

EDITORIAL

Jerusalem Planning and Land Conquest in the Shadow of COVID-19

The year 2020 will be remembered globally as the year of the pandemic. In Jerusalem, the devastation caused by COVID-19 was compounded by a threat from human hands: four Israeli planning schemes in the Jerusalem area whose cumulative impact, while not biologically fatal, may spell the diminishment or death of Palestinian communities in Jerusalem and its environs.

The threat began in February with a plan to erase the old Jerusalem airport in order to expand the nearby Israeli settlement of Atarot by building 11,000 units on the six hundred dunums of the airport area.¹ The plan also aims to establish an area for hotels and an industrial zone for employing Palestinians in the so-called seam area between the Wall and the settlement. This creation of hotels and commercial establishments in this area was a key objective in last year's Kushner/Trump "Deal of the Century" aimed at "Islamic



tourism” (that is, tourism following the newly normalized relations with the Gulf region) to Jerusalem.² It basically destroys any chance to rejuvenate Jerusalem’s only international airport that had served Palestine as its gateway to the external world during the period of Jordan’s administration.³

A second scheme known as the “Masterplan for the Reorganization of East Jerusalem’s Central Commercial District” was submitted to the municipal council in October 2020, covering an area of 707 dunums, adjacent to the northern wall of the Old City, the heart of the commercial area of Arab Jerusalem, extending from Sultan Sulayman, and Salah al-Din streets. It will allow for a new “development” of 482 units, and will likely demolish or displace 494 existing building units that the municipality has deemed illegal or unauthorized, presumably Palestinian-owned structures.

The third project, known as the “Silicon Valley Scheme” in the Wadi al-Jawz/ Musrara area was adopted by the Jerusalem Planning Commission in coordination with the Jerusalem municipality in November 2020. It aims at introducing a hi-tech complex in Wadi al-Jawz that combines commercial establishments, hi-tech companies, and a hotel complex in a 200,000-square-meter area, including the building of nine hundred hotel rooms for tourists. The project includes areas in Musrara, al-Zahra Street, and the industrial zone of Wadi al-Jawz. Here the municipality will reputedly confiscate a large amount of Palestinian private land for commercial development, and will transfer the bulk of Palestinian garages and workshops in Wadi al-Jawz to Umm Tuba and al-‘Isawiyya. Again, Israel is securing Emirati investments to cover developments in this area. Most of these industrial workshops are today registered as public endowments (waqf) and family waqf properties. Tens of garage owners and industrial workshops in Wadi al-Jawz were already given notice to evacuate their properties by the end of 2020, since their workshops are not licensed to operate such businesses.

The fourth planning scheme aims at the final displacement of al-Jahalin Bedouins from their current encampment. Al-Jahalin are the only Bedouin community in the Jerusalem area.⁴ Those in the core area of Jerusalem number around three thousand inhabitants, mostly living today in the area known as al-Jabal (the mountain) on the northern slopes of al-‘Ayzariya. They were expelled there from the area of Tel Arad, Negev, and Bir al-Sab‘a in 1948 and since then have occupied grazing grounds in ‘Anata, Khan al-Ahmar, Jericho Road, and al-‘Ayzariya. They were previously expelled from their current locations, on a number of occasions, when Maaleh Adumim was being built in the al-‘Ayzariya area, and are now slated to be forcefully moved to a garbage dump in the Sur Bahir area.⁵

In 2020, the Jerusalem municipal council, in close collaboration with the Israeli government, escalated these displacement schemes in the city under the rubric of planning for neglected neighborhoods of East Jerusalem. It is noteworthy that Emirati investments have been mobilized for two of these schemes (namely, Atarot, and the so-called Silicon Valley development in Wadi al-Jawz) as projects for tourism and real estate investment. They involve direct displacement of Arab businesses (Wadi al-Jawz), population displacement (al-Jahalin), and extension of colonial settlement

(in Qalandiya). Even with the demise of the Trump administration, there is still sadly little hope that the new Biden administration will intervene to end these measures of creeping annexation and displacement, although there is the expectation that the Kushner plan, which gave American diplomatic support to these schemes, will be off the table. In the meantime, it is mainly popular activism in Jerusalem, spearheaded by the owners of industrial workshops in Wadi al-Jawz and the Palestinian Tourism Association in Jerusalem that are raising their voices in opposition.

