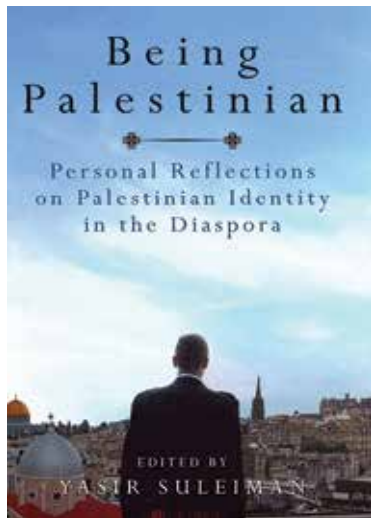


## Being Palestinian: Personal Reflections on Palestinian Identity in the Diaspora

Edited by Yasir Suleiman  
Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2016  
370 pages, \$30.00

*Reviewed by Ravenel Godbold, The American Colony Bookshop, Jerusalem*



*Being Palestinian*, edited by Yasir Suleiman, a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, is a compilation of 102 essays addressing the challenges of Palestinian identity while living as part of the diaspora in North America and the United Kingdom. Authors include musicians and diplomats, academics and physicians, Muslims and Christians, young and old, those born in Palestine and abroad. Some of the authors have been able to visit the towns and villages where

their families originated; others left and have not yet returned.

Each author discusses the struggle of reconciling their Palestinian identity with their "new" identity - maintaining a sense of Palestine within their new lives in Canada, the United States, Britain, or Scotland. The reconciliation of these identities is not simply a balance of language or cuisine, customs or tradition, it is never fully assimilating to the host country or being fully Palestinian, resulting in constantly feeling out-of-place. In response to what we may call the "identity crisis" facing diaspora Palestinians, one author remarked that she hoped to be reincarnated as an Icelandic ornithologist because "who hates Icelanders and doesn't love birds?" Even though technically a citizen or resident of another country, Palestinians continuously fight the stereotypes that have become so prevalent in mainstream media.

This book successfully explores the questions of identity, particularly whether identity is set from birth or a learned behavior, and whether identity is a multifaceted concept. While the authors come from a

multitude of backgrounds – those who were born in Palestine describe very different experiences than those born abroad into Palestinian families – they all feel a connection to a common identity: regardless of nationality or location of birth, each author identifies as Palestinian. Yet again, identity is neither simply a set fact nor a learned behavior, but a combination of circumstances and experiences.

This collection also examines the fluidity and multifaceted aspect of modern Palestinian identity. There is simply no one definition of what makes one a Palestinian. The discussion is open whether this is a challenge to overcome or a beauty to celebrate. Being Palestinian is a combination of experiences, feelings, and heritage.

Birthplace, mother tongue, or religious background does not make a person a more or less authentic Palestinian, and the authors are prime examples. The differences in their personal histories reflect the diversity of Palestinian identity.

Many of the authors describe their relationship with Palestine as complicated and ever-evolving, changing as the author transitions from childhood into adulthood. Yet, in spite of, or possibly because of, the associated hardships, each essay expresses pride in the author's Palestinian identity. Readers will walk away with a better understanding of the fascinating shades of identity issues facing members of the diaspora, as the feeling of not belonging is a universal experience, perhaps an identity in itself.

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