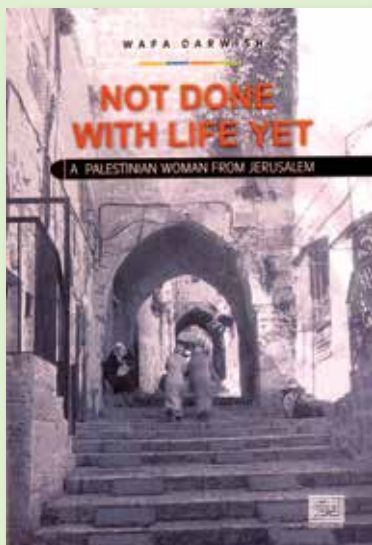


## Not Done With Life Yet



**By Wafa Darwish**  
**Dar Al Shuruq, 2014**  
**144 pages, US \$ 6.00**

*Reviewed by Alice S. Yousef*

In *Not Done With Life Yet*, Wafa Darwish muses on major stops along the road of her life in Palestine and abroad. At first impression, the book may seem to be an ordinary tale of an ordinary woman: A young child grows up in Jerusalem, spends her school years in Ramallah, moves to Beirut for college, and becomes a woman, mother, lecturer. On careful reading, however, Darwish's extraordinary persona shines through. Considering critical eras in the personal history of Darwish, the narrative also touches on a collective history of the region: Palestine, Lebanon, and Egypt are among the countries where Darwish strove to grow roots and find normalcy. Slowly, massive layers peel off to reveal the fight that Darwish had to lead against disability, oppression, and many strings of loss and longing. It traces a humane experience of life, spanning from ordinary childhood situations, infatuations, and merriment to major losses and injustices. There are many challenges to overcome in a journey

of growth that takes place in a region that is never stable or peaceful. The opening chapters offer a window into the old city of Jerusalem and find a child born into a torn house to divorced parents. Walking through the book, the reader grows close to the author, feeling the first pangs of loss, realizing that Darwish is gradually losing not only her homes and homeland to occupation but also her eyesight, a main means by which we survive. But life carries on with more surprises for both protagonist and reader. The book sorts through chapters in the history of a family that is at war with belonging: Jerusalem is an occupied city in which the Darwish family fights not only for physical space but also for joy in long nights of hospitable summers.

Readers lose and find themselves the same way the author does, gliding to a possibility of a brighter end as the fight for life continues and the author's thirst for a middle ground has not been fully realized. As the years pass, readers rest with Darwish as she contemplates the breeze blowing from the window by her daughter's bedside, an alternative middle ground. Within the journey, one can feel the strength of the woman Darwish has become within the whirlwind of political and personal turbulence. Even though Darwish is not a typical, traditional Palestinian woman, she radiates strength and nationalism, evident in the many sacrifices she's made to survive divorces, death, and the side effects of war. Far from the classic romanticization frequently associated with writings about Palestine, and far from political diction and jargon, the book is written in a simple manner, narrated as if spoken, and packed with action and movement. There's a whiff of every place: the reader can smell the jasmine of summer and taste the *mujadara* made for friends in Lebanon. Despite extensive losses, bitterness rarely exists, and the tone of the writing tends to be lighthearted, at times even funny.

Wafa Darwish made me laugh and cry; and by the way she combs disasters with the back of her hand and walks on, not done with life yet, she makes me realize what a Palestinian woman is.