Governing Gaza
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Published by Duke University Press


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COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FORMATIONS OF CIVIC LIFE

The average Municipality of Palestine is an authority which plans roads, provides water and conservancy, erects slaughter-houses and regulates markets; but it is not yet a corporate body expressing in its services the social sense of the community. . . . There is evidently little sense of municipal responsibility for public welfare in the sense in which this would be understood in Europe. . . . The participation of the local government authorities in education, as is the English practice, is one way of enlisting civic interest and civic pride in a campaign of general cultural improvement.

*Palestine Royal Commission* (Peel Commission) Report, 1937

Purpose of the club: to raise the social and cultural level among the Arab UNRWA employees—to have games and matches, hold lectures, show films. The club has sports activities to strengthen bodies and spirits. The club does not enter into political matters or sectarian matters. The club operates according to the law in Gaza.

Bylaws of Arab UNRWA Employees Association, 1961

While most of the governmental practice of the British Mandate and the Egyptian Administration was characterized by its constraints—limited in financial resources, tentative in relations with the territory being governed, anxious about overextending its
reach—there were domains and moments that called for a more expansive mode of governing. The need for control, for managing political threat and security concerns, sometimes produced an intensity of regulation and a close involvement with place and population. Government concerns did lead to a proliferation of security services, but they were also addressed by community services which elaborated civic ideals and defined public mores. In these services, the expression of government control was forceful without (often) employing the actual use of force.

In community services such as education and religious affairs it became ever more difficult to disentangle state from society, even as these services often relied on the apparent solidity of such a distinction to do their work. The space in which these services operated was the space of the civic, a domain that was, not surprisingly, highly contested. While at the broadest level there was agreement that civic life entailed individual, community, and government participation in the promotion of an active citizenry, an engaged public, how such goals might be accomplished and what such an engaged public might look like were sources of deep disagreement. That this public did not simply exist but had to be continually formed was certainly something of which government was aware. The necessary involvement of government in such production further complicated any imagined separation of the civic from the governmental, of society from the state.

We can think of the civic, as Pierre Mayol in volume 2 of The Practice of Everyday Life suggests in regard to the neighborhood, as entailing both obligation and recognition. One was obligated to participate and to conform to the demands of “propriety.” Propriety, as Mayol defines it, “represses what is ‘not proper,’ ‘what one does not do’; it maintains at a distance, by filtering and exposing them, the signs of behavior that are illegible in the neighborhood, intolerable for it, destructive, for example, of the dweller’s personal reputation.” Propriety does not function only negatively, but also articulates obligations of what is proper, what are the best ways of living and being in a community. Fulfilling these obligations could also lead one to expect acknowledgment of one’s compliance, one’s civic skills, through a “lexicon of ‘benefits’ expected from the progressive mastery” of propriety.

While the neighborhood is a more intimate space than the civic appears to be, arguments about civic virtues, as the services explored here make clear,
often played out at precisely this scale. Education and religious services, while broad in their mission and scope, were enacted at a small scale: in a school, a village square, indeed, a neighborhood. The mutual obligations brought forth by these services were not simply between government and the public, but within the Gazan community itself. Civic associations, which were regulated and subject to surveillance by government, offered a space for the management of the “conduct of conduct” of Gazans by Gazans. The activities of such associations, the details of schooling, the work of religious scholars and service providers were all part of a process of policing propriety.

One aspect of the locality of these community services was the bounded nature of the community they served. While community services were distinguished from crisis and everyday services by having a collective client, their clientele was also in some ways more narrow than that of those individually oriented, singular services. The “community” of community servicing was never the entire population, but rather was distinguished by religion, by nationality, by refugee status. And yet, these services often sought to exercise influence beyond the seemingly clear boundaries of their jurisdiction. Education, for example, had long been divided in Palestine according to religious community (millet), each millet providing its own schools. In the Mandate, this religious community distinction was transformed into a national community division, with two school systems, one for Jews and one for Arabs, operating. During the Egyptian Administration the line of distinction was once again transformed, and refugee and native children attended separate schools. Religious services were by definition limited to members of a particular religious community, but, as in the case of missionary activity, sometimes they attempted to expand the boundaries of that community.

The focus of community servicing on civic life further illuminates the dynamic of abeyance that was so important to the maintenance of rule in Gaza and in Palestine more broadly. While the language of propriety offered a mechanism of control, it also displaced the site of that control to the seemingly distinct realm of society. The demands of propriety, that is, could appear to be social rather than governmental demands, distracting attention from the very regimes which were imposing it. Abeyance, though, as has already been made evident, was never a perfect technique, and there were many cracks in its distractions and deferrals. Efforts by community members
to bring the government in as an ally in their projects for policing society highlight the impossibility of keeping these realms entirely separate and of fully distracting people from the government’s involvement in controlling propriety. Political struggles over the nature of civic life in Palestine, over the future of the community, the nation, and the state, suggest limits to the effectiveness of deferral as a means of avoiding political threat. Not surprisingly, the effects of government policies often outdistanced their intentions. In the effort to exercise control over the shape of Palestinian civic life, community services opened up new venues for challenging government.

Community services were concerned not only with defining and protecting propriety for the current moment, but also with shaping the future of civic life. Crisis and everyday services were principally focused on the near-at-hand and the current moment. Community services, on the other hand, projected their vision forward, imagining a better society, a brighter future. In conditions of tactical government like those in Gaza, this future orientation posed a problem. I have already noted that tactical government has a shortened vision of action, and we have seen some of the consequences of this makeshift character for governmental practice. Because community services articulated themselves in relation to a future they could not glimpse, they operated with an additional layer of uncertainty. This uncertainty shaped the delivery of community services in both the Mandate and the Administration.

“Commanding What is Good”: Religious Services as Civic Services

Religious services, which in the case of Islamic services included work in mosques, shari’a courts, religious education and scholarship, and charitable societies, were somewhat uncomfortably located within the larger bureaucratic structure. The question of whether shari’a court employees should be eligible for pensions (see chapter 4) highlighted some of that discomfort, a discomfort that was not so much about whether religion should have a place in public life, but what that place should be. How autonomous could religious services be? What kind of claims could religious expression make on a society that was broader than its own community? The process of defining a religious sphere within public life began not with the British, but with the Ottomans. In the nineteenth century, Ottoman authorities distinguished
religious and secular governmental functions, limiting the jurisdiction of religious courts, for example, to personal status issues and referring all other matters to a secular court system. During the Mandate and the Administration, the fact of religious servicing raised sometimes uncomfortable questions about the relationship among government and population, government institutions and civic associations, and private citizens and public officials.

