

73

A Complicated Faith

Zachary Zuckerman





# A Complicated Faith

By

Zachary Zuckerman

Thesis Advisor: Kate Schapira

Second Reader: Kevin Quashie

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
Degree of Bachelor of Arts  
in the Nonfiction Writing Honors Program in the Department of English  
at Brown University

April 9th, 2020

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis.

I authorize Brown University to lend this thesis to other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

I further authorize Brown University to reproduce this thesis by photocopying or by other means, in total or in part, at the request of other institutions or individuals for the purpose of scholarly research.

Zachary Zuckerman  
Signature

Brown University requires the signatures of all persons using or photocopying this thesis.  
Please sign below, and give address and date.



*For My Father*

# Contents

## Part I

A Complicated Faith 7

Projected Slides 10

Labyrinth 15

Kanafeh 23

## Part II

The Wall 34

Stress Test 40

Religious Objects 47

Ginger Curls 51

Truth(s) 55

Acknowledgements 62

Works Consulted 63

*Cover Art by Kenny Batu. Photographs by Zachary Zuckerman and Adam Hersko-Ronatas.*





# A Complicated Faith

“If you set enough tangents around a circle, you begin to recreate the shape of the circle itself.” – Teju Cole, *Death in the Browser Tab*

We meet in my kitchen. He is a stranger smoking a hand-rolled cigarette that he lights from the stove. I am a freshman in college visiting home for the first time. He smiles at me and opens his arms for a hug. Immediately, I feel love.

We meet because of faith. My mother has spent plenty of time in Israel but has never met a Palestinian before. A friend of hers asks if he can stay in our apartment while he works on a film in New York. She tells me later that when he first walked through the door he put down his bags, saw the stove was on, and told her he'd finish preparing dinner. She should just sit and relax.

Issa has long grey hair that he normally wears in a ponytail, a sharp jawline and soft kind eyes. Back then his hair had specks of black, and the lines around his eyes, mouth, and forehead weren't as pronounced as they are today. He is strong, with an accent I can't place that makes him sound sophisticated. That first visit we talk every night, often sharing a smoke sitting on my radiator looking out at the Upper West Side. I don't remember how we became close because now he feels no different than family.

A month after we meet, I struggle to follow Issa's ponytail as it bobs through the narrow, winding streets of the Old City of Jerusalem. He leads me into the Christian Quarter and stops at a small blue oval door, the entrance to his home. I live there for a week. In the mornings, he edits his film and I watch. In the afternoons, we walk through the streets of the Old City. He exudes a confidence and joy in his work that translates to gardening, cooking, hugging, even the way his shoulders sway as he walks down the street. I decide I want to make documentaries too.

In May, Issa visits us again. This time, both he and his son Shadi stay with us. We go to B+H and pick out a camera together. It's a Lumix Gx7, a small glorified point-and-shoot that people mistake for a Leica. We both buy one. It's my first camera. He teaches me the basics: how to focus the lens, what white balance and ISO are, the rule of thirds, and how to properly frame a portrait (leave some head room). Whenever we see each other, we share the images we've taken in the interim.

Until I met Issa, I understood Israel. I spent years studying it in school, learning the language and the culture. Israel is the place my whole family loves, where our many trips have made beautiful memories. Israel is the way my grandfather smiles as he describes the numerous miracles there that we Jews are responsible for. It is not only a community that I belong to but a place that seems made for me. I am a Jew and Israel is the Jewish State.

As Issa and I grow close, new memories expand Israel until I no longer know if I'm even there. Issa shares with me his Israel, a place different enough that it has its own name – Palestine – but similar enough that it shares the same land. At first, everything in Palestine seems different. None of the people around me are Jewish. They speak Arabic, which sounds similar to Hebrew except I can't understand it. And even the hummus tastes different – more garlic and lemon, which I prefer. As with any people who share a homeland, many things are similar too. If you



walk into any Palestinian or Israeli household, both will insist on making you a tea or coffee the minute you sit down. They treat their guests like family.

The biggest difference I notice between the communities is their trust. With Issa's friends and family, and all of the Palestinians I meet, they are more reluctant to open up to me. I must earn their trust before they become comfortable around me. Israelis give me the benefit of the doubt because I am a member of the tribe. Their trust in me is blind.

At first, I keep Israel separate from Palestine because they're both easier to understand on their own. Israel is the place I learned all about in Jewish day school and visit with my family. Palestine is the place I visit with Issa. But as Issa becomes family and our communities inexorably begin to overlap, this split becomes difficult to maintain.

Initially, I wanted to write my thesis about Issa and his family. The project would also be an opportunity to learn more about Palestinian history. I had spent years studying Israel in school but I'd hardly educated myself about Palestine. I also wanted to make a short documentary profiling Issa. A film would be the perfect way to honor him and all he'd taught me. I visited Issa in the spring of 2019 and we discussed the project. He was happy to support me but he offered some advice: if I was going to tell his story, I should still strive to make the work personal.

I've spent almost half of the past year living in Israel and Palestine. What began as a story about Issa has grown into something much larger and more confusing. As I formed new relationships and revisited old memories, I constantly crossed back and forth between both places until the mental barrier between the two began to fade. I've spent most of this past year filming in the Old City of Jerusalem in the pursuit of a truth that will reconcile my love of the Jewish people with my increasing disenchantment with the Jewish State – a country that discriminates against the Palestinians who I love as well. This pursuit has complicated my faith in documentary filmmaking, Judaism, and, at times, even my relationship with Issa.

\*\*\*

Recording the world, whether by camera or microphone, creates a perceptual paradox. Memories lose their sense of time. When you watch them, especially after they've been cut and shaped to create a story, you are viewing a vast collection of moments framed by a single perspective. This process births a new chronology. And every time you encounter this new timeline, it is reborn as it intertwines with your own experience. Every film is a new film whenever someone watches it. Your engagement with this writing keeps it present, fresh. Many of the stories you will read happened to me only a couple of weeks before I wrote them down. Others are recollections supported by recorded material I have watched or listened to repeatedly. Still others happened so long ago that I can only remember the sliver of story that I continue to carry with me. All are equally true. I write them as I remember them, in the moments they happen. I share with you my audio, my footage, my notes, my research and even my memories, not in chronological order but in the order that they shape me and as you encounter them now.





# Projected Slides

“Being human is a novelty, not a mere repetition or extension of the past, but an anticipation of things to come... A person has the capacity to create events.” – Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel

Where does the story begin?

I am ten years old. An Israeli soldier named Gilad Shalit is kidnapped in the middle of the night while on patrol near the border of Gaza. I don't hear about Gilad's story for a couple months. I am at an all-boys summer camp in Maine when he is taken.

I'm back at school, the Abraham Joshua Heschel School, a progressive Jewish day school on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. I sit down to pray. It's the beginning of fifth grade so we still sit on the floor and pray in a circle. For the 11 years I attend Heschel our first period class is always *Tefillah*, prayer.

We are about to begin the *Shema*. Our teacher Rachel pauses.

She explains to the class that Gilad was captured by Hamas and is now their hostage. I don't remember how she explains the men who grabbed Gilad and dragged him into the night, only that they are Hamas. Whether she calls them militants or terrorists is something I can't answer now. Definitely not soldiers. Every day, Rachel continues, we will pause before we begin the *Shema*, and we will all hold a moment of silence and pray for Gilad until he is freed.

The *Shema* is one of the most important prayers in Judaism, an affirmation of God's singularity. Tradition requires you to put your hand over your eyes and sing the first verse aloud. *Shema Yisrael Adonai Elohenu Adonai Echad*. The second verse you whisper to yourself, your hand still over your eyes. *Baruch Shem Kevod Malchuto L'Olam Vaed*.

One night I am very young and my head rests on my mother's shoulder. My body snuggles up against hers as she helps me fall asleep. She whispers the *Shema* to me. Then she tells me that my grandfather says the *Shema* every night before he goes to bed and so does she, though for years she hasn't remembered what it means.

