emeritus Latin Patriarch Michel Sabbah, often called the “Patriarch of the People” by Palestinians, exemplifies the role of olive oil in the church as a symbol of blessing.⁵ This title alone, “Patriarch of the People,” reflects Sabbah’s profound connection with his community. Through his sermons, prayers, pastoral letters, service to civil society, and commitment to interfaith relations, Sabbah has created a wealth of theological resources that have guided the Palestinian church in its witness from the First Intifada to the present day. His impact on Palestinian theology and the broader Palestinian community is undeniable, which explains the deep respect and affection he receives from the laity. Sab-

5. Habash Lily and Mohammed Alatar, “The Patriarch of the People: Reflections with the Patriarch,” YouTube, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuSuuaCHQPQ&t=585s>.

bah's role as a source of blessing extends to other notable Palestinian clergy, such as Bishop Faik Haddad, Bishop Jamal Khader, Bishop Munib Younan, Father Rafiq Khoury, Rev. Fadi Diab, Rev. Alex Awad, Rev. Munther Isaac, Bishop Atallah Hanna, Bishop Sani Ibrahim Azar, Rev. Naim Ateek, Rev. Mitri Raheb, and others. This list of clergy highlights a diverse mosaic of voices, each bringing unique theological insights that, like olive oil in the church, attempt to bless all who enter, especially the oppressed.

However, olive oil in the church can also be obstructed from reaching the people. Often compromised by institutions that maintain the status quo or even support oppressive colonial structures, many Palestinian clergy operate within churches that contribute to the colonization of Palestine.⁶ This dynamic spans many churches and denominations. These churches, along with their leaders, sometimes compromise their mission by aligning with structures of power and privilege, neglecting their duty to stand with the poor and oppressed. This reality is painfully visible amid the genocide in Gaza and throughout the 107 years of settler colonialism. The olive oil meant to bless is frequently diluted or, at times, entirely absent.

The churches in Palestine have become spaces of tension, where clergy (even Palestinian) may become both the good shepherd and the false teacher, standing as both anticolonial advocates and colonizer enablers, embodying both the olive oil of blessing and the vinegar offered to Christ on the cross. Yet, the spirit of blessing endures in the Palestinian church, and a nuanced approach is needed. To overlook the role, influence, and service of the church in Palestine is to

6. See Salim Tamari, *The Great War and the Remaking of Palestine* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); and Laura Robson, *Colonialism and Christianity in Mandate Palestine* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

miss the holistic understanding of Palestinian theology and its role in our times.

Soap

Academic Palestinian theology can be likened to the olive oil used to produce Nabulsi soap. Nablus, a city in Palestine, is renowned for this olive-oil soap, found in many Palestinian homes and exported globally. Nabulsi soap is highly valued for its organic composition, and its ability to cleanse the body of dirt and toxins. Similarly, academic theology serves as both an intellectual and spiritual cleanser, offering a liberating interpretation of the Christian faith in response to the realities of settler colonization, occupation, and, more recently, genocide. This theology challenges narratives that misuse faith or Scripture to justify the oppression of Palestinians while addressing key issues such as justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. One of the significant concerns Palestinian theologies engage with is the declining Christian population in a context where Islam and Judaism are the dominant religions.⁷ This has made interfaith relations a central theme of Palestinian theological reflection and practice. Palestinian theology is also informed by the broader Mashreq and North African contexts, acknowledging that, while these regions share similar historical and political challenges, each also faces unique circumstances.

At its core, Palestinian theology revolves around themes such as hermeneutics, justice, land, covenant, biblical prophecy, identity, resistance, and solidarity—themes that have deeply shaped the Palestinian experience.⁸ Just as soap

7. See Rafiq Khoury, *Local Palestinian Theology (1965–2019): A Comprehensive Vision* (Bethlehem: Al-liqa Publications, 2019), translation by the authors.