The dominant idiom of religious servicing was that of moral improvement. Moral improvement was, though, not simply the betterment of the individual or the improvement of personal character, but was also tied to the community as a whole, to its civic life. It was, therefore, also connected to the political terrain on which civic life was enacted; hence the problem with these services. Nationalism and civic duty were articulated as internal to religious practices, potentially solidifying a means of challenging government. Connecting their mission to this question of the civic, religious service providers also often tried to exert influence beyond the limits of their client population.

The first problem for the provision of religious services in the British Mandate was the form of that mandate itself. The replacement of Muslim Ottoman authority with (Christian) British authority in Palestine raised immediate questions about the organization of religious services within the framework of the state. Under the Ottoman Empire, shari’a courts, waqf administration, and mosque management were all part of the state infrastructure, authorized, like all government services and activities, by the sultan. When the British entered Palestine, they took over all of the administrative functions of the former Ottoman regime, including these religious services, but under, first, military and then international (through the League of Nations) authority. These authorizing sources, being secular at best and Christian at worst, were a weak foundation on which to build the provision of Muslim services.

In order to cope with this problem and to equalize the various religions within the new ecumenical authority, a governing body, the Supreme Muslim Council (SMC), was established to authorize Islamic services in Mandate Palestine. The SMC, like all government offices during the Mandate, was headquartered in Jerusalem, although, again like all government offices, it had employees working in the districts as well. Gaza City was the site of an SMC-authorized waqf committee, shari’a court, and library. Despite its
many similarities with other government offices, the SMC was not an entirely regular governmental body. By creating this autonomous religious body, Mandate officials hoped to both contain religious expression and defuse religious politics. From the beginning of the Mandate, Herbert Samuel tried to impress on the SMC the “undesirability of using places of devotion for the purposes of political propaganda.” In its 1936 report to the League of Nations, the Palestine government commented, “Whilst discussing the representative character of the Supreme Moslem Council, it will be borne in mind that it is not a political body, but an administrative body dealing with Moslem religious affairs. In so far as it is representative, it is representative of the Moslems of Palestine in their religious aspect.”

Despite the British insistence on controlling the limits of the SMC’s representativeness, neither the council nor the variety of Islamic personnel saw their services as so limited. The moral and political futures of the Palestinian community were entirely bound together in the eyes of these service providers, and their practices indicate an unwillingness to divide them. Religious services were civic services in Mandate Gaza, and they also formed a field of tension about the delimitation of both religious and civic life. The similarity of these services to other civil services in terms of administrative structures, styles of operation, and budgetary strictures imbued them with governmental authority. At the same time, the similarity constrained them, as it obliged them to operate according to the same standards of civility that sought to excise (or at least contain) politics from the civil service field.

In other chapters I have discussed personnel who operated under the direct authority of the SMC, including shari’a court judges, mosque staff, waqf officials, and religious teachers. Here I turn to another sort of provider and another site of such servicing: the community leader and the religious association. During the Mandate, societies were established throughout Palestine with the express purpose of “spread[ing] Islamic morals and ideals” among the population. Many of these societies operated under the umbrella of the SMC. Unlike some other religious services, though, these societies had no legal authority. Their ability to command was based, rather, on moral authority. Their self-defined responsibility was for the moral climate among the Muslim-Palestinian community and the promotion of virtue in its members. They, like government, acted tactically in their pursuit of a better society.
There were several Islamic societies in Gaza during the period of the Mandate, the most significant of which was the Society for *Amr bi-l-Ma’ruf wa-l-Nahy ‘an al-Munkar* (lit. Society for Commanding Right and Forbidding Wrong, a name which the society rendered in English as the “Society for the Preservation of Public Morals”). This society, Gaza’s branch of a national network of such societies, was established after a call from the first national ‘ulama’ conference (convened by the *smc*) for concerted work on Palestine’s moral terrain. According to Abdul Latif Abu Hashim, the Gaza society was established on June 3, 1935, at a meeting held in the *awqaf* administration offices.

In organizing its civic struggle in the terms of *amr bi-l ma’ruf*, these Palestinian societies were joining a much longer and broader Islamic tradition of exhortation to better behavior. Michael Cook, in a comprehensive study of the history of *amr bi-l ma’ruf* in Islamic thought and practice, identifies a wide variety of wrongs to be forbidden and of means of forbidding them. The obligation of *amr bi-l ma’ruf* crisscrosses the terrain of state and society. Describing this practice as it occurs in Saudi Arabia, Talal Asad notes that the government has taken on the responsibility, as part of its obligation to ensure that people do not flout God’s authority, of establishing “a supervisory organization whose members devote their energies ‘to commanding what is good and forbidding what is evil (*al-amr bi-l -ma’ruf wa n’nahy ‘an al-munkar*).’” In her study of the women’s mosque movement in Egypt, Saba Mahmood emphasizes its personal enactment, tying women’s involvement in such exhortation to Rashid Rida’s argument that it is a *fard al-‘ain* (individual obligation).

In Palestine, the Society for the Preservation of Public Morals lay somewhere in between. It was not governmental, though it operated under the umbrella of the *smc* and sought government support for its campaigns. Its membership was somewhat circumscribed—it was open to the following: participants in the conference, ‘ulama’, or “men of religion,” and “every Muslim who follows the righteous path and laudable morals [*al-akhlaq al-hamida*]”—though the specific issues around which it organized demanded the personal involvement of the entire Palestinian community. The major threats to Muslim community and morality in Palestine identified by the society were the sale of land to Zionists, Christian missionary activity, and improper dress and behavior by Muslims. While all of these threats were to the entire community, they could be rebuffed only by proper behavior on the part of...
individuals. In defining the issues which were most pressing for the Muslim community, the society also linked them to the needs of the entire Palestinian Arab society.²²

It was on the terrain of these preoccupations that the society struggled for its vision of civic life. Thus, while the services of the society, namely, its preaching and teaching, were limited to Muslims, its lessons were meant to be general. The concerns of the society also indicate the anxiety about the future that conditions in the Mandate engendered. The political character of some of these moral issues is evident and posed a challenge to government’s idea that religious expression could be contained as social. In the society’s work these ideas may not for the most part have been expressed against government, but in its charting of a political terrain they created a possibility for opposition.