My cousin Ben and I sit in the bleachers at Heschel High School and watch his friends play basketball. The game is very close. In the final seconds the coach calls timeout. Ben looks at me and I know what he's about to ask. We both close our eyes and say the *Shema*, praying that Heschel will score the final basket. I can hear Ben's laughter. My eyes stay closed. He is six years older than me.

In Judaism, the *Shema* is the last thing you're supposed to say before you die. Whenever my breathing is shallow, I use my inhaler. If there is no immediate release, I whisper the *Shema*. Just in case that's it.

Even when you're five years old you understand the intimacy of sharing a whisper with the classmate sitting closest to you. You can barely hear their voice, only hints, but you fill in the gaps because you're sharing words. You hear the whole room whisper. The hair on the back of your neck rises. When you're that young, that feeling is God.

Ten days before my sixth birthday, one of the first days of kindergarten, my mother takes me home an hour after school begins. First, we stop at the bank and then at the grocery store so she can buy milk. At home I sit on a wooden stool in our kitchen. I hear the small silver television. On the screen a plane hits the south tower. My father is covering the story for The

New York Times. My babysitter Ronit can't be reached. The phone lines are jammed. A few hours later she turns up at our front door. "What, you didn't think I'd show up?" she asks my mother incredulously. She had to walk all the way from Williamsburg. When Ronit was in the Israeli army, her job was to teach other soldiers how to fire a gun on a tank.

Later that year on the day of Israeli independence, *Yom HaAtzmaut*, our class goes up to the gym for the first time to join the rest of the Heschel lower school. We sing songs in Hebrew and wave Israeli flags. By the time we arrive back in our classroom our teachers have transformed it into a *shuq*, the traditional Middle Eastern market. We're given fake shekels which we use to bargain for various goods – pita and falafel with hummus, stickers, toys, and Israeli snacks like *Bissli* and *Bamba*.

Every year on Martin Luther King Day the entire lower school assembles in the gym and listens to the school's founder, Peter Geffen, recount his experiences during the Civil Rights Movement. Large black and white photos are projected onto a wall in the gym. A young Peter shaking Martin Luther King Jr.'s hand. Next, a photo of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, the school's namesake, crossing Edmund Pettus Bridge in Selma, arm in arm with Dr. King. We all sing "We Shall Overcome." We listen to Peter Geffen recount the history of the Civil Rights Movement and Rabbi Anne discuss the ethical obligation of all Jews to participate in *Tikkun Olam*, repairing the world.

In third grade my parents let me walk the eight blocks from our house on 81<sup>st</sup> and West End to the lower school on 89<sup>th</sup> and West End. Ben S. lives on 86<sup>th</sup> between West End and Riverside. We meet on the corner of 86<sup>th</sup> and West End and walk the remaining three blocks together every day.

A year later I'm in Lincoln Square Synagogue sitting with my classmates as Ben S. and his two older sisters wail. His mother weeps silently. A coffin is wheeled into the center of the synagogue. It is simple, pallid, unmarked and unstained. Naked. The lid stays closed. *Halakhic* law is precise when it comes to coffins – always pine. Ben's father collapsed on the subway three days earlier. There is no autopsy. Jewish law requires burial as quickly as possible. Every day at school we pray. When we reach the Mourner's Kaddish, I don't remember if Ben stands alone, as is the custom. He is the only person in the room who has lost an immediate family member in the past ten months. Or does every eye in the room watch him sit, wondering, before looking away? I go upstairs to his house on 325 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street where we'd played Guitar Hero and watched Mets games. I learned to cook mac and cheese there. My mother tells me I used to pull him out of bed and bring him to school with me.

I finish lower school on 89<sup>th</sup> and West End and head to middle school on 91<sup>st</sup>. There are different teachers for each subject instead of one English Studies teacher and one Hebrew Studies teacher. I'm placed in advanced Hebrew. Ben stops coming to school most days. I grow closer with people who hardly know me. I start making fun of myself so they laugh. I call myself Sunshine because I wear the same yellow sweatshirt every day and I look bigger than the sun. I start running every morning and join the track team. I am still Sunshine. We read *The Giver* in English class and learn about ancient Egypt in Social Studies. At *Tefillah*, our teacher hangs a poster with Gilad's face on it on the wall. There's a days-in-captivity counter next to it. Gilad is held for 1,934 days before he is reunited with his family.<sup>1</sup> I attend Heschel for close to 1,360 of those days. Gilad's captors are the first and only Palestinians we learn about.

---

<sup>1</sup> "Gilad Shalit Timeline: 1,934 Days in Hamas Captivity." *Ynetnews*, 23:25 , 10.11.11. [www.ynetnews.com](http://www.ynetnews.com), <https://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4134379,00.html>.

My mother swears I told her I wanted to leave Heschel because I wanted a black friend. I remember telling her that I want a school with more diversity. I'm sick of being in a place entirely made up of white Jews. My mother tells me I've always identified with the other. I believe I've always connected more easily with people one-on-one.

I'm three years old and I spend all day in the elevator with my best friend, Enrique, the doorman in his 40s who is originally from the Dominican Republic. I put a chair in the elevator so I can sit when I'm tired. Every time someone in the building enters the elevator, Enrique picks me up so I can press the white button higher than all the others, the button that closes the door. Soon I'm tall enough to press the button for my floor, 15, when I jump. Every morning Enrique and I chat before school. Usually it's baseball. He always gets me a Mets Jersey for my birthday. Ben S. and I go to Mets games every year. One game, in 2006, I turn around and see HAPPY 11<sup>TH</sup> BIRTHDAY ZACHARY ZUCKERMAN on the scoreboard. I am wearing my yellow sweatshirt. My father captures a moment of blissful awe.

I exhale in relief. I've just finished chanting my Torah portion: Noah, the same portion my older cousins, Ben and Alan, read. Now I get to read my *D'var Torah*, a teaching in the form of a speech I've prepared for months. I love Torah Study. I love offering my own interpretations of the sometimes bizarre and archaic stories so that they help me better understand my particular set of circumstances, a tradition upheld by every generation of rabbis and their students. I've been studying Torah with Rachel, my 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher. I read to all my loved ones gathered in Heschel High School's cafeteria.

*In my opinion, the most interesting detail in Parashat Noah is God's command that Noah make a tzohar. The traditional commentaries were hard-put to translate the precise meaning of the word because tzohar is what is known as a hapax legomenon, meaning that it appears only once in the entire Torah. The root of the word indicates that it was a source of light. God instructs Noah to install the tzohar on one side of the ark. That seems to imply that the tzohar was a window. The purpose seems obvious: a window would allow light into the ark. However, it would also enable Noah and his family to see out of the ark. Could it be that God intended for Noah to witness the destruction of the world with his own eyes?*

*Rashi, the famous 11<sup>th</sup>-century French commentator, interpreted the tzohar to mean a window and that its main function was to provide light. But he also offered a second translation of the word, that it was a place in the wall of the ark where a precious stone was lodged. The two interpretations cite the same purpose for the tzohar – it was designed to provide light – but they differ on the medium: a clear window or light refracted through a gem. What in essence is the difference? I see the window and the stone as virtual opposites. A window provides light but it also provides an unimpeded view of the outside world. If there was a window in the ark, then Noah would have seen the destruction that God had willed upon the earth. He would have experienced the horror and shock and felt the pain of the thousands who were suffering. I cannot imagine what sort of trauma Noah would have endured witnessing first-hand the total devastation of the world.*

*A precious stone, on the other hand, would have given Noah a completely different experience. It would have distorted his view of the outside world. Light refracted through the stone might have created a radiant display of colors, creating a sense of peace and serenity amid the turmoil. It would have shielded Noah, his family, and the animals on the ark from experiencing the full reality of the flood. They would not have felt the complete magnitude of the destruction.*