This issue of *JQ* includes three essays that address the history of these urban gentrification plans: Abd al-Raouf al-Arnaout's "The Catastrophe of Silicon Valley in Wadi al-Jawz"; Eldad Brin's "Gateway to the World"; and a briefing paper by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) on Israeli zoning plans for East Jerusalem. The latter differs from the two other reports in that it contains policy proposals that involve local political representation, as well as suggested international interventions by United Nations bodies. It also contains an unexpected reference to the *corpus separatum* scheme in the 1947 partition plan as a "beacon for future planning for the city."

After some absence this issue resumes its long tradition of examining biography as a window to the social history of Palestine – here we present three such biographies: a life and impact of Elias Nasrallah Haddad, an ethnographer who belonged to Tawfiq Canaan's circle of folklore studies in the 1920s, by Sarah Irving; new light on Jabra Ibrahim Jabra's layered identity (Arab-Syriac-Palestinian), by William Tamplin; and a political biography of the "Red Priest of Haifa," the theologian-activist Rafiq Farah, who died this year at the age of ninety-eight years, by Randa Farah.

In "Other Wells: Family History and the Self-Creation of Jabra Ibrahim Jabra," William Tamplin interrogates the hidden birth records of an icon of modern Palestinian literature:

Scholars' assumptions about Jabra's unshakeable Palestinian identity may take on a different cast when we learn about Jabra's concomitant concealment of his family history in Tur Abdin, his family's survival of the Sayfo genocide, his birth in Adana, and his immigration to Palestine with his family in the early 1920s. These facts trouble the tidy, uncomplicated image of the exiled Palestinian intellectual that he presented to the world. Why did Jabra deceive his readers about his family history, birth, and early childhood? What new readings of his work can these revelations generate?

The answer is provocative, and intriguing, if not conclusive.

In "Elias Nasrallah Haddad: Translating Visions of Palestine," Sarah Irving follows her pioneering study of the work of Stephan Hanna Stephan ("A Young Man of Promise," *JQ* 73). She examines the work of Haddad on local philology and dialects whose focus was on "representation, identity, translation, colonialism – and touching the work of so many beyond his own output, as a teacher, translator, or advisor on language and customs. His life also highlights the entangled nature of intellectual life

in Mandate Palestine.” Haddad, according to Irving, “represents an indigenous voice” writing at the turn of the century “delineating and describing the Palestinian dialect,” while his “choice of the word ‘Palestinean [sic]’” indicates that he and his colleagues “considered an identifiable Palestinian Arabic to exist, and, by extension, that they understood there to be an entity called Palestine, inhabited by a specific group of people (speaking a particular dialect).”

Randa Farah’s “The Red Priest of Haifa” is an intimate portrait of the life and work of Rafiq Farah, who was the chairman of the Society for the Defense of Arab Minority Rights in Israel during the period of Israeli military rule in the Galilee (1951–65). Farah was a leading figure in the Palestinian struggle for land rights and equality during the dark period of Israeli military government in the formative years of the state.

“The Gateway to the World: The Golden Age of Jerusalem Airport” by Eldad Brin follows the turbulent history of Qalandiya airport from its inception as a British military airport in 1921 to its current fate as a “runway” for the Ramallah-Jerusalem bus company today, and soon to be a launching pad for an extension to Atarot, the Israeli settlement southwest of Ramallah. It follows Nehad Awad’s essay “In Search of the Jerusalem Airport” published in *JQ* 35 in 2008. Brin’s essay traces the airport’s history from its origin, when the British army established a military airfield in 1921, four years after their occupation. Its location was chosen for “its relative proximity to Jerusalem” and was regularly used by the military and high-ranking officers. Brin recaptures the significance of Qalandiya airport as the region’s access to the world under conditions of war and dismemberment between the years of 1948 and 1967. He also points out that the extension of Jerusalem’s municipal boundary in 1965 by the Kendall plan, during the Jordanian period, was meant to allow for Jerusalem’s boundaries to include the airport. “Jerusalem Airport,” he concludes:

was vital in restoring, at least to a degree, Jerusalem’s cosmopolitan character after the fateful events of 1948. Naturally it did much to bolster the city’s tourism-related economy and strongly impacted the urban landscape with its resultant wide range of hotels, travel agencies, and related businesses. Regular and frequent flights between Jerusalem and a host of major Arab cultural, economic and political hubs not only offered the occasional respite and business connections to the city’s dwindled elite, but also served to emphasize the city’s pan-Arab relevance after the trauma of war.

Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian and Amir Marshi introduce, or rather revive, the concept of “unchilding” in the endemic practice of house arrest for children in the occupied territories. In “Iron Caging the Palestinian Home: Child Home Arrest in Occupied East Jerusalem as Lawfare,” they come to the conclusion that

re-scripting children’s homes as prisons and turning their families into prison guards positions colonized children as objects of the settler state’s

legal manipulations, legitimizing the occupation of the home, aiming at hindering dissent. The variegated and unpredictable effects of colonial lawfare “legalities” went beyond governing childhood to governing children’s homes, searing their minds, and building iron walls inside the viscerality of the colonized’s sense of home-ness.

The study narrates the story of several Jerusalem children who experience house arrest together with their family’s reaction (“are we parents or prison guards?”). The practice of house arrest was made famous in the 1970s in Raymonda Tawil’s intimate diary (*My Home, My Prison*), but here we witness how this military tradition has been developed forty years later to be a poignant tool of control and repression of children.

Just before the United Arab Emirates expressed interest in acquiring the Israeli right-wing Beitar football club, Nicholas Blincoe’s new book *More Noble than War: A Soccer History of Israel–Palestine* hit the market. Roberto Mazza reviews the book, which looks at the way in which sports activities have manifested themselves in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. We learn that while “Palestinian teams make up 40 percent of Israeli football, they are still considered second class and many Israeli teams prefer to hire Jewish players from abroad rather than relying on Palestinian grassroots.” Nevertheless, both the book and its review bring us immense insights into the politicization of the game and its metaphorical reverberations in the nationalist discourse.

In a “Question of Responsibility,” Rona Sela reviews Adam Raz’s *The Looting of Arab Property during the War of Independence*, published in Hebrew. She examines especially the distinction made by the author between individual and collective looting:

According to Raz, both individual and collective looting are “a personal act – a choice of action made by a person” (297–98), whereas the seizure of Palestinian assets was “only” of real estate by the state acted by laws and regulations. In other words, for Raz, the sovereign’s responsibility is reduced – as if it can be reduced – to the expropriation of houses and lands, a “one-time act” grounded in a political decision and enforced using military and police power. Having been decided by official institutions based on legal procedures, it was and is not seen as a crime.

The reviewer concludes by comparing Israeli attitudes to the looting of private property during the holocaust to the looting that took place during the war in Palestine.

“Printed in Jerusalem” is a review of an exhibit of the same title at the Palestinian Museum curated by Baha al-Ju‘beh and Abdel-Rahman Shabane. The reviewers, Tarteel Muammar and Hasan Safadi, write that the exhibit “enables us to view printing as a transition point in modern history. This constitutes an important change in societal culture and the formation of modern identity. Printing also contributes to the acceleration

and spread of knowledge on the global level, as demonstrated by various historical stages of printing in Jerusalem in the exhibit.” In her “Letter of Jerusalem—Goodbye the Commercial Press” Samia Khoury provides a more intimate portrait of a Jerusalem family press whose history extended over the last one hundred years before it was forced to shut down at the end of 2020.



Endnotes

- 1 Ir Amim, “Israeli Authorities Initiate Plan for New East Jerusalem Settlement in Atarot,” 18 February 2020, online at www.ir-amim.org.il/en/node/2427 (accessed 31 January 2021).
- 2 Abd al-Raouf al-Arnaout, “Al-Quds: karithat ‘al-silikon’ tuhadded mintaqet wad el-jawz,” [The ‘Silicon disaster’ threatens the Wadi al-Jawz region], *al-Ayyam*, 24 November 2020, online at www.al-ayyam.ps/ar_page.php?id=144a1007y340398087Y144a1007 (accessed 28 February 2021).
- 3 Nir Hasson, “Israel Planning Jewish Neighborhood on Land Trump Slated for Palestinians,” *Haaretz*, 18 February 2020, online at www.haaretz.com/israel-news/premium-israel-planning-jewish-neighborhood-on-land-trump-s-plan-slated-for-palestinians-1.8553810 (accessed 31 January 2021).
- 4 See *The Palestinian Bedouin of Barriyat Jerusalem: Survey Report of 21 Bedouin Community Sites in the East Periphery of Jerusalem*, International Peace and Cooperation Center, 2015, online at www.fes-palestine.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Publication_1/IPCC/IPCC_2015/IPCC_Bedouins_in_Barriyat_English.pdf (accessed 1 February 2021).
- 5 See Norwegian Refugee Council, “Demolitions in Sur Bahir set dangerous precedent for Palestinian communities,” 22 July 2019, online at www.nrc.no/news/demolitions-in-sur-baher-set-dangerous-precedent-for-palestinian-communities2/ (accessed 31 January 2021).