Uri Kupferschmidt, in his study of the smc, comments that the Central Society “rarely showed signs of life.”²³ This may have been true of the Jerusalem branch, but it was demonstrably not the case in Gaza’s society. According to the records of this society, which include reports on activities and correspondence, its members were active on a number of fronts, including preaching in villages, challenging government on its biases, complaining to government about its permitting immoral behaviors, and providing charity to the poor.²⁴ The obligation to act morally may have been incumbent on everyone, but the inculcation of such behavior required ethically authoritative personnel. The society’s sense of its authority is evident in its 1936 request to the smc to be permitted to oversee village preachers and to “supervise them in an official manner.” The society complained that there were many preachers “who are only interested in receiving their salary and who are lazy and negligent about undertaking this holy office [wazifa muqaddasa] correctly.”²⁵ Since it was through the offices of this wazifa muqaddasa that the bulk of Muslims in Gaza could be induced to “preserve the interests of their religion and their world,” their supervision by such morally qualified individuals as the members of the society was of paramount importance.²⁶

The society ended its request by tying together the various forms of community and obligation. It wanted to supervise the preachers, the letter affirmed, in order to “work with them in the public interest and for the salvation of the nation [umma] from the dangers which are facing their religion, their world, and their holy nation [watan], preservation of which will
preserve their being [kiyanahum] and their nationality [qawmiyatahum].”

There are several senses of nation embedded in these words—the Muslim community, the Palestinian nation, and the broader Arab nation—though, as Weldon Matthews notes, the distinctions between these terms that characterized later nationalist discourse had not yet fully crystallized. Even if the meanings of these locutions overlapped, the society’s use of them all suggests it saw itself as equipped to provide ethical guidance across these domains. That religious thought expressed itself in a nationalist idiom in Palestine is perhaps not surprising, but it should not be seen as self-evident (nor has such expression been employed at every moment). That it did so during the Mandate points to the expansiveness and the publicness of this thought at the time. This expansive attitude is confirmed by the range of the society’s activities.

The society sent preachers to the mosques of the city and to surrounding villages to speak about its agenda and to attempt to elicit people’s agreement to improve their behavior. The mechanisms the society employed to control conduct were varied, including social pressure and government force. One preacher, Said Muhammad Allah, described his success in transforming conduct in the village of Simsim. He went to the village on February 10, 1936, arriving before the afternoon prayer. He was escorted by a teacher in the government school, implying that he was not content to rely on his own moral authority but wished as well to “borrow” some of the social authority of teachers. After the prayer he commenced his preaching, focusing on the prohibition against drinking alcohol. He spoke until the evening prayer, after which time

I asked them to ask for pardon, to repent, and to cease practicing abominations. I took from them an agreement for that. The mukhtars of the village swore on the Qur’an that if someone practiced these things, they would hurry and inform on him to you [the society president] or to the police. This happened in front of everyone in the mosque. The schoolteacher gathers the boys nightly in the school and works on their reading and writing and tries to dissuade them from all abomination, and he deserves thanks for this. And so I thanked him in front of them. I am confident that they will not return to this behavior.

The publicness of both the message and its acceptance appeared to be of central importance: “this happened in front of everyone” and “I thanked him
Another crucial aspect was the communal and universal nature of the experience: everyone was there to hear Said preach, he stressed, and everyone agreed to accept the message. Even as people accepted the demands laid out by Said, their behavior would be henceforth policed by their local leaders, the mukhtars, who might involve the outside authority of the society or the police.31

Although Said invoked the authority of the police over moral conduct, it was by no means guaranteed that the police were actually interested in patrolling this domain. An effort to get legal backing for the society’s campaign against alcohol, for instance, largely failed. The society petitioned government to revoke the liquor licenses of a number of bars and stores on the grounds that they violated the law by being located too close to mosques or in solely Muslim neighborhoods.32 The government did not seem to find these claims compelling. In the matter of an objection to the renewal of Fahmi Hakura’s permit to sell alcohol in his store, for instance, the high commissioner decided not to overturn the decision of the local permits committee, being convinced, among other things, that “the store is on a main street in Gaza where a lot of non-Muslims live and a number of the neighboring shops are owned and frequented by non-Muslims” and that many of the nearby mosques “were built after the store.”33 There was more at stake in this decision for the society and for government than the narrow legal issues. But regulatory questions which made it possible for the society to request governmental involvement, also made it possible for government to refuse to intervene.

Christian missionary activity, especially missionary schools, worried the society and Gazans more generally.34 Like alcohol consumption, missionary activity threatened to undermine both the virtue and the unity of the Muslim community. The threat of the schools seems to have been less that pupils would actually convert to Christianity than that they would learn attitudes and morals that would make them bad Muslims. As in its campaign against alcohol, the society moved in several directions at once to confront the threat. A 1936 monthly report blamed the government for not providing adequate schooling and described the society’s efforts to address this problem:

In the last monthly report, we mentioned that there is a missionary school in Gaza which is teaching children to hate the Islamic religion. They learn this false ideology because there are no [public] kindergartens. We wrote
to the mayor of Gaza asking him to open a kindergarten in the municipal school, and we asked the director of education to open a children’s school in the government elementary school. We have learned that the municipality opened this class. As for the government, the education director responded that he received our request and he will look into the matter and maybe the request will be fulfilled. I hope that requests like this will be made by all the associations in Palestine, and then maybe the government will respond positively.35

In addition to petitioning government, the society decided to address the parents of the students directly, both in the public forum of the Friday sermon and through personal visits to their homes in order to “clarify to them the harmfulness of the missionary schools . . . and ask them not to send their children to the school.”36 The society serviced the community by involving each of the parties in the governing dynamic—government, municipality, population—in the project of creating a more virtuous civic life.

In the campaign against land sales to Zionists, the society focused its attention on individual members of society, seeking to remind them of their obligations to seek the good of all. In distinction to practices of public shaming of land sellers and simsars (brokers) that were often employed by the press, the society’s efforts were frequently private interventions. Society members did preach against the sales in general, for example, in cases in which a particular sale was threatened or a specific seller identified, but the society tended to approach the party individually. Among the records of the society, there are a number of letters written by individual members to persons they knew to be selling land as well as mentions of delegations being sent to talk to them in an attempt to dissuade them.37 Such individual address hints at another aspect of the control the society desired to exert. Using “sweet speech and logic,”38 the society aimed to compel individuals to recognize their obligation to community and society.

As a community service provider, the society searched out multiple mechanisms for controlling conduct and for improving the quality of civic life. The difficulties in acquiring the government support it sought further highlight the complications that religious servicing posed in the Mandate. Distinctions had been made between these and other kinds of services, partly in deference to community feeling (that it was inappropriate for a non-Muslim
body to direct Muslim services), but this distinction in turn restricted the capacity of those services to lay claim to the full weight of government power. In their practice, religious service providers made use of a variety of sources of authority, including ethical and social, governmental and national, even as these domains were held to be distinct.