*The question becomes: How much of the past should be incorporated into the world's second chance? Is there a correct interpretation of tzohar: window or gem? My conclusion to this question was yet another question. Do I really need to choose between the two? I came to realize that it is crucially important to entertain both possible meanings. Noah was chosen by God as a witness. He needed to see the death and destruction that God wrought in order to understand the severity of God's decision to remake the world. But he also needed to be shielded from the full horror in order to be able to take on the enormous task of recreating civilization after the flood. It is not always easy to witness all the unpleasantness in our world like poverty, hunger, war, hate and the deterioration of our environment. I believe that it is important that we take a hard look at such things – but not to the point where we become overwhelmed by the enormity and severity of our many problems. We need to see enough to be able to act to repair our world but not so much that we become paralyzed from grief and resignation.*

*Each of us must decide how much is enough, where the harshness of looking at things head-on must give way to the luminous glow of imagining a better future. As I mature emotionally and intellectually, I see my attitude changing. The gem is getting clearer. I want to see more of what is really happening. I want to use the wisdom of experience to make better choices. But there will always be times when I will have to turn away from the harshness of reality. I only hope that I will always see enough to be able to contribute something positive to the world around me.*

I set the speech down and walk off the stage. In the eyes of the Jewish People I am now a man.





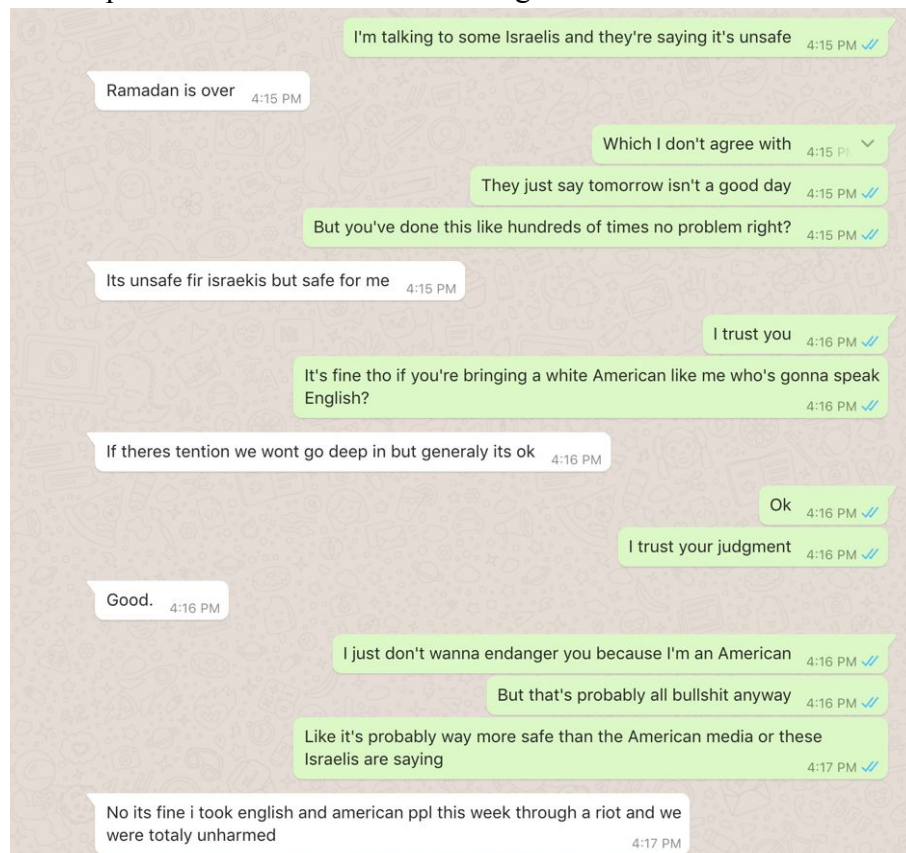
# Labyrinth

“Cities, on the other hand, are marked with specific architecture from specific dates, and this architecture, built by long-vanished others for their own uses, is the shell that we, like hermit-crabs, climb into.” – Teju Cole, *A Conversation with Aleksandar Hemon*

We meet outside a bar. I smell a spliff and muster up the courage to ask for a hit. Sharon obliges. I sit down and we start talking. Sharon studies music at Bezalel, the local art school in West Jerusalem. I’m here on vacation with my family and I’m staying at a hotel nearby. Quickly this leads to freestyle rapping. She messages me on WhatsApp the next morning:



We work out the details. I’ll meet her at 2pm outside Damascus gate. Four others will be joining the tour. She’s been giving tours for a few years, ever since she started volunteering at Rabbis for Human Rights. I invite my cousin and uncle to join me. They’d rather go to the Dead Sea. I message her a couple hours later with second thoughts.





I'm a few minutes late but she waits for me to begin. I've brought a lavalier mic and clip it onto her shirt. We all sit down in a circle under the shade of a tree outside Damascus Gate. She takes out a map of Israel and the West Bank.<sup>2</sup>

"In '67 Israel decided to not decide," Sharon begins. "The occupation is not a term for leftists to be dramatic about Israeli presence in the land. The occupation is a term in international law in which you conquer somewhere and you don't *decide whether* to annex it, meaning you're taking the people there and making them your citizens, *and you don't decide to leave either*. We [Israel] have been undecided for 50 years."

The Old City is a place where conflicting histories stack on top of one another. Although the entire city is only one square kilometer and it is now considered a small neighborhood within the larger modern city of Jerusalem, it is home to some of the holiest sites in all three of the major monotheistic religions: The Dome of the Rock, The Church of the Holy Sepulchre and The Western Wall. Positioned at the intersection between East and West Jerusalem, essentially Palestine and Israel, the Old City is at the heart of the conflict.

"So, we're going to walk now. Take a minute to breathe. We're going to the Western Wall and then down into Silwan."

We walk toward Damascus Gate. The gate itself looks like the entryway to a castle. The entrance is cut into a massive stone wall topped with ramparts. The doors, perpetually open and a third of the height of the larger wall, are at least 15 feet tall. Standing against one of the doors is a man holding a snake. Another snake is wrapped around his neck. He's offering pictures with tourists. Next to him old women kneel before boxes of vegetables, selling their wares. We walk through the gate and into the city.

The streets and buildings are made of white limestone. They have been replaced and re-plastered thousands of times. Within these layers lie a stratification of histories. Each individual existence vies for priority. Excavating one buries another. The Old City can be seen as the perfect example of Jewish resilience and expansion following the decimation of the Jewish people during the Holocaust. It can also be viewed as one of the last junctures for the erasure of Palestinian culture in what Israel considers annexed land.

"Wow, it's crowded," Sharon remarks. Every day in the Old City is crowded. Millions of tourists visit annually, most of them religious pilgrims. The ancient narrow streets are so congested by foot traffic that they're at the point of atrophy. Approximately 34,000 Palestinians live in the Old City, the majority of them Muslims, and around 3,000 of them Christian. 4,000

---

<sup>2</sup> Before Sharon begins the tour I want to add a quick disclaimer. If this was a documentary or audio story, I'd be cutting Sharon's words together so that they are eloquent and economical. I'd only have so much time to get her point across so I'd need to condense. If this was an article for a magazine, or any form of traditional long-form nonfiction journalism for that matter, when cleaning up the quotes, removing the "ands" or "ums," or even doctoring her words so that they are grammatical, I'd add in ellipses or brackets. This is just the tip of the iceberg; some people doctor quotes to fit their agenda, others have strict copy editors, or feel an ethical responsibility, and don't doctor at all. I'm sharing with you my memories, entangled with three hours of recorded audio, photos from the tour and events that happen years before and after. I'll add my interpretation of her words in italics, condense quotes without losing what I think she means, and I'll add a bracket or ellipse when it feels right.