8. See Munther Isaac, *Introduction to Palestinian Theology* (Bethlehem: Diyar Press, 2018), translation from Arabic by the authors; Rafiq Khoury, “Palestinian Contextual Theology: A General Survey,”

restores physical well-being, this form of Palestinian theology strives to restore spiritual and societal wholeness by confronting the sin of colonization and offering hermeneutical tools to uncover the pathway toward redemption witnessed in the Bible. Ultimately, this theology can be viewed as an intellectual effort to love God with our minds, by resisting oppression through the intellect and seeking the restoration of both people and land through a political and spiritual vision.

Academic Palestinian theology is not an exercise in abstractions or metaphysical speculation. Actual events shaped the roots and soil of Palestinian theology, including the Nakba of 1948. The Nakba profoundly impacted the collective Palestinian experience and identity, planting the seeds for the emergence of this theology.⁹ The Naksa (Arabic for setback) in 1967 brought a new sense of urgency for Palestinian theology due to the rise of religious Zionist rhetoric, both Christian and Jewish, seeking to justify Palestinian colonization and intensifying the need for theological reflection on the realities of occupation and displacement.¹⁰ The year 1967 represents a turning point for Palestinian theology, when it began articulating itself systematically. In addition, the indigenization of clergy in the 1970s, many of whom were and are professional theologians, further solidified the development of Palestinian theology. These pastor-scholars were able to address many of the theological questions with sustained reflection.¹¹

The First Intifada (1987–1993) propelled Palestinian theology into the global spotlight, highlighting its liberative mes-

in *Christian Theology in the Palestinian Context*, ed. Rafiq Khoury and Rainer Zimmer-Winkel (Berlin: Aphorism A, 2019), 9–46.

9. Naim S. Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation: The Bible, Justice, and the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2017).

10. Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*.

11. Khoury, "Palestinian Contextual Theology," 17.

sage and its deep connection to the struggle for justice and peace.¹² This grassroots uprising, with the active involvement of Palestinian Christians, brought Palestinian theology to international attention, cementing its place in global discourse. During this time, theologians such as Rafiq Khoury, Geris Khoury, Naim Ateek, Mitri Raheb, Cedar Duaybis, Jean Zaru, Salim J. Munayer, Alex Awad, Nora Carmi, and others began to publish books, write articles, establish organizations, and convene conferences, expanding the reach of Palestinian theological thought.¹³ The Second Intifada (2000–2005) further underscored the continued relevance of Palestinian theology, both for Palestinians and international audiences. Though these theologians addressed various topics, hailed from different regions, and targeted diverse audiences, they could be seen as the first wave of Palestinian Christian “soap makers,” pioneers whose witness, wisdom, and influence continue to cleanse the Palestinian collective from the stain of colonial supremacy. This theology is not confined to ivory towers of academia. It is rooted in active engagement with the Palestinian community, demonstrating pragmatic versatility that transcends mere scholarly reflection.

Many of the students and mentees of the first wave of thinkers continued this form of Palestinian theology while developing it and exploring other topics: Munther Isaac, Niveen Sarras, Viola Raheb, Yohana Katanacho, and Grace Zougbi. Again, these theologians may not address the same questions or use the same methodologies, and, at times, they hold diverse perspectives; nevertheless, their development,

12. Ateek, *A Palestinian Theology of Liberation*, 34.

13. See, for example, *Faith and the Intifada: Palestinian Christian Voices*, ed. Naim S. Ateek, Rosemary Radford Ruether, and Marc Ellis (New York: Orbis Books, 1992); Elizabeth Marteiijn, “The Revival of Palestinian Christianity: Developments in Palestinian Theology,” *Exchange* 49, nos. 3–4 (2020): 257–77.

training, and institutional affiliations are connected to the early articulations of Palestinian theology.