**Stated Religion: The Egyptian Administration and the Provision of Religious Services**

Under the Egyptian Administration, the boundaries between the various domains of service receipt, provision, and authorization were much less sharply drawn. Whereas during the Mandate the smc was established precisely to create a distinct authorizing body for religious services, during the Administration the smc was integrated into government, and at its head was the governor-general. Ultimately this lack of distinction led to its dissolution. Since its original purpose had been lost, this “old” body was no longer suited to the needs of service provision. As Michael Dumper puts it, “The position of a higher echelon of the Supreme Muslim Council in the Gaza Strip controlling the local waqf committee [became] increasingly redundant.” Accordingly, in 1957 the responsibilities of the smc were devolved to the governor-general, the Administration, the shari’a appeals court, and the local waqf administration. The dispersing of religious services across government departments suggests how unproblematically within service these practices were during the Administration. At the same time, the control exerted by the Administration over the services indicates the extent to which this provision was connected to political concerns.

Before the smc could be absorbed and then dissolved, the Administration had to reconstitute it. As we have seen in every arena of service provision, the 1948 nakba destroyed the financial and organizational basis of religious servicing. The loss of waqf land, which provided revenue for mosques and religious schools, and of the resources of the smc in Jerusalem had an immediate deleterious effect on the provision of religious services. As a stopgap measure, in 1949, the new governor-general of Gaza asked the Egyptian Awqaf Ministry to help support Gaza’s religious institutions:

In the areas of Palestine under the purview of the Egyptian Administration, there are a number of mosques which are now without furnishings.
Not one of them is maintained by Islamic Affairs in Jerusalem, as they used to be. . . . The need now is for the Awqaf Ministry to provide new furnishings and also to provide financial assistance to these places of worship. The salaries of the preachers and muezzins have been stopped. The Egyptian Administration is obliged to organize these places of worship and to arrange for assistance to them. The Awqaf Ministry is responsible for religious and charitable matters, so we ask that the ministry provide whatever assistance it can in paying the salaries of these employees.42

The ministry agreed to send carpets to the Gaza mosques and to contribute 190 pounds to their budget.43 The Egyptian Social Affairs Ministry also appropriated funds (upon request) to support the operations of Islamic schools in Gaza, which had previously been supported by the smc.44 In the long term, as I noted, the smc was reestablished by the Administration and then absorbed into other departments. With religious services distributed across government, Administration-era files record numerous instances of municipalities and other government bodies funding these services—the Deir Belah Council contributed to the construction of a religious school; the Rafah Municipality was ordered by the Administration to pay for the repair of a local mosque wall.45

While this absorption occurred in large part for administrative reasons, it reveals the government’s desire to control the domain of religious services.46 The Mandate government was similarly apprehensive about the possibility that religious bodies would act politically, but it was more constrained than the Administration in its possible responses to such worries. The Administration, as a Muslim government, was able to more directly control religious expression by its employees and the public. Rema Hammami, echoing this point, suggests that “the Egyptian State’s consolidation of its control over the institutional mechanisms of religious production in Gaza was intimately connected to its suppression of the Muslim Brotherhood [Ikhwan Al-Muslimiin] as a counter-hegemonic political force.”47 Still, just as the Mandate was never entirely successful in controlling these politics, neither was the Administration. In concert with its centralization of control over religious expression, the Egyptian Administration was much less willing than the Mandate to give independent religious societies room to maneuver.
Police files from the Administration include numerous accounts of surveillance of religious activities and refusals of permission for the formation of religious societies. In 1953, a group of people in Khan Yunis desired to establish a Society of the Followers of Sunna in Khan Yunis, whose stated purpose was to spread knowledge of the Qur’an and Sunna through “public lectures on exalted morals and social etiquette,” to develop a collection of religious books and magazines, and to “aid the poor and unfortunate to the extent the Society’s finances allow.” Police investigation of the founding members found them all to be supporters of the Muslim Brotherhood, but also found them all to possess “good morals and clean records.” Despite the lack of apparent danger such a society would pose and the nonobjection of the police to its founding, the governor of Khan Yunis recommended against approval, commenting, “In my opinion there is no cause to have this society, given that its numbers are very small, and in fact do not exceed the founders themselves—also there is no cause to have a society like this given that most of these founders were previously members of the Muslim Brotherhood.”

Even if religious services during the Administration were not usually provided by the kinds of religious societies that were so important during the Mandate, their provision was nevertheless not limited to religious affairs muwazzafin. The administrative dispersal of religious services across the governing infrastructure also produced an expansion of religious servicing. One of its most important sites became the educational apparatus (see below for a lengthier discussion of education). According to Rema Hammami, “The administration invested itself with the role of elaborating religion. . . . [and] the main terrain through which the regime promoted its reading of Islam was the school system.”

Hammami argues further that this reading was part of the government’s project of “creating modern subjects/citizens” and made clear that “Islam was to be considered a code for personal behavior and social morality as opposed to a political will that it was the responsibility of Muslims to fulfill. Islam was relevant to shaping modern life inasmuch as it provided codes of ethics and behavior in everyday life.” Gregory Starrett makes much the same argument for religious education in Egypt, writing that “religious study in Nasser’s primary schools altered the previous emphasis on manners like humility, time management, and good behavior, focusing instead on social values nec-
ecessary to a popular reconstruction of society by the masses: sincerity, fulfilling obligations, forbearance, and the rights of the nation.” Compared to the Mandate, the Administration made religious servicing, if anything, more public, more imbricated in the civic life of Gaza, but it was also more controlled for political expression. Islamic education under Egypt sought to promote a kind of civic morality that would not threaten government power and could participate in its project of promoting a well-ordered public life.

The civic quality of religious services and the obligations entailed therein were highlighted in the crisis atmosphere that preceded the 1967 war (and, as it turned out, the end of Egyptian rule in Gaza). At the end of May 1967, just two weeks before the war in June, the awqaf commissioner issued an order to mosque staff in which he listed the topics for sermons to be delivered in the mosques during the month of Safar 1387 AH, that is, May/June 1967. In light of the brewing political crisis, the sermons were to stress the importance of cooperation and understanding among the citizenry as well as support for and cooperation with the forces working to liberate their nation. Further, the sermons were to urge people not to hoard food and supplies because it is “the government [that] is responsible for organizing, storing, and distributing the needed supplies to the people, and it is undertaking this task.” People should be reminded that hoarding food “will harm the public without benefitting the hoarder, whether he be a merchant or a consumer. . . . The Prophet, sala ‘alehi wa-salem, said: ‘One who hoards the food of a nation [qawm] is not of them.’”