Jews also live in the city, predominantly in the Jewish Quarter which was rebuilt after the Six Day War.<sup>3</sup> It has transformed from the poorest quarter in the city before the creation of the state of Israel to the most affluent one.

“So in ’67,” Sharon continues, “*after the Six Day War*, Israel occupies the West Bank and the Old City of Jerusalem which was previously under Jordanian occupation. It’s full of Palestinian refugees. So is Gaza. And these people can now enter into Israel. They can see the houses that they left 19 years ago *during the War of Independence in 1948*. They can taste the lemons that they planted when they were kids.”

We walk through the Muslim Quarter, mostly on Al-Wad Street, the main thoroughfare. We pass restaurants, clothing stores and spice shops. Although Jewish residents are a minority in the Old City, the Israeli municipality controls the space. Hundreds of soldiers and police patrol the streets every day.<sup>4</sup> Every few feet there is a mounted CCTV camera with a yellow sticker underneath it denoting its number. All the cameras are placed above us and look down. It takes me a few minutes to notice them. Once I do, I can’t avoid them. The cameras are strategically positioned throughout the city as part of a mass surveillance system that records most of the public space. Some cameras are pointed at a single doorway – as if they’re placed there to focus on an individual household.

“Israel decided to annex rather than occupy East Jerusalem, saying that this is part of our historical everlasting capital of our nation,” Sharon says sardonically. “*The government* uses the euphoria from the ’67 war, from being able to *access* the holy sites, *most importantly the Temple Mount*, to basically annex a whole bunch of shit that was never part of Jerusalem *before 1948 when the land was called Palestine*. Like, Jordanian East Jerusalem was just five square kilometers. Israeli East Jerusalem is *now* seventy square kilometers.”

We take the most direct route to the Temple Mount, barely winding through any streets at all. But we do stop for some falafel sandwiches. I go through a metal detector and sit on the steps facing the Western Wall as I wait for the rest of the group to make it through the checkpoint. After Israel won the Six Day War in 1967, the government began to expropriate land under the guise of religious preservation. The first major land seizure occurred within a week of victory.

I stare out at the pavilion in front of the Wall where thousands of tourists normally mill about. It’s fairly empty today. Some put on yarmulkes, wash their hands as is tradition, and go pray at the Wall. Others take selfies or stand in groups listening to tour guides that look a little more conventional than Sharon, who is wearing a shirt with the words *love music hate racism* on the front. A group of soldiers, all women, stream past us holding machine guns. I take a few pictures surreptitiously.

“What we’re seeing now used to be a neighborhood. The wall was always there, but until ’67 there used to be a big neighborhood right until there.” Sharon points to the bottom of the steps where we sit. “The first house demolitions in the Old City were done within five days *after Israel took over the Old City*.”

---

<sup>3</sup> Seidemann, Daniel. *A Geopolitical Atlas of Contemporary Jerusalem*. Terrestrial Jerusalem, 2015. Page 76.

<sup>4</sup> “Old City Hi-Tech Helps Police Prevent Crime.” *The Jerusalem Post* | *JPost.Com*. [www.jpost.com](http://www.jpost.com), <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/old-city-hi-tech-helps-police-prevent-crime-462907>. Accessed 9 Apr. 2020.

The neighborhood was called the Mughrabi, or Moroccan neighborhood. An estimated 6,000 people lived there. In a span of two weeks in 1967 relative peace transformed into war which led to bulldozers demolishing all 135 houses.<sup>5</sup>

“[The wall] is not really holy if you have to destroy someone’s house for it,” Sharon continues.

One of the first songs I learned at Heschel, probably in kindergarten or first grade, was *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*, Jerusalem of Gold. We all sang it in our music class and sometimes at assemblies like the one for Israeli Independence Day. The song was written by Naomi Shemer the month before the 1967 war at the behest of Jerusalem’s mayor, Teddy Kolek.<sup>6</sup> It quickly became a hit. In the song Shemer sings, “The cisterns have dried, the marketplace is empty, and no one frequents the Temple Mount in the Old City.” Israeli paratroopers reportedly sang the song when they conquered the Temple Mount. After the victory, Shemer added a new verse: “We have returned to the cisterns, to the market and the marketplace. A ram’s horn calls out on the Temple Mount in the Old City. And in the caves in the mountain thousands of suns shine – we will once again descend to the Dead Sea by way of Jericho!”<sup>7</sup> Descending to the Dead Sea by way of Jericho would mean annexing much of the West Bank, a move Israel has not yet taken.

“Why annex so much territory *only in the vicinity of Jerusalem and nowhere else?*” Sharon asks us. “They are trying to keep as many *Palestinians* outside of the territory and as much of this [Jewish Israelis] inside, again using this *idea* of united Jerusalem. *The government* says it’s now part of the state. It is not part of the state. It’s not being recognized by the international community... mainly because the residents of East Jerusalem, then 20,000 people and now 300,000 people, were never granted citizenship. They were never *naturalized* (Sharon says annexed but she means naturalized). The land they live in is part of Israel, but they’re not part of Israel. Their residency status is temporary and it has to be renewed. If the center of your life is not in Jerusalem, for instance you married a man in Ramallah and you’re living there, your residency can be revoked. Meaning you have to have special approval to *pass through a checkpoint* and visit your fucking parents in the house you were born in. *If the government thinks the center of your life has shifted* your house can be raided and your fucking underwear drawer can be checked. They can say, ‘We’re sorry. We came to your house. We looked in your stuff. We didn’t find a toothbrush. Goodbye Jerusalem residency.’ *Goodbye visiting your family.*”

\*\*\*

I first visit Issa in Jerusalem in March of 2015, a month after I meet him in my kitchen. He stands outside of Jaffa Gate, scanning the crowd for me. We make eye contact, he smiles, runs over, hugs me, kisses both of my cheeks and takes my luggage. I am overwhelmed and glowing. I follow him through the Old City, first on a main road with many tourists and then on progressively narrower streets. We pass children on bikes and old men sitting in plastic chairs. I follow his bouncing ponytail as we round corners and suddenly we end up on a main road where

---

<sup>5</sup> Omar M. Yousef, *Urban Morphologies of Conflict: Palestinian life and Israeli planning in Jerusalem*. University of California, Irvine, 2009 p. 93.

<sup>6</sup> “From Lamentation to Triumphalism: The Story behind ‘Jerusalem of Gold,’ Israel’s Second National Anthem.” *Mondoweiss*, 22 June 2017. [mondoweiss.net](https://mondoweiss.net), <https://mondoweiss.net/2017/06/lamentation-triumphalism-jerusalem/>.

<sup>7</sup> *YERUSHALAYIM SHEL ZAHAV - Jewish Songs | Hebrew Songs*. <http://www.hebrewsongs.com/?song=yerushalayimshelzahav>. Accessed 7 Apr. 2020.



golf carts with groceries stacked precariously in the passenger seat whiz past us and shopkeepers yell out their fares. We abruptly take a left back into a quiet residential neighborhood. I follow him blindly as we make a quick series of lefts and rights. We pass a bakery, an Ethiopian monastery, and a tall fence that guards a school. I can hear children playing. Finally, we are on Issa's street. We stop at a small blue, egg-shaped door with a number above it painted onto a tile. Next to the tile is a small wooden cross.

Issa bends down to avoid hitting his head and we walk through the opening into a small courtyard. We pass his neighbor's home. I hear her dog bark. Issa holds the door open for me. His mother Nahil sits in a recliner and looks up. She shoots Issa a look of bewilderment. He smiles and laughs as he practically shouts in her ear so she can hear him, "This is Zach! Zach!" He continues speaking with her in Arabic but I hear my name again among the words. I smile and say hello.

