Jewry during World War II. By Fischbach’s own account, the vast majority of the settlement ($845 million) resulting from the 1952 final reparations agreement between Israel and West Germany went to Israel—much of it in the form of industrial equipment, trains, ships, and other goods that helped build the Israeli economy. Only $110 million went to Jews outside Israel as reparations. Second, he indicates that linkage is unfair both to Mizrahi/Sephardi Jews and to Palestinian refugees; Jews’ private losses become an Israeli bargaining chip, while Palestinian compensation is unfairly diminished due to the damages Arab states (and not Palestinians) inflicted on former Jewish residents.

One puzzle to which Fischbach points is the question of why so little has been done to assess the preferences of Mizrahi/Sephardi Jews themselves. For example, he laments the absence of any survey or poll to determine how and by whom they want their property losses to be handled. Indeed, one curious question is why major groups that represent Jews from Arab countries, including the World Organization of Jews from Arab Countries and the American Sephardi Federation, have supported linkage. Does this indicate that most Jews of Middle Eastern and North African descent favor linkage? If not, why has there not been more protest against this policy? Healing can only occur, Fischbach argues, when individuals can voice and seek redress for their grievances. For both Palestinians and Jews from Arab states, justice has been slow in coming. For its part, Jewish Property Claims against Arab States makes substantial strides in documenting the circumstances surrounding the loss of Jewish property in the Arab world as well as explaining why there has been little effort to seek compensation.


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Palestine and the Gulf States is Rosemarie Said Zahlan’s last book before she lost her battle with cancer in 2006. It is also perhaps her best book. Lucid, detailed, concise, and perceptive, it is meticulously researched and argued, shedding light on a little-studied connection between Palestine and the Persian Gulf. Using a historian’s fine eye for detail exemplified in her previous work, Zahlan demonstrates intimate and multilayered connections between the two that few have explored before.

The book begins with a broad overview of the relationship between the Persian Gulf and Palestine, pointing to the Gulf being home to millions of Palestinians since 1948, the importance of financial donations by wealthy Gulf elites to the Palestinian cause, and the role of hegemonic superpowers, namely, Britain and then the United States, in the Middle East in general and the Palestinian question in particular. In each of these connections, Zahlan argues, personal relationships between principal figures involved in regional diplomacy have been of paramount importance (p. 12), thus undermining the emergence of viable institutions that could outlast them.

In every flashpoint in Middle East history, Zahlan maintains, the histories of Palestine and the Persian Gulf are connected in more ways than scholars have explored thus far. Watershed events such as the abolition of the Egyptian monarchy in 1953, the Anglo–French–Israeli invasion of the Suez Canal in 1956, and the 1967 and 1973 Arab–Israeli wars all not only significantly changed the course of Palestinian history but also greatly influenced the role and importance of the Persian Gulf in Palestine. The Gulf became a particularly important factor in the Palestinian–Israeli conflict after 1967, when a new wave of Palestinian refugees found
their way to Kuwait, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia. It was not until the October war of 1973, however, that the Gulf oil producers closed ranks and cut oil exports to the United States and Western Europe because of their support of Israel.

Unlike more recent interpretations of the oil boycott that see it as undermining Arab financial and diplomatic interests in the long run, Zahlan has a more positive take on this turning point for the Arab world. Kissinger was wrong, she argues, in assuming that the Arabs would not have the courage to go through with their threatened boycott. The West Europeans, for their part, moderated some of their policies toward Israel and pursued more balanced relations with the PLO directly as a result of the boycott.

The linkages between events and developments in the Persian Gulf and Palestine continued in the 1980s, whether through the establishment of the Gulf Cooperation Council (1981), American military sales to Saudi Arabia (1981), “IranGate” (1986), or the eruption of the first intifada (1987). The United Nations, meanwhile, passed one toothless resolution after another, with the lives of Palestinians, and the Palestinian predicament in general, becoming increasingly dire as the years dragged on. By the start of the 1990s, and especially in the immediate aftermath of Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the situation of the Palestinians living in the Gulf, and the position and power of the PLO, reached new lows.

“The whole episode was devastating for the Palestinians,” she writes. “Their communities in Kuwait and the other Gulf states were decimated. Their economic situation was also disastrous. They had fled with little money, and had few prospects for employment elsewhere, either in Jordan or the West Bank” (p. 94).

As this quote exemplifies, Zahlan wrote not only with empathy but also with precision, an eye for detail, and an ability to convey context and texture. In the process she managed to produce a small book of great value, collecting within its pages insights and analysis related to the Arabian peninsula, Iran, Israeli, Palestine, Europe, the United States, and the United Nations, showing how each of these otherwise disparate pieces came together to form an important part of a much overlooked aspect of the Palestinian drama. For anyone interested in a better understanding of Palestine or the Persian Gulf, and connections between the two, this book is essential reading. The text lacks a conclusion and ends abruptly, a product no doubt of her losing battle with cancer rather than an omission or oversight. Still, it marks a valuable contribution to existing literature on the subject.


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Despite massive democratization reforms and constitutional amendments implemented in the context of European Union (EU) membership requirements, Turkey still has a constitution that was drafted under military rule following the 1980 coup. The symbolic weight of this fact is the major hindrance to greater democratization. Hence, the task of drafting a new constitution is one of the most pressing issues in Turkish politics. Ergun Özbudun and Ömer Faruk Gençkaya provide an excellent overview of the history of Turkish constitution making that will help observers of Turkish politics to locate the current political debates in Turkey within a historical and theoretical framework.