In this high stakes moment of preparation for war, the practices of policing propriety and encouraging ethical comportment were especially important in the delivery of religious services. The mutual, overlapping obligations inherent in civic life continued to shape its expression. Religious and national duty were inextricably linked in this call for responsible citizenship. The government could meet its obligations to both regulate and provide only with the participation of the entire society. To choose not to participate was to choose not to be of the society. To cooperate with government and with one’s fellow Gazans, on the other hand, was to express the highest ideals of Gaza’s civic life. As it turned out, of course, this carefully calibrated array of obligations was disrupted by the defeat of Egyptian forces and the Israeli occupation of the Gaza Strip.
Education in Gaza during the first half of the twentieth century, which was partly colonial, influenced by nationalism, and indebted to enlightenment traditions and Ottoman practices, was necessarily connected to the contours of civic life that were emerging and being struggled over during this period. Given the intensity of the demand for control and the ongoing uncertainty about rule, the civic life promoted through education unsurprisingly was one which excluded, or at least restricted, political expression. The contours of educational servicing were also formed by uncertainty about the future shape of the polity of which students were being educated to be a part. This uncertain civic life was expressed in education through the sometimes conflicting figures of the “national” and the “citizen.”

In their most common senses, nationality and citizenship appear to be integrally connected. James Holston and Arjun Appadurai, for example, describe a general modern project of “national citizenship” that relies upon an idea of “the nation as a community of shared purposes and commensurable citizens.” In the Gaza of the Mandate and the Administration, however, nationality and citizenship were to a degree uncoupled, and each became a site of struggle. Given the intensity of national conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine during the Mandate, British officials promoted a vision of citizenship that could transcend national distinction and offer a social, as opposed to a political, sense of citizen rights. Since the Administration, on the other hand, was unable to actualize the achievement of formal citizenship (in an independent Palestine) that it promised to Gazans, it promoted the nation as the dominant space of subject positioning. During both periods, Gazans, above all the teachers who were most explicitly called on to impart these visions, challenged the government’s terms and its efforts to control the limits of proper behavior.

If civil servants occupy an uncomfortable space in a ruling dynamic, the work of teachers epitomizes this discomfort. Gazan teachers, who were highly politicized during both the British and the Egyptian periods, were in the position of always having to teach two conflicting curricula at once. On the one hand, they taught the government curriculum with its particular emphases and with its important skills and knowledge. On the other hand,
they also articulated and taught a contesting vision of community and civic life. They suggested, in the Mandate, that the national community was paramount, even as they reproduced the official curriculum’s lessons on world history and universal civics. They suggested during the Administration that the rights of citizenship, rights that included political contestation and organization, were as important as the demands of nation as defined by the Administration. Teachers continually negotiated a terrain of contradiction and conflict.

Early in the Mandate, officials identified education as a mechanism for inculcating a broad conception of Palestinian community, one which would encompass all religions and nationalities and which would be distinctly social, rather than political. Being a good citizen was uncoupled from one’s obligations to country and was figured instead as a general attribute of a proper person. Such a project would be greatly simplified, officials argued, by the establishment of a uniform, national school system. Ylana Miller describes the attitude of the Colonial Office: “The avowed British aim in Palestine was ‘to get Jew and Moslem to work together and develop a common Palestinian consciousness.’ The more schools were left to religious communities and local authorities, the more difficult it would be ‘to get the schools to play their part in the development of such a policy.’” 58 Given the depth of the conflict in Palestine and the doubts and debates that were always present under British rule, one has to wonder, as Miller does, how much British officials really imagined they might succeed in producing a common citizenry and community in Palestine. Certainly the fact that schooling was separated into two systems, the Jewish community operating its own schools, seemed to guarantee that the effort would fail even before it began. 59 However unrealistic the aim, schooling for Arabs in the government system was always engaged in this project of producing non-nationalist, apolitical citizens, a project that was complicated by the uncertain future of Palestine.

A further complication in educational initiatives was that, although schooling was supposed to be compulsory, there was a sizable gap between theory and practice, with large numbers of students shut out of schools every year for lack of space. Education during the Mandate may have been defined in universalizing terms, but it was nowhere near universal. 60 The limits in
educational services represent another instance of services with a limited clientele whose effects were meant to pervade society. Those families which had no direct exposure to school might acquire some familiarity with its general lessons through the social personas of teachers. Civil servants generally, and teachers particularly, had high social status during the Mandate. Given the limited availability of education, it was inevitable that this service field would contribute to the reproduction and reinforcement of class distinctions among the population. The same conditions which mandated the stagnation of much of the population were those which guaranteed the educator and the educated status and respect. Education was widely recognized as a path to personal advancement. As Qasim Jamal, a former teacher, recalled people’s desires to educate their children, “The desire was that they would finish school and become respectable, could find a position, get work.”

Teachers were both the embodiment of this educational ideal and gatekeepers for its realization. Sami Ibrahim, a teacher in Majdal, pointed out that there were very practical reasons to cultivate good relations with teachers, as they determined which of the students would take one the few seats available at the next grade level: “It wasn’t like what they did during the Egyptian Administration when there was a general examination that was corrected in Egypt or was corrected by a committee. . . . No, we made the examination and the grades—and I reported the grades. There was no one to supervise me in the question of grades.” The delegated authority enjoyed by teachers contributed to their social status, as did their relatively high salaries and their education.

The social authority of teachers was evident in the context of religious services—as when a preacher smoothed his entrance into a village by coming with a teacher (see above). In relation to the program of civic education promoted by the Mandate, teachers’ influence was much more complicated. Since, for the most part, Palestinian teachers did not support the government’s policies, their social practices often worked at cross-purposes to its program. Recall the discussion in chapter 3 of one teacher’s (Hanan) extracurricular political activity. Even as Hanan obeyed Mandate commands “at work,” in her personal life she wrote political articles under a pseudonym. Even those teachers who did not directly engage in political activity (no doubt the majority) had an influence on people’s conceptions of what Palestinian
community, society, and civic life could be. That people still talk about the significant effects of Mandate education, even as they complain about its restrictions, suggests that classroom work had a broad social impact.