That week I am Issa's shadow. I sleep on the couch in his office and spend hours watching him edit. Afterwards we walk around the city together. He shows me all of the tourist hotspots and religious sites, but most of the time we go for groceries or just to stretch our legs and get some hummus. Every few feet I hear someone yell 'Issa' or '*keefak*' ("how are you" in Arabic) or even just '*habibi*' ("my dear or my love"). Issa always stops, smiles, and embraces whoever calls him, often kissing them on both cheeks. A five-minute walk to buy some fruit at the market can often stretch into fifteen or twenty minutes, especially if Issa runs into a cousin or a friend he hasn't seen in some time.

I struggle to beat the jet-lag. A lot of time is spent waking up in the middle of the night and watching the "Avatar" animated spin-off "The Legend of Korra." Every morning I climb up a ladder onto his domed rooftop above the terrace where he grows his plants and watch the sunrise. You can see all of the Old City from his roof – the Dome of The Rock, Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, and thousands of houses stacked on top of each other. Most of the photos I take from that trip are iPhone selfies with the sun rising over the view from his roof behind me. I scroll through them now and wince. My hair is cut into a high-top fade. I style it with gel. I can barely grow stubble. There are many versions of the same selfie that have slight variations. In some photos I choose to smile, in others I look serious. Sometimes I'm wearing sunglasses or headphones. A few even have garish yellowed Instagram filters. You get the picture.

Issa shows me his Israeli *laissez passer* – a travel document that looks similar to a Jordanian passport but doesn't denote citizenship. This is the document that Jerusalemite residents who are not Israeli citizens receive from the Israeli government. It states that Issa was born in Jerusalem – which Israel considers the capital of the country – but lists his nationality as Jordanian. Every time Issa wants to leave the country – whether for work, like when he visited us in February, or for vacation, when he and his son Shadi visit us a few months later – he needs to apply for a visa. When airport security sees his travel document, they put him in a separate line with more stringent security checks. As a Jerusalem resident, he receives certain benefits like healthcare and social security, and he can vote in local municipal elections, but he cannot vote nationally because he is not a citizen of Israel, the country he has lived in the last 37 years. (For the first 11 years of his life the Old City was occupied by Jordan.) His family, the Freijis, have been living in the same house for over 250 years. Issa was born in the same bed where he now sleeps. He's lived in Jerusalem, Ramallah and Paris for extended periods but moved back into his family's home to take care of his mother after she had a stroke in 2012.

On that first trip, I learn that Issa is a man of ritual. He wakes up and has a glass of water and a date or two. He rolls a cigarette while he prepares his coffee but waits to smoke it until the coffee is cool enough to drink, normally while he's on his roof watching the city wake up. He cleans his mother and helps her put on a fresh diaper and dress, usually floral patterned or purple. Then he hands her a cup of coffee and a few McVitties digestive biscuits (she won't drink the coffee unless she can dip the biscuits in it) and finally sits down to work.

Issa prefers to teach by showing so I quickly learn I have to speak up and ask questions when he performs a task in the editing software that I don't understand. I learn how to make titles and how to use his Canon digital camera and that the best dates in the Old City are the Medjoul dates that Jacob sells at his spice shop. I learn that Issa worked for *60 Minutes* as a cinematographer for over 25 years. That he was especially close with Bob Simon, the late veteran CBS News correspondent, and that they worked together on many assignments in Gaza and the West Bank. I watch his documentary *Last Supper: Abu Dis* for the first time. The film documents a Palestinian whose house in Abu Dis is mere feet away from the separation wall Israel is building. I learn that Issa's tender gaze translates to how he films others. I think about whether the social cost of bisecting a group of people with a wall is worth the added security to prevent the suicide bombings that terrorized Israel in the early 2000s. I think about how I've never thought about the effects of displacement on the people who live on the other side of the wall, how this barrier extends past the physical and has existed long before the wall was built. I learn that I want to make documentaries of my own.

But I don't learn the details of Issa's residency status, how the government views him, aside from when he briefly shows me his laissez passer. If he does go into more detail, I don't remember it. He explains the details of his residency in March of 2019, when we sit on his roof and begin talking about the possibilities of a film about his life. In 2015 Issa tells me never to walk around the city without him. So in the few moments I do walk alone, especially at night, I constantly look over my shoulder. If I hear footsteps I walk faster. If someone makes eye contact with me, I avert my gaze. Most of the time my heart is in my throat.

Issa doesn't bring up the occupation, or the surveillance cameras that seem to look down on every street in the city, or the soldiers that patrol the streets with machine guns, or the stabbings of religious Jews and soldiers and how that changes how certain people look at him. We don't talk about any of these things. Is it because he doesn't want to tell me or because I don't even know what to ask him?

It isn't until midway through Sharon's tour that I begin to wonder: why is she the first one to tell me all of this information when I've known Issa for three years? Why is this the first time I'm hearing about the occupation, really hearing about it in detail, when I went to a Jewish day school that taught me about Israel for 11 years? Why don't I remember my father explaining any of this, even though he swears he did when I was fourteen and he took me to a protest in Sheikh Jarrah, a neighborhood only 2 kilometers away from Issa's, where the government was evicting Palestinian families who had lived there for many years.

\*\*\*

At the end of the tour we all sit in a circle on rocks under a grove of olive trees. As the sun falls it reflects on Sharon's glasses. The smoke from her hand-rolled cigarette is golden. Someone asks Sharon how she started getting interested in activism.

“It started at the end of high school,” she said. “I had an argument with somebody from the punk scene, which is very leftist.” Sharon grew up in a fairly religious family. “I remember saying in Bil’in (*a Palestinian village in the West Bank*) ‘They’re throwing rocks at the soldiers. Of course, they have to shoot them.’ And then somebody said, ‘But why are there soldiers in Bil’in and not police officers?’ Which I never even thought about.”

As we’re walking back up the hill to West Jerusalem, Sharon shares one last point: “The first stage of denial, you say, ‘What you’re saying is a lie. It’s untrue. It’s not true. It can’t be true.’ This is what I experienced and what I experienced with a lot of people. People say, ‘You’re lying to me.’ The second stage of denial is, ‘Okay maybe it’s true but there’s a reason.’ And the third stage of denial is to say, ‘Okay it’s true. But what can I do about it? I don’t want to know.’ And that, I think, is like everybody in Israel.”





# Kanafeh

“It’s not anymore the discrimination, it’s not anymore the balance and stuff. No, this is us, this our way of life, this is how we are now, and we have to take it. We can’t just go and fight... do what? Try to convince others that we are not? I don’t want to break my head again. Because they can’t understand.” - Issa Freij

Spring of 2019. It’s just me, Issa and a shotgun microphone. We sit on his couch and I finally ask him the questions about his life that have never come up in normal conversation. He tells me about his father Jamil, who died in 2007 at 106, and what his mother, Nahil, was like before her stroke. Growing up in the Old City, he remembers little of the differences between the Jordanian occupation and the Israeli occupation. “Both had soldiers walking the streets,” he tells me. His father owned a camera shop originally right outside of Jaffa Gate. It was destroyed during the War of Independence in 1948. Before the war his father would swim and play tennis at the YMCA every morning and then eat breakfast across the street at the King David hotel, which still has one of the best morning spreads in the city. Jamil had his own simple routine although it was a little more luxurious than Issa’s.

Issa was born in 1956. He soon became his father’s apprentice. He used to have short hair and a mustache, which I still find shocking every time I see the photos on his fridge of the entire family standing over a hibachi grill and smiling next to a chef at Benihana. They were taken at some time in the late ‘80s, when he and his parents and sister were visiting his brother, Nicola, who had moved to California.

At first Issa didn’t want to be a photographer. His father mostly took portraits in the studio in his shop, so all of Issa’s early photographs were taken on the streets of the Old City and in the rolling hills of the West Bank. Before he settled on becoming a cinematographer he was the upright bassist in a popular band called *Sabreen*.

