



Editorial

On the closing night of the Palestinian Literary Festival 2011 this April, international and local writers stumbled into a darkened Solidarity Tent in the beleaguered Palestinian neighborhood of Silwan in Arab Jerusalem. They had come on foot, after being stopped by Israeli police barriers. “We had wanted to welcome you in our own way with a thirteen-year-old poet,” said community activist Fakhri Abu Diab, “but see instead we welcome you with teargas.” Eventually, the lights went up, the writers read and the Palestinian rap group DAM gave a spirited performance. But teargas, heavy Israeli police presence, and the threat of continued Palestinian house demolitions lingered in the air and on the ground as the international writers departed Silwan.

To date, the Silwan community has received little assistance from the institutions of the “international community” or from the Palestinian government in its struggle to oppose Elad (meaning in Hebrew El Ir David, “To the City of David”), the well-funded and government-supported Israeli settler organization which

Jerusalem from the southwest.
Source: Library of Congress.

has been relentlessly excavating and demolishing homes in Silwan's Wadi Hilweh neighborhood, and aims to turn Silwan's Al Bustan neighborhood into a luxury Israeli housing project and archaeological park, "The King's Garden," (aka King David). Elad, mandated by the Israel Nature and Park Authority to "manage" the "Jerusalem Walls park," represents a potent mixture of "religious nationalism and theme park tourism," as Emek Shaveh, an Israeli organization for "archaeology without ownership" aptly notes (www.alt-arch.org). Eerily, plans for another luxury Israeli housing project and hotel threaten to obliterate the last standing Palestinian village emptied in 1948 – Lifta, a poignant and solitary reminder of the 1948 expulsions on the outskirts of Jerusalem, pictured in Rula Halawani's photos and Rema Hammami's text in JQ 37 – although a restraining order has at least temporarily frozen this project.

A peculiar paradox of the almost two decades of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations following the signing of the Declaration of Principles in 1993 is that the longer the negotiations the less the "final status" issues – Jerusalem, settlements, and refugees – have been addressed on the ground by the international community and indeed, by the Palestinian Authority and the more, in the case of Jerusalem and settlements, they became unresolvable due to pre-emptive Israeli actions. Jerusalem in particular seemed to disappear from any template of action, as if the checkpoints and Wall separating it from the Authority's seat in Ramallah, have also blocked our line of vision. "You can't get there from here," as the old saw goes. Indeed, the manic building of Ramallah seemed matched by the depressive dismantling of Arab Jerusalem. However, perhaps times are changing. With Palestinian national reconciliation moving forward, at least as of this writing, and direct negotiations very much on the back burner, perhaps Jerusalem, as well as settlements and refugees, will come back as subjects of concerted action rather than scattered rhetoric. In this summer before the storm – given a September 2011 "deadline" for a Palestinian state – *Jerusalem Quarterly* reflects on the configurations of conflict in the past.

This issue examines the lives of two Palestinians, the writer and radical activist Nicola Jabra and the photographer Karimeh Abbud. Ron Greenstein provides the trajectory of Nicola Jabra – Palestinian revolutionary, writer and editor – who was born in Haifa in 1912, struggled (in difficult conditions of poverty) as a left radical with the "anti-Zionist Zionism" of his Jewish comrades in the Mandate, participated in the Revolutionary Communist League, and engaged after 1948, often as a dissident, with the Israeli Communist Party, editing *Al Jadid* with Emile Habibi. He died in 1978 in London as "another Palestinian buried far away from home," in the words of Tariq Ali. In a critical encounter in 1958 with Israeli Jewish writers, he responded pointedly to a remark that Arabs were "part of the exquisite landscape" of the country by saying "we are a living people." It is that sense of a living people that Issam Nassar explores in the photographs of Palestine's first professional woman photographer, Karimeh Abbud (also see Ahmad Mrowat on Abbud in *JQ* 31) and his detailed reading of several of these photos, such as the intimate portrait of Dmitri and his mother from 1926, finds a "sense of spontaneity" that contrasts with the dominant European portraits of the Biblical Orient.

On 15 May, Palestinians commemorated 63 years since the Nakba – and Palestinian refugees, many third generation exiles, gathered for courageous border protests, including a border crossing through a minefield into the occupied Golan. The unarmed demonstrators in Lebanon and on the Golan border were met with Israeli army fire and the loss of fourteen lives. Prior to the day, the admirably obsessive blogger at Washington’s Palestine Center posted a chart where he counted via Google the occurrences in English of the word “Nakba” over the last decade: from less than 10,000 in 2000 to about 800,000 in the first four months of 2011 alone. Whether this marks an upsurge in historical memory, a growing political commitment to addressing the root issues in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, or the threat of a new nakba, we must leave to the reader.

While new scholarship on the Nakba has not grown at a Google pace, Itamar Radai’s piece on the Qatamon neighborhood in 1948 moves the focus from the political and military aspects of the struggle to the more neglected aspects of social history. In particular he raises the question of whether class – in the form of Qatamon’s rising Palestinian middle-class residents – “contributed to the collapse” of Qatamon and the exile of its inhabitants. Although Qatamon residents like Khalil Sakakini and his daughter Hala expressed great admiration for the resolute commander Ibrahim Abu Dayyeh – a villager – Radai points out a decided urban-rural divide, as well as simply middle-class civilian incapacities for adequate self-defense. While the military assault on Qatamon, including the Haganah’s blowing up of the Hotel Semiramis, was perhaps sufficient cause for civilian panic, Radai’s exposition of class tensions – and incapacities – adds another dimension.

The noted historian Bayan al Hout’s intimate memoir of living as a child in – and leaving in 1948 – her home in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Upper Baq’a adds another note as she considers both her father’s attempts to stay and defend Jerusalem and how she learned of the fate of her home, a reminder that the memory of the exiled subject, as well as post-1948 transformations, are very much part of the historical narrative. For al Hout, the home in homeland comes to have the most resonance.

In a piece that excavates the past in present struggles over land and residency Peter Lagerquist takes us south of Jerusalem – to the southern Hebron hills or Masafir Yatta – for an exploration of the “eternal frontier.” Lagerquist ranges from the first surveys of the Palestine Exploration Fund in the late nineteenth century to the narratives and video testimony of the attacks of masked settlers on Palestinian farming families and “cave-dwellers.” Finally for your summer reading, Atef Alshaer reviews Dina Matar’s book of Palestinian narratives, *What It Means to Be Palestinian* and Robert Mazza brings us an important new book in French (*La soif de Jeruslaem*) that examines the history of water as a lens to revealing the urban history of Jerusalem from the early nineteenth century. And readers are invited to visit JQ’s website (www.jerusalemquarterly.org) to browse past issues of *Jerusalem Quarterly* in full-text editions.