Decisions and debates about school curricula highlight the tension between social citizenship and national identification. The students who were lucky enough to be admitted to schools were taught different subjects depending on whether they were in town or village schools. The village curriculum was limited in its academic subjects and was weighted toward agricultural techniques. This curriculum was intended, in the words of one educational official, to deliver “an education that will at once enlighten the peasant, make him a contented citizen, and keep him on the land.” The town school curriculum included history, Arabic, English, mathematics, religion (Islam or Christianity, as appropriate), hygiene, drawing, and sports. It was designed to ensure that upon graduation students would “know in a systematic way (a) the circumstances of the development of human society and present systems of government; (b) the problems that face human society at present, and (c) the duties of the citizen to his country.” Each of these knowledges was general, connected to universal history and values. The duties of the citizen that students were to learn through this curriculum were not, therefore, the particular duties of an Arab Palestinian living in the conditions of the Mandate, but the general duties that any citizen anywhere would have to his country.

The politics of curricular depoliticization did not go unnoticed among Palestinian nationalists. The emphasis in the curriculum on world history was understood as a direct attack on the development of Palestinian nationalist consciousness in students. A. L. Tibawi, the education inspector for the Southern district, recorded the following complaints in his history of Mandate education: “While it contained features of the geography and history of Arab countries, [nationalists] never ceased to point out, it insisted in its content and tone on the international rather than the national character of Palestine. The Arab boy or girl was taught far less about the history of his nation and the geography of the Arab countries, the argument went, than the average Iraqi or for that matter the Palestinian Jewish child studying under a national but an independent system of education.” Despite their political objections to this curriculum, Palestinian teachers recognized what they
identified as its pedagogical importance. It was a good education, if not always the right one. Almost every former Mandate teacher with whom I spoke echoed this view. Hanan summed up her view of British education as follows: “The level of education was high, sixth or seventh class during the British period was better than the level of the general secondary students today—truly, without exaggeration. This is true, and one cannot say anything but the truth. However, we still dislike them.”

Visible in this attitude of educators is how the development of citizenship was complicated not only by the practices of tactical government, which ensured that no one, clear policy could ever be pursued with consistency, but also by the sometimes oppositional practices of the teachers who had to implement any policy. There is no small irony in the fact that the arena that was supposed to produce apolitical citizens was occupied by the most political of civil servants. While teachers remember their political activity during this period as being severely curtailed, as constrained as that of any other civil servant—“They didn’t allow any discussion of politics, not by us or the students,” one teacher told me—politics plainly did seep through the restrictions.

Government was certainly aware that students were learning nationalism, however indirectly, from those who were supposed to teach citizenship. In an attempt to deal with this problem, the Education Ordinance of 1933 provided for the firing of any teacher who was proven “to have imparted teaching of a seditious, disloyal, immoral, or otherwise harmful character” and the closing of any school “being conducted in a manner contrary to good order and morals.” Through its use of a general language of “order” and “morals” the education ordinance presented itself as a nonpolitical document, a representation of the social public sphere that Mandate practice sought to promote. At the same time, of course, these broad categories were designed to permit the firing of any teacher deemed to be a nationalist.

That this effort to foreclose nationalism enjoyed only limited success is evident in Palestinians’ memories of this period and was recognized at the time by Mandate officials. The Peel Commission Report of 1937 summed up the state of the problem when it identified education as a key factor in the growth of Palestinian nationalism:

The whole of the Arab educational system, unlike the Jewish, is maintained by the government . . . it is at least as purely Arab in its character as
the Jewish system is Jewish. . . . A school-system thus purely Arab may be better for Arab children than a “mixed” system with a British element in its staff and its field of instruction; it is the right way, it is said, to make them “good Arabs.” Whether that is so or not, it certainly makes them good Arab patriots. The general tendency of schoolmasters to be politically-minded is nowhere more marked than in the Middle East: and it is not to be expected that Arab schoolmasters in Palestine, Government servants though they are, should be able to repress entirely their sympathy with the nationalist cause.

The narrowness of a school system that was “purely Arab” apparently made it difficult to create Arabs who were broadly civic. Politically minded teachers, left to their own devices, produced politically minded students. Despite the fact that education was a service domain in which government endeavored to plan strategically and from which it made an explicit effort to remove politics, it was, as we have seen, one of the more political of service areas.

When political leaders called strikes in the country, students and, sometimes, teachers obeyed. In one of his memoirs, Ibrahim Skeik, a former teacher and local historian, recalled such a strike. On November 2, he remembered from his elementary school days, he and the other young boys would run into older students on their way to school who would tell them, “Today is Balfour Declaration Day—it’s a strike. So we retraced our steps, and no one was scolded or punished.” Tibawi noted this same phenomenon in his report on education during the latter years of the Mandate:

There is hardly any place for politics in a report of this nature but a few passing remarks are needed to touch on the subject of strikes in schools. This subject was almost negligible from 1940 to 1944, but with the resumption of political activity in Palestine . . . strikes were declared. . . . Government schools like all other branches of the Government service were bound to be affected, and attendance of pupils on the days of the strike became either scarce or nil. . . . From the range of my experience as a pupil, teacher and inspector from 1920–45 I know of no effective remedy to stop completely strikes in schools when there is a political strike. . . . Penalties of suspension, expulsion or payment of fines proved of no avail in dealing with pupils. Warnings and withholding of increment of salary was likewise useless in dealing with teachers.
Both the complaints made about the school curriculum and the prevalence of political activity within and around schools highlight the extent to which the stakes of this service were evident to providers and recipients. Distraction and deferral gave way to direct political challenge. Education (not always, but at times) was a case in which abeyance failed. There was almost no service area that did not on occasion witness such a failure, but, along with policing, education proved to be the most difficult to manage. As political challenges heated up after World War II, abeyance, which offered no real solution to the problems of governing Palestine but simply was a way to manage such government in the short run, was no longer a sufficient technique. Having no capacity to govern in any other way, the British ultimately gave up on their civic project and on the Mandate as a whole.

SCHOOLING AND SURVEILLANCE: EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES IN THE EGYPTIAN ADMINISTRATION

Educational services during the Egyptian Administration did not, as they did during the Mandate, strive to exclude nationalism from the curriculum or from the minds of students and teachers. On the contrary, during this period a carefully circumscribed version of nationalism was promoted and encouraged, and the concept of the citizen assumed a more restricted place in education. The tensions that teachers felt as participants in the practice of education were similarly reconfigured. Teachers’ oppositional practices during the Administration tended to inject political citizenship, including the right of opposition and the right to organize, into students’ consciousness. Another distinguishing feature of this period was the addition of UNRWA as a negotiating party that shaped the contours of educational practice. If the Administration and Gazan teachers struggled most immediately over the shape of the current civic life, UNRWA and the Administration struggled over its future. In this struggle as well, the Administration privileged nationalism as the idea that would give shape to this future, while UNRWA promoted a more prosaic notion of utility in education.