As we reflect on the historical trajectory of Palestinian theology, recent events—the Unity Intifada in 2021,¹⁴ the martyrdom of Shireen Abu-Akleh, the October 7 attack, the ongoing genocide in Gaza, and intensifying settler-colonial violence—have and will profoundly shape this tradition. These events are bringing new voices to the forefront of Palestinian theology, many of whom are contributors to this book. Like the founders, these emerging theologians are grappling with similar questions, striving to build on the witness and mission of Palestinian theology. These voices include Yousef AlKhoury, Shadia Qubti, Tony Deik, Lamma Mansour, Yasmine Rishmawi, Marah Sarji, Daniel Munayer, Daniel Bannoura, Azmera Hammouri-Davis, Anthony Khair, the editors of this book, and others. Importantly, some of these newer voices, whether explicitly or implicitly, are critically examining the tradition of Palestinian theology itself and attempting to build further on its foundations. They are seeking to illuminate limitations within and offer alternative ways for the tradition to better contribute to a roadmap of liberation, equality, reconciliation, and justice for all people living in the land. In other terms, they are making new olive-oil soap from inherited recipes.

Lamp

One of the most overlooked forms of Palestinian theology, both by Palestinians and internationals, is grassroots theology, or theology of the people, often expressed through lived

14. The Unity Intifada of 2021 refers to a collective Palestinian uprising that emerged in May 2021, characterized by widespread demonstrations, strikes, and nonviolent confrontations across multiple fronts in historical Palestine. See Lana Tatour, “The ‘Unity Intifada’ and 48 Palestinians: Between the Liberal and the Decolonial,” *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 50, no. 4 (2020): 84–99.

religion. This theology can be likened to one of the most fundamental uses of olive oil throughout history: burning lamps to provide light. This type of oil is unfit for consumption and, therefore, is inexpensive and commonly used as fuel in households. Because it is accessible to most, it is valued for illuminating homes. In this way, the olive oil of lamps represents the theology of the people in Palestine, a theology formed in households and shaped by all family members.

This theology is neither less valuable than nor redundant with other forms of theology. Rather, Palestinian olive oil for theological lamps emphasizes abundance and the ability to shed light. This theology sheds light for most Palestinian Christians in times of profound darkness. The lived religion is witnessed through the veneration of saints, traditional rituals, holidays such as Easter (especially Sabt al-Nour), everyday greetings and expressions steeped in theological language, special foods prepared for occasions, poetry, iconography, and many other cultural practices in Palestine.¹⁵ This theology is not confined to Christians but is also seen in our Muslim brothers and sisters. The olive tree and olive oil hold significant importance in Islam, as highlighted in Surah an-Nūr (The Chapter of Light, 24:35), where God's light is described as a lamp burning olive oil. Also the Prophet Muhammad instructed, "Eat the oil (of olives) and use it on your hair and skin, for it comes from a blessed tree" (Sunan al-Tirmidhi). Together, the lived theologies of Palestinians create a profound sense of identity and belonging within Palestinian communities, connecting people to the transcendent as rooted in the land. This can be understood as part of Palestinian indigeneity.

In the context of genocide and settler colonization, this form of theology both affirms the reality of Palestinian suf-

15. John S. Munayer and Samuel S. Munayer, "Decolonising Palestinian Liberation Theology: New Methods, Sources and Voices," *Studies in World Christianity* 28, no. 3 (2022): 287–310.

fering and celebrates Palestinian beauty, resilience, and joy, making it a form of resistance. Moreover, these practices offer a glimpse into how Palestinians imagine hope, process grief, and find meaning both politically and spiritually. Theology of the lamplight affirms Palestinian humanity within a context that denies it, especially when Palestinians are referred to as “human animals.”¹⁶ While it may not always directly counter oppressive ideologies like Zionism, this theology centers the Palestinian experience, seeking to offer light amid the darkness. Unlike a lot of Palestinian academic theology, Palestinian theology of the people is not meant for advocacy but promotes internal empowerment and connectedness.

Regrettably, some within colonized theological circles dismiss these practices as superstitions rather than legitimate theological expressions. Some Palestinian theologians may also undervalue this form of theology, perhaps too focused on creating liberationist interpretations to counter Christian Zionism (like olive-oil soap), or preparing sermons for the next Sunday (olive oil in the church). Yet not everyone needs to be a soap maker or prepare the olive oil for church services; olive oil for lamps is accessible to all.

