

Editorial

Ramadan Wars: Jerusalem and Gaza

Jerusalem was at the heart of the Palestinian uprising in April/May and Israel's subsequent war on Gaza. At the start of those events was the resistance against two evictions: the first, of Palestinian youth from public space at Damascus Gate and the second, of Palestinian families from their homes in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Shaykh Jarrah. Together they represent only the latest in the long Palestinian struggle against Israeli efforts by the state and settlers to remove them from the city, and are of profound significance for the future of Jerusalem.

The events may have progressed unexpectedly rapidly, but they were not unpredictable. It began in the first nights of Ramadan in mid-April, when Israeli police suddenly blocked the entrances to the tiered steps leading down to Damascus Gate. The amphitheater-like area is the one public plaza in the Old City where youth can congregate, especially during festive evenings in Ramadan. This year it became the focus of Ramadan nightly clashes between Palestinian youth and Israeli police. The clashes reached their peak on 21 April when the Lehava ("flame") Jewish supremacist group marched into the Old City, with police permits, and later into Shaykh Jarrah chanting "Restore Jewish dignity" and "Death to the Arabs." At Zion Square in West Jerusalem, right-wing activists assaulted left-wing Jewish activists who were protesting against Lehava's racist messaging. The daily press reported hundreds of Jewish activists congregated around the Knesset calling for vengeance on the "Philistines."

[They] defiantly sang “Zakhreini Na,” which is associated with revenge and ends with the words of Samson in the Book of Judges: “O Lord God, remember me, I pray Thee, and strengthen me, I pray Thee, only this once, O God, that I may be this once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes” – but they sang the lyrics substituting Palestinians for the Philistines.¹

Simultaneously, provocations by Haredi and nationalist Jewish youth inside al-Haram al-Sharif compound were taking place. And in Shaykh Jarrah, the Palestinian neighborhood on Nablus Road, demonstrations every evening protesting new eviction orders against Palestinian families and settler take-overs of their homes, were met with extreme police violence injuring scores of protestors. It was then that Hamas began launching homemade rockets across the Gaza border in response to the aggressive actions in Jerusalem, and Israel unleashed its shock and awe barrage against Gaza, killing and injuring hundreds of civilian victims, until the Egyptian-brokered cease-fire stilled the bombing.

The uprising was a battle against ongoing Israeli processes of exclusion and discrimination against Palestinians in Jerusalem. But it also brought to the fore Palestinian claims for sovereignty over Arab Jerusalem, claims enlivened with force by the protestors – perhaps in opposition to the more tepid response of the official Palestinian leadership after President Abbas announced the postponement of Palestinian elections – scheduled for 22 May – because Israel had not acknowledged the rights of Jerusalem residents to vote. The slogan was “no elections without Jerusalem” but many observers saw the postponement as reflecting the ruling party’s fear of losing control over the Palestinian Authority, which had no response to proposals for logistical solutions for voting in areas of greater Jerusalem that are under the control of the PA, such as al-‘Ayzariya, and Kufr Aqab.

When the war on Gaza was raging the elections seemed to have been forgotten, or at least sidelined, but Jerusalem and Palestinian rights are once more at center stage. The war itself ended with an indeterminate truce and a massive destruction of Gaza infrastructure, as well as hundreds of civilian casualties. But it also generated enormous mobilization and global solidarity, triggered by the wide bombing of Gaza’s heavy residential areas. Youth rebellions (what else can we call them?) in Jaffa, Tiberius, Lydda, and ‘Akka and other urban “mixed cities” within Israel formed unparalleled scenes of solidarity with Gaza and Shaykh Jarrah. Those were followed by massive demonstrations throughout the West Bank and in the Arab world – in Yemen, Iraq, Jordan, Tunis, and Lebanon – and simultaneously in London, Rome, Paris, Madrid, Stockholm, and dozens of North American cities, of people galvanized in support of Palestinians. The unity produced by these street demonstrations recalled events during the First Intifada.

As we ponder our present, can we bring new critical eyes to the past? The focus of this issue of *JQ* is “Time Travelers in Palestine” based on a collection of stereoscopic images taken around the year 1900 that were curated in March 2017 by Issam Nassar and Ariella Azoulay at Brown University.



Invitation to the exhibition *Time Machine: Stereoscopic Views of Palestine, 1900*, Pembroke Hall, Brown University, March – May 2017 (design Erin Wells).

The images by various photographers take viewers on a journey through Palestine beginning with Jaffa, the traditional point of arrival in the country, followed by images of biblical sites in Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Hebron, Nablus, the Jordan River, and other places including in modern day Lebanon and Syria. The original collection that was at the time available to pilgrims and collectors was technically of Palestine and its people, but much of it invoked biblical narratives of the country as it appeared at the time. Palestine and its people appear in the three-dimensional space of the stereoscopes only as re-enactors of the biblical story. The gap between the viewer – in the privacy of her living room in turn-of-the-twentieth-century United States or Europe – and the local population, as guardians of a cherished past, is further widened by captions such as: “The native mode of grinding coffee,” or “This market, with its throng of robed and turbaned business men (Arabs, Jews, and Turks), its meek donkeys and dignified camels, is just as Jeremiah and Isaiah and Amos used to know.” The images in the collection cannot be viewed today without feeling the imprint of the destructive colonial impulse that rendered nonexistent much of what we see in them, and erected on its modern ruins, the state of Israel.