As in other service areas, Egyptian security concerns had considerable impact on educational practice. Despite, or maybe because of, these concerns, education was the site of the most expansive governmental project of the Egyptian Administration. As distinguished from crisis and everyday
services, in community services like education and religious servicing the Administration hoped to do more than contain security threats. It hoped to actively transform the political positions and dispositions that could produce such threats. We have seen how religious education sought to contribute to a project of producing social subjectivities, a project that extended across the curriculum. Muslim Brotherhood and Communist Party affiliations would, it was hoped, be substituted by support for Nasserism. The prevalence of independent political attitudes among teachers made this a challenging proposition in certain ways, though the evidence suggests that Nasserism was indeed broadly popular among the Gazan population. To the extent that Palestinian nationalism was encouraged, and it was, this was to be a dependent nationalism—subordinate to Egyptian political demands and not to be acted upon on solely Palestinian initiative. The simultaneous expansion of education and control of politics were pursued through increased surveillance of schools and their occupants.

Egyptian authorities transformed the social landscape in Gaza by making universal primary and secondary education a reality and by providing free university education for large numbers of Gazans. This massive educational expansion mirrored the policy in Egypt, and here too university graduates were granted government employment. The importance of Egyptian educational initiatives is universally recognized and applauded by Gazans today. Gazans who refer to Egyptian rule as a “golden age for the Palestinian people” explicitly connect this evaluation to the expansion of education. As a retired government clerk put it to me, “We are completely tied with the Egyptians. No one can deny that. They were here to serve us. People used to study without paying fees. . . . Education was free. That is why if you pay a visit to a [refugee] camp you will find tens of teachers, doctors, pharmacists, and engineers who were educated at Egyptian universities.”

The massive educational transformation took time, of course. In the immediate aftermath of 1948, there were not enough schools, teachers, or materials, nor were there the funds to provide them. Gazans recalled to me the very difficult conditions in which education was initially pursued: “Pupils had no wooden board to write on. They wrote on the asphalt. They solved algebra questions while they were walking.” Mahdi Ayub, a former teacher, recalled how he began his career teaching refugee children: “In the beginning
of 1949, after five months, we, the youth, gathered and discussed the situation and decided to be volunteers and teach the children. We started to teach the children in streets. The Quakers and the Egyptian Administration noticed us and helped us.”

Eventually, Mahdi recounted, schools were built to house these students. He insisted that, even without school buildings, refugees’ desire for knowledge was such that his students’ grades were better than those of native Gazans studying in preexisting schools. Today, the high educational levels attained by refugees are often pointed to as proof that they have “assimilated” into Gazan society—that they have overcome their initial lower-class position. In fact, class and other distinctions between these groups have not entirely disappeared.

Getting enough books for all the students was a problem, as was the sorts of books that were available. Coming out of the frustrations of Mandate education, Gazans initially hoped to have a more Palestinian curriculum.
When a delegation from the Arab League visited Gaza in 1952, the mayor took the opportunity to insist that students in Gaza needed to be educated in the history and geography of Palestine and that they needed textbooks that could offer this education. Providing such resources proved difficult. A committee sent from Egypt in 1959 to examine the state of education in Gaza noted that some classes still lacked books altogether. Those that did have them relied almost entirely on Egyptian texts. The committee agreed that this was a problem because “some of the things in Egyptian schoolbooks will be strange to Gazan students,” but designing wholly local texts would have been difficult given that, as the committee also recognized, “the current situation in Gaza is a provisional one, subject to many changes.” One effect of the textbook situation, and of the educational practice more generally, was that Gaza’s students received a somewhat deflected education. They were schooled in the manner of Egyptian citizens, and yet they were not schooled to be such citizens. Keeping Palestinian national feeling alive and controlled was an Egyptian priority, but the mechanisms for providing this national education (tarbiyya wataniyya wa-qawmiyya) were not necessarily Palestinian.

The Administration and UNRWA certainly struggled over curricular issues, and their conflicts were often about short-term practical benefits versus
long-term national strategies. A conflict in 1959/60 between the two bodies over responsibility and funding for an agricultural training school in Beit Hanoun illustrates this tension. Having operated the school for a number of years, UNRWA decided to terminate its support on the grounds that, because agricultural lands were very limited in Gaza and no local work was available for graduates of the school, it did not conform to the agency’s policy of funding “useful” projects. UNRWA’s apparently prosaic focus on training refugees in useful skills was interpreted in political terms by the Administration. In responding to the decision to stop funding the school, the Administration countered that UNRWA’s responsibility was to improve the educational standards of refugees to prepare them for a future not in their temporary refuges, but in their homes: “The intent in this improvement is not to settle [tawtin] them in the places where they are living, but the goal is that they should be good citizens [muwatinin salahin] when they return to their country.” In the Administration’s view, citizenship was defined in reference to the deferred future in Palestine, and education in the present should produce Gazans who were Palestinian “nationals.” Students were to be prepared for citizenship in a country which did not (yet) exist, and whose relation to their current conditions was not defined.

While the Administration championed future civic life in this conflict with UNRWA, its own position was not and could not be stable. Even as Administration officials were accusing UNRWA of attempting to settle the Palestine problem by focusing on practical education, in another setting officials were championing exactly this kind of need-focused education. The 1959 “Report on Education in Gaza” implied that UNRWA had responded too much to refugees’ desires for higher education and had lost sight of the need for the creation of work opportunities. The report indicated that the school curricula of the government and UNRWA alike—contained far too little vocational training: “The result of the current education system is that many young men graduate from their theoretical studies and the Strip is not able to find room for them.” In the absence of any industry in Gaza, even vocational education was less than wholly practical. As the report stated, “Establishing industrial schools in the Strip before industry is set up there will transform the study to theoretical study.” These considerations seem the same as those which made UNRWA hesitant to keep funding the agricultural school. Whatever the Ad-
ministration’s commitment to a future Palestine (a commitment that was generally more rhetorical than practical), the immediate economic demands and political threats of Gaza’s difficult conditions made it impossible to banish immediate concerns from educational services.\footnote{88}