When building a Palestinian theology of healing and liberation, this form of theology might be the most significant, resonating deeply with the people as it affirms their humanity daily and offers visions of redemption. Olive oil can be applied in many ways, but it is nonetheless from the same tree. This theology of the people arises in our homes and kitchens, from our elders and children, through our stories, and from the changing seasons—rather than from conferences, lectures, or books. Theology of the lamp is, perhaps,

16. The words of former defense minister Yoav Gallant when referring to the Palestinians in Gaza, MEE Staff, “Israel-Palestine War: ‘We Are Fighting Human Animals,’ Israeli Defense Minister Says,” *Middle East Eye*, October 9, 2023, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/israel-palestine-war-fighting-human-animals-defence-minister>.

the most freely expressed Palestinian theology, unconfined by academic borders or church restrictions. This theology has impacted us most profoundly as we have borne witness to the spiritual encounters that our grandparents transmitted to us in the olive groves of al-Lydd. There, we encountered the sacred, the trauma, and the witness to love, all felt in our bodies and minds. So, given the power of this usage of olive oil, who holds the authority to determine who is or is not a theologian?

While we have described and introduced Palestinian theology as three different types of olive oil, these categories are not mutually exclusive. They are merely here to help orient one in the field of Palestinian theology, highlighting the nuances so we can appreciate the multilayered beauty of the theological olive grove. These distinctions help us avoid oversimplifications, resist concentration on individuals, and appreciate the mosaic of diversity in Palestinian theology. Palestinian theology is more than a reactionary response to Christian Zionism. One can certainly be more active or influenced by a certain category of Palestinian theology, but one is not bound to it. Palestinians use each of the three olive oils, just in different ways and portions. What is certain is that the olive oil that is produced, whether for lamps or soap, bears the influence of olives harvested from trees now soaked in the blood and tears of many.

The Book: The Cross and the Olive Tree

This book and its collection of chapters have been influenced by all types of oil in Palestine: theology of the people, academics, and clergy. Likewise, it is deeply influenced by the current climate for the olive trees, namely, genocide. While the daily realities of destruction, ethnic cleansing, and loss have persisted for over 107 years, the current events in Gaza reflect an unprecedented scale of devastation. Genocide is

more than a legal category in international law. It is a harrowing symbol of reality that has taken shape since 1917. Genocide has been forced into public consciousness since October 2023, carrying profound implications at both individual and global levels.¹⁷

Doing theology amid genocide speaks both to the immediate destruction in Gaza and to the irreversible transformation of perspectives worldwide, including within ourselves. It is why the cross, symbolizing the Christian faith, and the olive tree, symbolizing Palestine, interpret each other, each shedding light on the other's reality. All the authors are committed to continuing the legacy of our tradition, paved by our theological forebears. Indeed, the influence on this book also goes beyond Palestine, drawing from other theologies and theologians from different oppressed and colonized contexts. As unimaginable suffering is inflicted on our people and the land we so love, Palestinian theology must ask itself difficult and pressing questions. It must be relevant for the new and ever-changing realities in which we live. We must continue to make olive oil, in the good and bad seasons, as witnesses to the baptism, life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must continue to make Palestinian olive oil so that we may be a blessing to our own people and our enemies as well.

As such, the book addresses key questions such as What is the theological and Christian legacy of Gaza? How is the theology of martyrdom relevant during these times? How can we exercise divine imagination? What might reconciliation look like during genocide? What can we learn from other communities that have gone through genocide, and how can we build transnational solidarity? Where is Christ during a genocide?

17. The book is written in English in order to engage with a wider audience but will be in Arabic for our own communities.

Teita's Faith

Yousef AlKhoury (Gaza/Bethlehem) highlights the history of Christianity in Gaza and the role of Jewish and Christian Zionism in the decline of its Christian population. Through his grandmother's experiences, he introduces "Teita theology," a grandmother theology, as a model of faith rooted in resilience and Jesus's teachings. This chapter, combining personal and interdisciplinary approaches, seeks to preserve the legacy of Palestinian Christians in Gaza, countering the destruction of knowledge in times of genocide.