The days in early spring are easy; it’s the beginning of the project, and there’s no pressure. I know I want to focus on Issa’s life, but I still don’t know what part of his life to focus on. One day we walk through the market and Issa mentions offhand that he can no longer find one of his favorite sweets as a kid, *Kanafeh*. *Kanafeh* is a traditional Palestinian pastry with white cheese wrapped in a flaky crust with syrup drizzled on top. His words confuse me: I see *Kanafeh* sold on almost every corner. He tells me he’s talking about a different kind of *Kanafeh*, the real *Kanafeh* of his youth, when the cheese was made with Gi – a type of goat fat cultivated by Bedouins – which made it saltier and gooier. Gi can only be found in the West Bank now. It’s a symptom of the larger geopolitical shift of erasure that has pervaded the Old City and East Jerusalem.

Much of Issa’s work has focused on this erasure. He did so explicitly in his film *Freedom I Have Lost* about a community of Bedouin goatherds whose nomadic lifestyle, which had spanned generations, became impossible to continue because of Israeli land redistribution and development. The Gi needed for proper *Kanafeh* came from the goats the Bedouins herded across the vast expanses of land they were free to roam. Now their tribes have been reduced to living in makeshift plastic and concrete structures, or small tent camps. The last shot of *Freedom I Have Lost* is a Bedouin wearing a traditional *Keffiyeh* standing on the side of a highway, all of his personal belongings in a few suitcases at his feet. His thumb is in the air as he tries to hitch a

ride. The cars do not stop. He is no longer free to roam with his goats. Instead, the world is herding him.

When Israel built the wall, Issa made his film *Last Supper: Abu Dis*, which centers on a family living in a house only a few feet from the wall's construction. He focuses on how the impending enclosure impacts their psyche, how the new barrier disorients the family. *Last Supper: Abu Dis* ends with a shot at dusk as the wall is only a few days from completion. The family stands in the small gap in the wall looking up at the moon. The camera follows their gaze and looks past the opening one final time and out into the dark rolling hills with the twinkling lights of Jerusalem below. Enclosing Jerusalem from the West Bank effectively destroyed Jerusalem's status as the cultural capital for the Palestinian people. The separation is why many traditions in the Old City are disappearing. Cultivating these traditions requires a constant exchange between Palestinians in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

The climax of *Freedom I Have Lost* occurs when Israeli soldiers show up unannounced with bulldozers and begin to demolish the entire village. While this is happening, one of the villagers calls Issa and he rushes to the site. He films people talking about their traditions and culture vanishing as their homes are destroyed behind them in the frame. All they can do is turn away from the catastrophe and face Issa, standing with his camera as their witness. When the scales of power are so lopsided, erasure is counteracted by pressing the record button.

When you first begin recording it's impossible to fully realize the significance of the moment. Even if you pick up the camera to retain some trace of a culture under siege, time's passing still adds meaning that is often unpredictable. Israel will only become a Jewish State when all of the footage, paintings, songs, recipes and many other forms of art and tradition are erased.

As trends of erasure in the Old City accelerate, Issa worries that one day soon he won't notice any traces of the city where he grew up. Already, so much has changed. From the stones on the street, to the name of the country. My film, I realize, will be both a profile of Issa's life and an archive. Recounting Issa's life will both highlight the city's transformation over the past 60 years and preserve those stories and memories for his own archive. He's taken hundreds of thousands of photos and videos of the City as he's seen it, but he's always behind the camera, hardly ever talking about his own life.

\*\*\*

Adam is always up first and loves to take a morning run through the streets of the Old City if we have time before filming. I've wanted him to meet Issa for a long time, as they're two of the closest people in my life. The minute Issa said yes to the project I knew Adam was the only person I'd trust to hold the camera I was going to direct and record the sounds I wanted heard. There is no one else I'd rather live with in Jerusalem.

Adam is an only child. His parents are immigrants from Hungary and both are academics. His mother's Jewish, which means in the eyes of the Israeli rabbinate so is he. When he wakes up early, he often brews me a cup of coffee without asking, the same way Issa does. He'll film from four in the morning until the next morning if we have to, his energy and passion are endless. Yet he is always respectful and easy-mannered, perfect qualities when handling something as delicate as recording. I've looked up to him for as long as I've known him. We



were only at Brown together for a year before he graduated, but in that time, we grew to have faith in one another.

Without Adam no film would be made, and with Adam, the film irrevocably changes. The day before we're set to begin production, Issa and I sit on his roof alone and outline the next three weeks. We'll conduct a few interviews, visit the spot where his father's camera shop used to be, visit his mother's old house in West Jerusalem, where she grew up before 1948, and talk to a few of Issa's friends. The rest, we decide will be observational.

The next day Adam and I show up to Issa's house. After the customary cup of coffee and a hug hello, things begin to feel different. There's never a moment that feels natural to begin recording. I always hesitantly ask Issa if it's ok for us to turn the camera on, and often the answer is no. I've imagined what I come to realize are two conflicting visions. There's this one shot that I can't get out of my head where we follow Issa's morning routine in one continuous motion. Just as he's finished pouring his cup of coffee and rolling his cigarette, we'd follow him upstairs to his roof and profile him as he smokes and watches the sun rise. This would require multiple takes and direction of Issa that doesn't feel like a documentary at all. Instead he would become my actor. I would depict him not how he is, but how I fantasize him. And yet everything that draws me to him as a character happens off camera, in our normal easy moments together. I also want to be a fly on the wall, constantly filming his natural charisma and charm with others.

I don't know how I expected him to be comfortable with this. Maybe I thought he'd be more understanding because he's filmed so many others and he knows how terrifying making a first feature film can be. But what I'm asking him to do is something even I can't completely comprehend when I first picture it. There's no way I could spend every day for the next three weeks as a fly on the wall observing him. And even if I could, the camera would still change his behavior. I don't believe anyone truly gets comfortable being filmed to the point where they forget the camera's presence completely. Part of the magic is the way the camera's presence heightens every moment. But this can get exhausting quickly. When Issa was learning documentary, he had to pick and choose his spots, film was expensive and only ten minutes' worth of film could fit on each roll. He couldn't film constantly, the technology wouldn't allow it. Today a tiny SD card can record hours of video without a problem. The entire method of recording has allowed the camera to act as a collector if one chooses, leaving much of the decision making in the editing room.

Now with Adam here holding the camera and the pressure of beginning to make choices that carry consequences, I freeze. I think more about the ways Issa's energy has shifted than directing the film. The recording brings out a side of Issa that I've never encountered, a side that immediately disappears when Adam and I put the cameras away and we all can exhale. He seems uncomfortable with the camera. He comments on our equipment, saying the cameras these days are too small and the footage will be shaky. A day later when we bring more equipment he tells us now that we've brought too much and it looks like we're shooting a narrative film. There always seems to be a reason why we can't film, and when we do film most of the time it is painful rather than joyful.

Still there are a few beautiful moments captured on film – Adam slips onto the couch behind Issa and me without us noticing as we go through some of his archives. We stumble upon photos of the hills in the West Bank and the natural landscape. Issa begins to recount the stories behind each photo, what happened outside of the handles of the frame. He stops at a photo of a

boar. His mouse hovers over its head. The boar is in a small valley with rocks and shrubs. There are olive trees in the background and a sloping hill with stones.

“Big head, look at his head,” Issa tells me.

“No neck,” I point out while laughing.

“No, that’s why it’s difficult to kill them, not easy. Actually, on a checkpoint, soldiers wanted to shoot at them because they were afraid. Going out of Ramallah.” The camera faces the photograph, and Issa’s hands are in the foreground, gesturing. “And I told the soldier, ‘Don’t shoot them. They will attack you.’” Adam turns to Issa’s cheek, zoomed in intimately so that we are level with Issa’s eyes. “Just leave them. Let them go. Let them pass,” Issa told the soldier. “And he looked at me and he said, ‘Yeah?’” Issa turns back toward the photo and his long grey hair comes into view. “I told him, ‘Yeah, yeah, yeah, don’t shoot. Just let them go. They won’t even look at you.’” Adam’s lens is so close now that you begin to notice my reflection in Issa’s eye. My head is leaning in slightly. I hang on his every word, and so does Adam. “And I waited until they passed,” Issa says. “I took some pictures. I don’t know where the pictures are, but um yeah.” He’s already clicked to the next photo. “Bushes. And this is uh...”