The emphasis on national education by Egyptians was both policy and practical consideration. Unable to offer Gazans immediate improvement, administrators resorted to offering them hope for the future. Teachers’ descriptions of their work during this period emphasize the importance of developing this sense of nation among their students. Ibrahim Mahmoud, a native inhabitant of Gaza who was both a teacher and a principal in UNRWA schools, described his responsibilities as the head of the “cultural committee” in his first school.\footnote{89} This committee, he said, focused on “making the people aware culturally, principally concentrating on morals and values as well as the love for the people and doing good deeds.”\footnote{90} He noted that one of the achievements of the committee was implanting a sense of patriotism among the students. When I asked him how this patriotism was taught, he said, “Loving homeland and morals do not come by instruction but through practices. Practices—that means you tell stories, run school tours where cooperation among people and the respect for others prevail, where the importance of not harming others and forgiving people will be clearly manifest—through practices. Also through writings, for example, in a small newspaper. . . . These things encourage the students to search in the library about the moral values, which they then wrote about and showed to their teacher.” The duties of the nationalist as described in schools were not immediately political ones, but cultural and moral ones, including care for others, cooperation, and respect. Ibrahim argued that being a patriot was a moral duty and a requirement for the betterment of society as a whole: “They must love the people so that the whole society can live in happiness and well-being.”\footnote{91}

The happiness of the whole society, from the Administration’s perspective at least, depended not just on patriotism among its people, but also on the control of unauthorized political expression. It is in the struggle over the control of political activity in and around schools that the extent to which educational patriotism was pursued at the expense of certain aspects of citizenship is especially manifest. Ibrahim, who spoke so proudly of his achievements in inculcating patriotism in his students and who praised
Egyptian authorities for their support of education, is the same Ibrahim whom these authorities imprisoned for nearly two years (see chapter 3). Politics was a perpetual threat, and teachers, who were always more political than the general population, were the objects of continual surveillance and regulation. In the Administration police files there are numerous reports of principals being instructed to watch their teachers (and themselves) to ensure that there were no political activities in schools.²

A file on the Bureij Middle School for Refugees demonstrates the extent of the surveillance of education in the Administration as well as the prevalence of politics within the schools.³ On the morning of October 12, 1959, the janitor of the Bureij school found a leaflet posted on the door of the school. As he began to remove it, some students ripped the leaflet apart, perhaps to forestall an investigation. He was able to put the pieces together, and he then turned the leaflet over to the school principal, who sent it to the Deir Belah administrative governor, who in turn sent a contingent of police officers to investigate. The officers questioned the students who had ripped down the leaflet as well as its author and some teachers. The text of the leaflet seemed to comport with the messages being promoted by the Administration—it declared “Palestine is our country” and “Long Live Gamal Abdul Nasser”—so the disturbance produced by its posting was obviously about something other than content. This independent action on the part of a student raised the possibility of a loss of control over the school and the civic environments. The sentiments might have been proper, but their expression had not been authorized.

The investigation into the posting revealed that the school was an arena of rampant factionalism and party politics. The police identified teachers affiliated with the Communist Party, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Ba’th party, the supporters of each organization accusing the others of creating trouble and “chaos.”⁴ In an incident which exemplified just how difficult educators could be to control, an informant reported on a quarrel that broke out among the teachers. They were calling each other garbage, and the principal, who was a Ba’thist, threatened to “wring the neck” of a Nasserist teacher. The principal announced to the group, “I am a Ba’thist, and I am not afraid of anyone, not even Gamal Abdul Nasser.”⁵

Even as the Administration sought to promote a nonpolitical national subject, teachers injected a sense of political citizenship into the discourse
about civic life. It was teachers and students who were at the forefront of demonstrations in 1955 against a proposed plan to resettle refugees in the Sinai. It was teachers who were most active in the political parties the administration hoped to control. Even the imprisonment in 1959 of a large number of teachers for their political activity—the incident is mentioned by Mahmoud and described in detail by Mu‘in Basisu, a teacher, poet, and Communist Party activist, in Descent into the Water—failed to entirely contain such expression.

During the Administration, political threats and the perception thereof ebbed and flowed. There were moments of genuine crisis, many of which involved teachers directly, but the dynamic of Egyptian government was never completely undermined. Through one tactic or another, and sometimes by changing a governing practice, these crises were contained, though never really solved, and abeyance continued to work. Changes in the governing structure in Gaza in the latter years of the Administration do suggest that there may have been a limit to deferral’s effectiveness as a governing tactic. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was created in 1964; shortly thereafter the National Union was dissolved and replaced by the PLO as Gaza’s only recognized party. The PLO then established the Palestine Liberation Army (PLA), with Gaza as its primary base. Yezid Sayigh indicates that Egyptian authorities initially objected to this establishment, but that Nasser ultimately was compelled to support it in order to deflect challenges to his leadership in the Arab world. Sayigh further argues that the actual establishment of the PLA in Gaza was hampered by Egyptian policies. However tempered the support may have been, in March 1965 the governor-general and Legislative Council approved a law mandating compulsory conscription. This move toward the creation of Palestinian institutions, however limited their authority (and it was quite limited), does allude to the impossibility of deferring Palestinian national aspirations indefinitely. Since Israel’s occupation of Gaza cut the Administration short, what exactly might have been the limits of deferral and of abeyance will never be known.

Conclusion

Government control, political struggles, and the proprieties of civic life were intertwined in the provision of community services. In these services, contestations over civic life centered around government’s attempts to control
political expression, Gazan efforts to expand political consciousness, debates about the role of religion in public life, and challenges to the highly vexed categories of “national” and “citizen.” Ideas about civic life were always expressed in multiple tenses—struggling with past loss, striving for the future, uncertain about the present. The concern for control, for propriety, was perhaps the most difficult feature of tactical government. It was compelled by anxiety and incapacity. At the same time it required a putting aside of this anxiety and a surpassing of these incapacities. Control demanded precisely the kind of over-involvement that government in Gaza generally struggled to avoid. There was also a persistent paradox in these controlling services, as it was precisely in the domains where government was expansive that the most sustained resistance emerged.

This awkward relation among the aspects of tactical government was itself, of course, tactical. Tactical government was by its nature self-contradictory, relying now on one instrument, now on another. Government coped with the difficult conditions of Gaza by deploying a tactical mobility that allowed it to respond rapidly to changing demands, just as Gazans coped with these same conditions through a multiplicity of practices that included care and contestation, scuffles and support. The confrontations among these forces sometimes produced crises in abeyance—such a crisis led the British to retreat from the Mandate and perhaps could have undermined Egyptian rule had it continued—but also often worked to sustain rule. Within this dynamic, the parties to government in Gaza each sought, even within the constrained horizons of its temporality, to imagine a future that could provide more security, greater stability, a better life.