Guatemala and Gaza

Marah Sarji (Nazareth) looks at some of the similarities and interconnectedness between the genocide in Palestine and Guatemala. She also examines both genocides from a gender and sexuality lens, highlighting the violence experienced by Palestinians, especially women, due to patriarchal violence. Sarji attempts to answer the question "Where are you, God?" — *Wenak ya Allah?* in Arabic — by locating Christ in the practices and ethics of care embodied by Guatemalan and Gazan women.

A New World Is Coming; She Is on Her Way

Azmera Hammouri-Davis (Hebron/Kea'au, Hawai'i) brings Palestinian and African American theology into conversation. She examines the ways in which both traditions can learn from each other, bringing both her unique expertise and identity into dialogue with the other. Furthermore, Hammouri-Davis examines the unique and powerful perspective of the womanist tradition and how it can support Palestinians who are experiencing a genocide. This chapter, similarly to those of Shadia Qubti and Sarji, makes a vital step to encourage dialogue between traditions that have faced and are still facing immense oppression due to white supremacy and colonial logics.

Imagination in the Valley of the Shadow of Death

Lamma Mansour (Nazareth) looks at how Palestinian Christians can use divine imagination as a form of faithful witness to the Kingdom of God during oppression and suffering. In the midst of such brutality and suffering, Mansour advocates for a divine imagination that allows us to live in relation to the future that God has planned. As such, she argues that divine imagination is not simply an abstract worldview, but praxis for survival, resistance, and collective action. Mansour focuses on three areas of divine imagination: (1) reclamation, (2) disruption, and (3) catalyst.

Reconciliation and Co-Resistance: A Redemptive Vision

Daniel S. Munayer (Jerusalem/al-Lydd) attempts to offer a theological and practical model of reconciliation in Palestine-Israel in times of genocide. Building on years of experience in the field of reconciliation, and theological engagement with biblical Scripture and theologians from other colonized contexts, Daniel argues for a decolonial understanding of reconciliation that works for liberation and the ultimate vision of redemption for all people. This chapter seeks to challenge both watered-down Western concepts of reconciliation and uncompromising Palestinian concepts of justice.

Noticing Sumac in Unexpected Places

Shadia Qubti (Nazareth) engages with the historical and theological developments among Palestinian and Indigenous Turtle Island theologians. Qubti focuses on the theological analysis of both sets of theologies on the concept of land. Qubti carefully compares and contrasts the two traditions and their engagement with colonial theology. The chapter does not simply suggest reading these two colonial contexts as mirrors of each other. Rather, it engages in both

similarities and differences, and provides insights for future dialogue. Qubti's deep knowledge of both traditions, each having endured its own genocide, provides a foundation for fostering greater transnational solidarity among colonized peoples.

Palestinian Theology of Martyrdom

We, Samuel S. Munayer and John S. Munayer (Jerusalem/al-Lydd), attempt to articulate a Palestinian theology of martyrdom. Given the death of so many, including Gazan Christians who have been and continue to be faithful witnesses to the Kingdom of God, we seek to explore what faithful martyrdom looks like in Palestine. In this chapter, we will build on Scripture and the Christian tradition to challenge the "theology of survival," encourage communal witness, and redefine the "signs of our time."

In conclusion, we invite the reader to dive into each chapter and reflect with great patience and detail over what the authors are asking, arguing, and articulating. We invite the readers to walk with us in the olive groves of Palestinian theology. Pay attention to the smells, sights, tastes, and feelings of the olives we are picking. Witness as we attempt to make relevant olive oil for our current reality. As our people are being slaughtered, starved, expelled, and arrested, we seek to make sense of our experience. We do this not only for our own sake as theologians but for the sake of participating in God's liberative work in history. We bring our pain, which is becoming deeper and wider, into conversation with each other and God in this book. And our anger, which is at a boiling point beyond imagination, is our motivation to continue the work in Palestine in order to see liberation and reconciliation.

We expect to see our situation deteriorate and do not

know what the future holds. Nevertheless, we wish to be faithful witnesses to the gospel, just as the ultimate Samid (steadfast one), Jesus Christ, showed us.¹⁸

18. Munayer and Munayer, "Decolonising Palestinian Liberation Theology," 304.