



A Palestinian Professor and Activist in Italy

Wasim Dahmash

Wasim Dahmash, born in Damascus in 1948 to Palestinian parents who had been expelled from Lydda, devotes his time to volunteering with Gazzella,¹ a nonprofit association he cofounded with friends in 2000. It provides care, treatment, and rehabilitation for Palestinian children who have been injured by weapons of war as well as for kids with disabilities who live in the Gaza Strip. Over the past 22 years, Gazzella has provided support to over 3,600 children and financed the provision of electric generators for clinics and motor rehabilitation programs in Gaza. Gazzella also funded the establishment of a multipurpose women's center in Rafah, set up the neonatal ward at Gaza's Al-Shifa' Hospital, and established a dental office in Shati Refugee Camp.

Before he founded Gazzella, Wasim participated in other Italian projects that supported Palestinian children, among them the association *Salaam Ragazzi dell'Olivo* that was established in 1988 and in a short time facilitated 2,000 adoptions. Unfortunately, the experience ended in 1994, immediately after the Oslo disaster. Its national committee has been disbanded, but two local sections continue to operate to this day. In an earlier project that informally started in the early 1980s, Wasim and a group of friends joined a long-distance adoption project launched by the *Association médicale franco-palestinienne*, a program he supported for about 20 years.

Since 1999, Wasim has run the publishing house Edizioni Q,² which he cofounded with some colleagues from the University of Rome. It is the only publishing house in a language other than Arabic that is entirely devoted to Palestine. Edizioni Q publishes three series: one is dedicated to scientific research, another focuses on Palestinian childhood, and the third features Palestinian literature. To date, Edizioni Q has published 70 books, including translated works by Salman Abu Sitta, Saleh Atout, Ahmad Rafiq Awad, Samira Azzam,

With Syrian poet Adonis, 2019.



With architect and author Suad Amiry.



With Palestinian author and essayist Adania Shibli.



Mohammad Bakri, Jamal Bannura, Murid al-Barghuthi, Mahmoud Darwish, Sh. Husseini Shaid; Giabra Ibrahim Giabra, Ghassan Kanafani, Ibrahim Nasrallah, Salman Natur, Samih al-Qasim, Mahmud Shukair, Ghassan Zaqtan, Sa'dallah Wannus, Talal Haidar, and others.

Wasim's interest in Palestinian literature began at an early age and found its first expression in university student bulletins. It expanded into a broad political-cultural space in 1968, when the Committee of Solidarity with the Palestinian People began to publish the magazine titled *The Palestinian Revolution*, and Wasim was asked to translate the works of some Palestinian poets. In 1972, publication of the magazine ceased, and its committee was dissolved shortly after the killing, at Israeli hands, of its animator, Wael Zuayter. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Wasim contributed translated Palestinian poetry to collections that were the first popularized works of Arabic literature in Italian, and in 1970, he published his first anthology of Palestinian poetry. He continued to popularize Palestinian literature in magazines and newspapers, combining cultural and political activity throughout the 1970s and 1980s, and in the 1980s encouraged and helped university colleagues to undertake the study and popularization of Palestinian literature.

Wasim ceased all participation in direct political activity in 1993, following the Oslo *nakba*, but he continued to take part in cultural activities in support of Palestinian rights. Thus, he edited the journal of the Italo-Palestinian Medical Association, a publication that was published in paper format until 1995 and in digital format until 2009.³ In addition to contributing to newspapers and magazines until 1993, he continued to publish newsletters and bulletins that reported on the situation in Palestine.

His academic life took place between the Department of Oriental Studies of the University of Rome "La Sapienza," where he taught Arabic dialectology from 1982 to 2006, and the Department of Stylistics and Linguistics of the University of Cagliari, where he taught Arabic language, dialectology, and literature between 2006 and 2015. In more recent years, he has taught Arabic linguistics for the Master of Oriental Language and Cultures program at International University for Languages and Media in Rome (from 2015 to 2020). Between 1980 and 2015, he lectured at almost all Italian universities and conducted courses in literature, linguistics, and literary history. His main research interests are literary translation, Arabic dialectology with particular reference to the dialects of the Syrian-Palestinian region, literary history, and contemporary history of the Near and Middle East.

As a part of his research, Wasim has produced several books and articles and supervised the translation of tens of Arabic literary works, mostly presented as part of master's or doctoral theses. Alongside his scientific writings, he has edited books concerning Arab culture on behalf of several publishers.

¹ For more information, please visit www.gazzella-onlus.com.

² For more information, please visit www.edizioniq.eu.

³ The journal's archive remains available at <http://www.palestina-balsam.it/>

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