“A mantis,” I finish.

One of my favorite moments is one that I film. Issa massages his mother’s feet with tea tree oil. Her feet are quite bloated and her nails are yellow but Issa gently and lovingly rubs the oil on them all the same. He looks up at her, smiles and winks.

Issa has been taking care of Nahil since 2012, when she had her stroke. Now she’s in her 90s, suffers from Alzheimer’s and can barely walk. A few days before we begin filming, Issa has to hand-feed her for the first time. I can tell it bothers him. Most days Nahil doesn’t recognize her grandkids or even her own children. Sometimes she calls Issa her brother. She used to be able to change her own diaper but now he must change it for her, and bathe her, and cook for her, and wash her soiled clothing, and never leave the house for too long in case she falls. He doesn’t save any of his care for himself. I hardly see him eat unless we’re eating hummus together and his face has grown gaunt. He keeps telling me he’ll quit smoking, but now that we’re filming he smokes more.

And still, I want to keep going. I came here to profile his life and brought Adam with me. I’m afraid to think about what we’ll do if we can’t. There is no deviation. There is no back-up plan. There is no taking no for an answer. Until he says something.

A few nights into the project Issa, his girlfriend, Joumana, who is also an artist and filmmaker, and I drink Louisa tea in his living room. After some small talk and a few minutes of watching the news, I finally muster up the courage to bring up a topic that has been on my mind.

“Should I be filming yet? Is it okay to film while you’re learning?”

“Coming in with a narrative can lead to colonialism whether you intend it or not,” Joumana begins. “But you should always be filming. Filming is a form of learning. These are questions that we constantly ask ourselves, they’re always evolving. This is the right question to ask.”

“You’re pushing, Zach, you’re pushing,” Issa interjects.

“I’m pushing? Pushing what?”

“C’mon man, you keep pushing.”

That’s all it takes. I haven’t felt comfortable filming him but until that moment it was easy for me to chalk it up to nerves or Issa not yet getting used to the camera’s presence. I know I’m not filming a story that I want to share. I’d already gotten the sense that I’d been pushing before he finally mentions it, but I’m still not sure what I’ve been pushing up against. It’s easy for me to

blame myself – I'm in Issa's home and he's doing me a huge favor, not only hosting me each day but spending hours talking with me and Adam at night. Still, he knew what he was getting into – we planned this together extensively. I've been completely transparent with him throughout this entire process. And now that I'm finally here to film him, he's changed his mind. The question is: why?

For now, I can't answer that question but I must respect it. I only know that I can't film Issa any longer. Adam and I still have two weeks together in the Old City, with all of our equipment so we decide to pivot. The new idea begins with Adam's fascination with all of the surveillance cameras. We decide we'll treat the remaining time as a form of experiential research. We'll walk around the city trying to count and film as many surveillance cameras as we can and see what else we discover. Our only goal is to better familiarize ourselves with our surroundings. It's the opposite of what we came here to do – we no longer even attempt to film Issa and we have no plan – and naturally we begin to learn patterns within the city we'd never read thought to look for.

\*\*\*

One day Adam and I walk the entire perimeter of the city along the ramparts. I notice that if we jump a small fence there is a perfect vantage overlooking the market inside Damascus gate. We spend the next eight hours filming a timelapse, patiently waiting for the market to close. By midnight, we are freezing cold, the camera's batteries have died and still the market hasn't fully shut down. We leave excited by the potential of a new discovery. At around 9pm the tourists finally cleared out and the families living in the Old City began to buy their fruits and vegetables. Aside from when we're with Issa and some of our friends, the majority of the locals treat us like any other tourists. Most of our interactions are transactional – they either offer to sell us souvenirs and food or we ask if we can film them. Although we are on a rooftop and no one looks up and notices us, Adam and I observe how differently the residents of the Old City interact with each other when there are no tourists.

A few days later we decide to sneak back up onto the ramparts at 4am and film the market opening as the sun rises. We end up filming for eight hours. The first shop that opens is the newspaper seller. At dawn he lays out a stack of papers on top of a small plastic crate. The regulars who are early risers pass by on their way to work and grab a paper as they walk by. They must have monthly accounts. Hints of sunlight peak out behind the Mount of Olives. As the sun slowly rises, birds begin to sing. Cats sleeping on tin roofs wake up and stretch their legs. Two boys push a cart filled with *bagele*, the long oval bread iconic within the Old City, still steaming from the oven. Their faces are illuminated by a YouTube video on an iPad that rests between two of the pastries. Two soldiers stop a man walking down the street and demand to see his papers. By now close to 7am, the newspaper man has built an elaborate network of plastic foot stands, cardboard crates and wooden planks constructing shelves and tables on which to display his wares. He seems to be the local convenience store. He sells large jars of vaseline, toothpaste, scissors, umbrellas, duct tape, paint brushes, and even chewing gum. Old women with headscarves unbox their fresh produce and hunch over vegetable stands. A boy starts dressing mannequins with women's clothes. In a side alley a municipality worker wearing a neon yellow t-shirt suddenly falls to the ground twitching uncontrollably. Seizure. Shopkeepers rush over and one man with a bald spot places a flattened cardboard box underneath the worker's head. He kneels next to the worker gently cradling him and checking for a pulse. Both men's

eyes are closed. The worker winces in pain and shrieks. A crowd gathers. The worker goes limp. Soldiers stand near the periphery monitoring the situation. The newspaper man dips his head in to check out the commotion and quickly returns to his stall. The soldiers rush over and demand to see the bald shopkeeper's work permit. The worker jolts suddenly, interrupting the soldiers, and the shopkeeper rests him on his side. Adam turns his head and the camera follows him, abruptly whipping to the right, as Adam notices a man pushing a cart filled with fruits and vegetables. Every time the cart reaches a decline the man stands on a deflated tire that he's chained to the bottom of his cart and slides down the street. Adam jerks the camera back towards the sound of a blaring siren emanating from a yellow motorcycle that zooms around the corner and screeches to a stop in the alley. The rider takes off his helmet. He's wearing a *kippah* secured on his head by two clips. The medic is Orthodox. He checks the worker's pulse, and together with the surrounding shopkeepers they pick the man up and take him away.

All of this happens before 8am.

By noon there are loud explosions all around us. At first Adam and I believe we're standing above the scene of a terrorist attack but everyone below us walks around as if nothing is out of the ordinary. After a few minutes of bombardment we realize the sounds are fireworks. We later learn that it's customary to shoot fireworks into the sky, even in broad daylight, to celebrate high school seniors receiving their diplomas.

After the success of the market Adam and I go to great lengths to film without being noticed. Our goal is to blend in among the thousands of cameras perched and moving throughout the Old City. Most of our shots are taken surreptitiously from a distance using long lenses that are zoomed in. With this approach the camera quickly feels like a shameful object, something we try to conceal from the people we record for fear it will change their behavior. We are more observational than interactional. Looking back at much of the footage from those two weeks you can sense this detachment. Any connection we may have felt while watching others in the moment didn't translate to how the camera perceived things. The shots are distant and because of this they are often filmed extremely wide with no clear focus on the individual we are interested in following. The footage feels fearful.

Sometimes in the middle of filming we can tell that something feels a bit off. It's a discomfort similar to when I could sense Issa no longer wanted to be a part of the documentary. It didn't feel right to record the municipality worker writhing on the ground, but in the moment we were so shocked it was tough to turn away. Adam and I begin to develop a code of ethics so that our style of recording won't emulate the callous surveillance that surrounds us. Whenever we film someone in a way that would make them identifiable, we try to at least make eye contact and nod at them to let them know we're filming. If they go rigid or scowl we immediately turn the camera off. We also agree not to film into people's homes through their windows or record any other moments that seem like a breach of personal privacy. We never film children's faces unless we ask permission explicitly. Admittedly these decisions are made on the fly. When it comes to filming in the public domain there are very few hard-set rules, yet the equipment we possess can have powerful consequences.

