

EDITORIAL

A Whiff of Everyday Religion

Palestine's construction as the Holy Land, a place coveted by Christians and studied by Orientalists for its associations with a biblical past, has ironically overshadowed the ways in which its inhabitants have understood its holiness (or, perhaps more accurately, have related to the holy within it) in more quotidian terms. Several contributions to this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* address the place of shrines, holy sites, and religious festivals within Palestinian society. Over the past two centuries – and especially since 1948 – these spaces and events have undergone radical transformations, reshaped by the modernization of religion and the rise of nationalism, but most radically by the settler-colonial ethos of exclusionary appropriation that has characterized the Zionist project in Palestine.

As Fadi Ragheb shows in “Sharing the Holy Land: Islamic Pilgrimage to Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem during the Late Medieval and Early Modern Periods” – the winner of this year's Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem – Muslim visitors to Jerusalem in the premodern period frequented sites holy to Christians. Islam's reverence for Jesus and Mary meant that sites central to Christianity were significant for Muslims, too. Drawing on *Fada'il al-Quds* (Merits of Jerusalem) literature as well as Muslim travelogues, Ragheb shows that Muslims not only visited such sites, but offered prayers there, and even participated in Christian celebrations. Repeated questions in this literature as to the desirability or permissibility of Muslims entering or praying in

churches, for example, pointed both to the anxiety aroused by such practices and their prevalence.

Salim Tamari's rumination on the festival of Simon the Just (*Shimon haTsadik*), "An Air Smelling Event," shows that Jewish-affiliated locations were also known for multiconfessional celebrations. Indeed, the late Ottoman and early Mandate descriptions of the festival associated with Simon the Just capture the transitional period during which such social intermingling was undone by newly dominant colonial and nationalist ways of being. This same period, for example, saw the transformation of the Nabi Musa festivities in Jerusalem into a nationalist event, as explored by Awad Halabi in his recent book *Palestinian Rituals of Identity: The Prophet Moses Festival in Jerusalem, 1850–1948*, reviewed in this issue of *JQ* by Jacob Norris. Tamari also offers a glimpse of an alternative possibility, in which multiconfessional festivities briefly seemed as though they might continue as "secular" revelries – in which local sharing of music, food, and language took precedence over religious rituals. Given that Zionist settlers have since used claims to Shimon HaTsadik's tomb to justify displacing Palestinians from the Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood where it is located, such alternatives can seem almost unimaginable today.

The changing relationship between communities and religious sites and festivals is also at the core of David J. Marshall's "Sacred Space/Contested Place: Intergenerational Memory and the Shifting Meanings of the Shrine/Tomb of Joseph." Marshall's interviews with Palestinians of different generations who reside near Maqam Yusuf, outside Nablus, indicate that the shifting political context in which the site is situated has led to its transformation from a place associated with social activities and celebrations (particularly for women) to one linked to violence in the minds of a younger generation (particularly young men). Although Marshall cautions against an overly romanticized notion of a peaceful and harmonious past – suggesting Robert Hayden's notion of "antagonistic tolerance" as one way of understanding multiconfessional interactions at holy sites – he also picks up on the possibility for alternatives hinted at in the "air-smelling event" of Simon the Just, alternatives that seek the resanctification of local sites, figures, and events in open and inclusive ways that refuse the exclusive claims of settler colonialism.

This issue of *JQ* also features two sections devoted to current and ongoing concerns for Palestinians in and beyond Jerusalem. The first of these is education, where Jerusalem has become a focus of Israeli efforts to Zionize Palestinian education. The previous Israeli government devoted significant energy (and funds) to push Palestinian Jerusalemites into schools that use Israeli curricula. Although the current far-right government of Benjamin Netanyahu – in particular, the extremist finance minister Bezalel Smotrich – has indicated some reluctance to devote funding to what it sees as services for Palestinians, efforts to "de-Palestinianize" education in Jerusalem are ongoing. Parents of some 460 students of al-Sal'a Boys School in Jabal Mukabir have organized daily protests since the start of the school year. They are refusing to send their children to a new school for al-Sal'a secondary students – whom the old school building cannot accommodate – because it intends to impose the Israeli curriculum.

In Kafr ‘Aqab, the Iliya School – one of several new schools built in East Jerusalem to introduce the Israeli curriculum – was painted with oppositional graffiti and set on fire. Meanwhile, Israeli police continue to harass Palestinian students at al-Haram al-Sharif, searching their bags and confiscating schoolbooks that depict the Palestinian flag or any other form of national sentiment, including maps or slogans, on the claim that it represents “incitement.” The two reports here, by Anwar Qadah and Zayd al-Qiq, have been translated from Arabic to provide background to the ongoing Zionist assaults on Palestinian education in Jerusalem, a multidimensional campaign that has received little sustained coverage in English.

Health and environment – global concerns that have been exacerbated by a pandemic and intensifying climate crises, including droughts, storms, wildfires, and extreme temperatures – are the focus of a roundtable in this issue with contributions from Osama Tanous, Maysaa Nemer, and Brian Boyd. These worldwide phenomena are particularly acute in the Palestinian case, where access to basic needs fundamental to survival (food, water, a livable environment) is a constant struggle. Moreover, Palestinians’ conditions illuminate the fact that, as a species and a planet, we cannot expect to address the global challenge of climate change without first reimagining our relationship to the environment. This reimagining requires acknowledging and dismantling the violent colonial approaches to land, resources, productivity, and science that lie at the root of Palestinians’ dispossession and oppression. The intertwining of health, reproduction, and colonial modernity is also central to Frances Hasso’s *Buried in the Red Dirt: Race, Reproduction, and Death in Modern Palestine*, reviewed in this issue by Nadim Bawalsa.

Rounding out this issue of *JQ* is Gabriel Schwake’s article on Palestinian and Israeli housing architecture, “Red Pitched Roofs: A (Post)Colonial Genealogy.” Finally, this editorial offers an opportunity to express *JQ*’s enormous appreciation for the co-editorship of Lisa Taraki. Over the past year and a half, and especially in *JQ*’s transition from the longtime leadership of Salim Tamari, her steady comradeship and critical eye have been an indispensable boon to the journal. Though her name no longer appears on the masthead, it is important to acknowledge that this issue also benefited from her input.