



Editorial

Forbidden Destinations, New Perspectives

On a Sunday afternoon last May, friends and colleagues in Ramallah were waiting for Professor Noam Chomsky, his daughter Avi and Professors Irene Gendzier and Assaf Khoury, to arrive from the Allenby Bridge crossing from Jordan. Noam Chomsky is a global figure, both as an unparalleled critic of imperial power, particularly the United States, and as a renowned linguist: he was due to speak at Birzeit University the next day and to give a seminar at our own Institute of Jerusalem Studies in Ramallah. Then the phone rang. “He’s been denied entry.”

Chomsky had visited both Israel and the Occupied Territories on many occasions in the past and his powerful critique of Israeli policies, the Israeli occupation, and the U.S.-Israel relationship has been on the books for at least four decades. So what was different this time? Chomsky himself has an answer:

Opening of Allenby bridge, 1918.
Source: Library of Congress.

“They apparently didn’t like the fact that I was due to lecture at a Palestinian university and not in Israel.” Indeed, it seems that Noam Chomsky was denied entry to the West Bank simply because he was *not* visiting Israel.

Meager or no publicity greets the less famous visitors to Palestine, young and old, Arab and international, solidarity activists and pilgrims, whose passports also bear the dreaded stamp: “Denied Entry.” But the same colonial logic is in operation: there is one proper destination in this land and it is Israel. As we reflect on the long history of travel to the “Holy Land” in this issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* on “Pilgrims, Tourists, and Travelers” and consider the pilgrimages, travels and package tours of literally millions and millions of people crisscrossing the land over many centuries, it is sobering but crucial to address the exclusions of the present day. For example, a new Israel military order (1650) issued in April, made public in June, and not yet fully implemented, treats everyone living or visiting the West Bank without a permit as an “infiltrator” subject to deportation. (See the websites of Al Haq or the Campaign for the Right to Enter the Occupied Palestinian Territories for more information). The West Bank in this interpretation is only a border zone where Israeli immigration and security officials are the ultimate rulers.

In this issue of *JQ*, we can trace the development and re-configuration of borders both of the state and of the imagination. When Nabil Matar’s two seventeenth century travelers to Palestine from far-away locations – England and Morocco – made their journeys, bandits, not borders, were the immediate concern. But as Matar so acutely shows, the Moroccan jurist Ayyashi “experienced one Palestine,” while the English trader T.B. “constructed another,” a much narrower one, pursuing and recording his lists of sites and failing to imaginatively come to grips with the people and land around him.

The nineteenth-century French traveler Pierre Loti, whose journey across the Sinai to Jerusalem is sensitively analyzed by Abdul Karim Abu Khashan, was turned away from Petra by Ottoman officials due to conflict in the area, but principally had his own fears (and stereotypes) of the desert and its Bedouin inhabitants, to overcome, rather than a state power hostile to his pilgrimage. Abu Khashan critically unpacks the contradictions in Loti’s accounts of his Bedouin companions who provide him with protection and comfort, even while Loti is scribbling highly negative and vivid portrayals into his notebooks. But Abu Khashan uncovers one more interesting paradox: Loti affirms he has arrived in the Holy Land when he enters the coastal plains of Gaza – not recognizing his seven days in the Naqab as such – and immediately changes his viewpoint, describing local Bedouin inhabitants, as well as peasants and urban dwellers, in a more positive light cast by the sacred space.

In the current atmosphere, the literary pilgrims featured in Hilton Obenzinger’s pungent account of an international conference of the Melville Society held in East Jerusalem, find themselves facing both political dilemmas and security scrutiny as they gather to discuss Herman Melville’s long (and complicated) narrative poem, *Clarel: A Poem and Pilgrimage to the Holy Land*. An Israeli security guard asks one participant: “You are going to Israel to attend a conference about ... a poem?” Indeed, Obenzinger’s

absorbing account of conference discussions of, and pilgrimages to, sites in *Clarel*, raises questions of how or whether “normal” activities such as an international academic conference can take place in the context of occupation and contestation.

Rebecca Stein’s meditation on Israeli routes through Nakba landscapes expands our notions of travel as she explores Israeli travels and routes which feature encounters with the pre-1948 Palestinian landscape, buildings and artifacts. She uses a fine ethnographic brush to ink the portraits of an Israeli Jewish woman living in (and forgetting the past of) an Arab house in Abu Tur, an Israeli Jewish man living with objects looted from Palestinian houses in Qatamon, and, conversely Israeli Jewish activists engaged in the act of remembering and re-marking Palestinian sites. These acts of remembering and forgetting are highly charged: we need only to note recent legislation presented to the Israeli Knesset to make the commemoration of the Nakba a crime. Also of great concern for scholars and for recovering historical memory is the July 2010 decision of Prime Minister Benyamin Netanyahu, “under pressure from intelligence agencies” (*Ha’aretz* 28 July) to keep state archives classified for an additional twenty years, beyond the present fifty year period.

In a lively and evocative piece that complements Stein’s attention to the Israeli looting of the Qatamon neighborhood in 1948, Eldad Brin, himself an independent licensed tour guide, takes a municipal-sponsored tour of the Old Qatamon neighborhood billed as “the story of a border neighborhood during Israel’s War of Independence.” Brin is attuned, as the all-Israeli group walks through the leafy neighborhood of Qatamon, to the “things unsaid,” whether Qatamon’s pre-1948 Arab-Palestinian character, its architectural heritage and history or the disappearing of Palestinian civilians from the story of the battle for Qatamon. He marks the “derision” with which the guide treats the Arab partisans in this battle and the “dominance of the Jewish narrative” and argues convincingly that the guide’s narrative and presentation is part of the continuing story.

JQ is fortunate to have two brief but compelling memoirs in this issue. Simone Fattal tells the story of her Aunt Rose’s pilgrimages to Jerusalem from Damascus (as well as her own) before the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation closed the gates of the city to these Arab Christians. Ellen Cantarow remembers her visits as a committed journalist during two Palestinian intifadas and brings both periods, their people and landscapes to life. She makes a convincing argument for “enlightened tourism” and even gives a few tips for travelers. A review essay by Penny Johnson on art historian Annabel Wharton’s book, *Selling Jerusalem*, traces key transformations in the circulation of Jerusalem and its sacred objects, paralleling changes in the city’s visitors from pilgrims to tourists. The essay brings our issue to a close – but not our topic, which will be explored further in forthcoming issues of the *Quarterly*.

Penny Johnson is the editor of this issue of the Jerusalem Quarterly.