In the 2017 exhibit at Brown, the curators invited spectators to become “time travelers”: to enter into a time machine of sorts for a journey into the beloved country of Palestine, the country of the many who lived there, of those who dreamt of going there, and of the pilgrims, immigrants, colonialists, missionaries, and tourists who did. The collection on display in the Brown exhibit raised a set of fascinating questions about photography – distance and proximity, public and private viewing, reproducibility, and the photographer/the photographed – as well as political questions about colonialism, conquest, migration, rule, ownership, memory, legacy, patrimony, and preservation. The curators, in collaboration with other contributors, addressed some of these questions in a second layer of texts added to the images on display. Through the juxtaposition of original and revised captions, spectators are invited to look at these images from a dual perspective: on the one hand, from the perspective of

what could be seen in them at a time when the destruction of Palestine was unthinkable and, on the other hand, from the perspective of what can be seen in them today, several decades after the catastrophe that imposed on this place the paradigm of colonial condition and national conflict as the sole lens for imagining a future.

The curators Issam Nassar and Ariella Aisha Azoulay, as guest editors of this issue, have chosen some forty images from the original exhibit, which appear here with their original captions and new captions provided by the contributors to the exhibition. In an introductory essay, the curators contextualize the juxtaposition of the original captions with the modern ones in which the issues of nativist ethnography, bibliofication, orientalism, and the commercialization of the photographic images are interpreted and deconstructed.

In addition to “Time Travelers,” this issue includes two articles on workers’ rights in settlements, and on sound as an historical element; an essay on the city’s early Evangelical visitors; and a new section on Jerusalem neighborhoods.

With the Oslo process fading and more than a decade of analysts arguing that the two-state solution is not viable, some have argued for a transition to a new strategy, shifting from a focus on state-building to one that demands rights. Ethan Morton-Jerome’s “The Struggle for Palestinian Workers’ Rights in Israeli Settlements: The Case of Maan and Zarfati Garage.” examines the work of Maan, a joint activist program taking an interventionist political stand – that is, to advocate for workers “regardless of nationality, religion, gender, or the color of their skin” – a radical position in the context of Palestine/Israel. Maan is also closely tied with Israeli socialist party Da’am, which seeks to “embrace solutions that connects the two nations and is based on democracy, human rights, pluralism, economic equality, and solidarity.”

Andrea Stanton’s “Situating Radio in the Soundscape of Mandate Jerusalem” sets radio broadcasting and listening within the broader “picture” of sound in 1930s–1940s Jerusalem. It examines several layers of the radio soundscape: the sounds of the broadcasting studio, the sounds and noise that radio listeners might have experienced from their set, and the sounds of radio broadcasting as mingled with other kinds of sound in Jerusalem’s public and private urban spaces. The article argues that contextualizing radio sounds and noise within the broader urban soundscape offers a better understanding of radio’s position within the social world of Mandate Jerusalem, and hence on its impact.

The winning essay of the Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem for the year 2021 is also featured in this issue. Gabriel Polley’s “Jerusalem through Evangelical Eyes: Nineteenth-Century Western Encounters with Palestinian Christianity.” In his essay, Polley explores Western attitudes to Christianity in Palestine as recorded in the accounts of nineteenth-century travelers, especially British Evangelicals of various denominations, to Jerusalem. In 1906, Charles W. Wilson described “the views of those earnest Christians of all denominations” – in reality, Evangelical Protestants – concerning the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, recognized by most Christians since the fourth century as marking the location of Christ’s crucifixion and tomb. Wilson, a key figure in the Palestine Exploration Fund in the late nineteenth

century, was well-placed to observe the attitudes of his own milieu of archaeologists, missionaries, and wealthy tourists who flocked to Palestine in the phenomena of the “Peaceful Crusade.”

In our new section titled “Jerusalem Neighborhoods,” *JQ* will be touring the city by neighborhoods, offering a fresh look onto the old vista. Saluting the *sumud* and bravery at Shaykh Jarrah, Nazmi Jubeh’s “Shaykh Jarrah: A Struggle for Survival” takes us to the front lines in the latest takeover confrontation in East Jerusalem.

As the world goes back to traveling once again, albeit differently from pre-COVID-19 times, we hope this special issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* will take you on a safe and enjoyable trip in time and sound.

Endnotes

- 1 Nir Hasson, “For Jerusalem’s Muslims, an Israeli Humiliation on Ramadan,” Haaretz 21 April 2021, online at www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.HIGHLIGHT-for-jerusalem-s-muslims-israel-s-ramadan-restrictions-were-a-bridge-too-far-1.9726088 (accessed 22 June 2021).

Corrigenda:

- The credit of Figure 4, on page 75 of the Spring 2021 Issue (JQ 85) was wrongly attributed to Micha Sender. The correct credit goes to Ayman Safi.
- On page 148 of the Spring 2021 Issue (JQ 85), the correct date is 27 July 2020, not 2021.
- On pages 40, 56, and 57 of the Autumn 2019 Issue (JQ 79), architectural critic Or Aleksandrowicz’s name was misspelled.