By the end of the trip Adam and I agree that most of the footage we've shot isn't footage we'd include in a film, but we still needed to shoot it in order to reach a level of confidence where we could move forward and make a film. We are fascinated by what we discovered when we stopped viewing our surroundings like tourists, but that isn't necessarily fascinating to anyone else, least of all the people we'd been filming who were just living their everyday lives.



Both Adam and I have this ineffable sense that there is a story here to tell but we know that we need to partner with someone who lives in the Old City to help us find the stories that are worth sharing. Every evening we visit Issa, drink tea, and excitedly recount what we've seen and learned. He enjoys hearing what we discover and often suggests parts of the city and customs we should film, but he doesn't have time to help us. He's busy taking care of his mother. I leave the Old City in August with a plan to return with Adam in October to film 100,000 Jews praying at the Western Wall the night before Yom Kippur.<sup>8</sup>

\*\*\*

We meet Yazeed in October in a small and beautiful courtyard inside the Lutheran Church in the Old City. When Yazeed first asks us to meet him there Adam and I are confused. We've been to the Lutheran Church many times but we've never heard of a cafe there. Soon we learn firsthand that they serve the best cheesecake in Jerusalem. Almost every place we go to with Yazeed is like this: we think we know it until we arrive with him and have a completely new experience. I thought when Issa walked through the Old City a lot of people stopped and said hello to him but it's nothing compared to Yazeed. He's a local celebrity. After weeks of filming alone, mostly observing from a distance, the minute people see we're with Yazeed they approach us and ask us what we're working on. And within five minutes of Yazeed speaking with them in Arabic they want to participate in the film.

Adam and I are given Yazeed's number from a friend of ours named Mahmoud who owns a bookshop in East Jerusalem. We have spent countless hours in the bookshop drinking tea and coffee with Mahmoud and researching the area. He has introduced us to people all over the city. We mentioned over the summer that we'd like to find a producer for our project who lives in the Old City and he immediately thought of Yazeed.

Yazeed is short and balding and always pacing. He's in his thirties and when he smiles, it's hard to tell if he's smiling at what you're saying or thinking of a memory. He smokes incessantly and he's always at least fifteen to twenty minutes late. When Adam and I first meet him his energy wakes us up before the espresso we ordered reaches the table.

That first meeting I try not to act nervous. This is our chance to pitch Yazeed our project and I don't want to bungle it. Neither Adam nor I want to make a film about our thoughts on the local community who live here. Our goal is to make a film that the residents of the Old City can relate to. Our hope is we can share perspectives from all quarters in the city so that people will learn more about their neighbors. There are certainly tight-knit communities in the Old City – the proximity requires neighbors from all quarters to interact with each other whenever they step out onto the street. People living in the Jewish Quarter may depend on those in the Muslim or Christian Quarter for groceries or gadgets, but ultimately the quarters are still fairly separate. The most overlap is between the Muslim and Christian quarters. The Armenian and Jewish quarters tend to keep to themselves. Issa told us when he was growing up this wasn't the case. Although there were technical quarters, each street had an eclectic mix of people. But this was back when the Jordanians occupied the Old City and all the Jews were kicked out after the War of Independence in 1948. Many people who live here now are extremely religious, especially in the

---

<sup>8</sup> "100,000 Jews Gathered for Selichot Prayers at Western Wall - Jewish Lifestyle." *Israel National News*. [www.israelnationalnews.com](http://www.israelnationalnews.com), <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/269922>. Accessed 9 Apr. 2020.

Jewish and Muslim quarters, so they spend most of their time within their religious communities. And there is a general mistrust between Israelis and Palestinians.

Adam and I have noticed that we can navigate between the different quarters in ways that our Israeli friends and even Yazeed cannot. We can pretty much talk with anyone Israeli or Palestinian without causing any trouble. With Yazeed or Issa there to vouch for us, and my own knowledge of Jewish customs and my ability to speak Hebrew, it's not too difficult for people in all of the quarters to open up to us and get on board with our idea. The minute Yazeed starts to trust us, that trust transfers onto most others who trust him. And the longer Adam and I spend with Yazeed the more confident we become when filming on our own. Our shooting style becomes intimate – we film much closer to people and use a shallower depth of field to keep the focus entirely on individuals. It's similar to how I shot Issa massaging his mother's feet. The camera becomes an instrument of reassurance, transferring comfort back and forth between the person in front of the camera and the ones behind it.

I can't remember exactly what I said to Yazeed to get him on board but I remember the sentiment. Adam and I were very clear that we would be working with both Palestinians and Israelis on the project in case this caused him any issue. We wanted Yazeed to know that if we were to work with him we'd want him to pick the people in his own community who he felt had interesting stories to tell. He would be our translator and producer but also a partner in the project.<sup>9</sup> Our goal in filming the Palestinian community in the Old City was to remove the lens of conflict and violence and, honestly, even sympathy in our representation. We wanted to try and represent the community as they interacted with each other without all of the associations Western culture or the media placed on them. We didn't want to make a film where people saw Palestinians as victims or terrorists. And we especially didn't want to frame Palestinians through their relationship to Israel.

This is where Yazeed really started to get excited about the project. We felt like the Palestinian people had always been framed within a conflict with Israel and a lack of their own statehood and we were determined to film their culture and stories from their lives in the Old City outside of this context. We didn't want to get into who was right and who was wrong or where people deserved to live (unless people were settling in other people's homes to actively displace them). Whenever Yazeed would pitch our idea to a potential subject he would always emphasize this point of making a film outside of the context of the conflict with Israel, and this is what the people we started to work with seemed most excited about. They were constantly surrounded by political opinions and this film was an opportunity for them to represent themselves on their own terms. I think part of the reason Yazeed trusted us was because we were two Jewish Americans whose goal was to let people speak for themselves so that we could share their stories in our communities back home. Hopefully we could shift people's perspectives just as ours were shifted when we watched Damascus Market. Yazeed told us this was a completely different approach than any of the other projects he'd worked on, and that excited all of us.

At the end of the day, I mention to Yazeed that we are going to our friend Issa's house. When I clarified it was Issa Freij, Yazeed's eyes lit up. It turns out Yazeed has known Issa since he was a little kid when Issa used to teach him photography. Sitting down to coffee at the

---

<sup>9</sup> Often producers like Yazeed are used as 'fixers' by journalists and other filmmakers. A fixer does the majority of the work – they often translate, line produce, and sometimes even record sound or shoot video – but they get little credit. Adam and I are not interested in replicating that.

Lutheran Church that morning, none of us realized we'd be ending the day having a smoke on Issa's roof. The day ends with us all having a smoke on Issa's roof looking out at the houses stacked on top of one another, the Dome of the Rock and the Mount of Olives looming in the background.

## Part II





# The Wall

Walking through the metal detector my stomach clenches. I'm praying my bag of equipment will make it through the x-ray machine. *Shabbat* begins in less than fifteen minutes. I want to record the evening prayer at the Western Wall.

The checkpoint is fairly empty. It's on the far side of the pavilion, opposite the main entrance where thousands of tourists pour inside. Mostly *Haredim* enter here. A couple of them rush by in their black hats and suits, *Tallis* draped over their shoulders, ringed *payot* bouncing behind their ears as they hurry to arrive before sundown. Most of the ultra-Orthodox have congregated before *Shabbat* begins. Those who arrive after sundown are stopped and frisked by security because they cannot walk through the metal detector on *Shabbat*. *Halakhic* law forbids any use of electronics from sundown on Friday until sundown on Saturday.

Inside my bag is an audio recorder. It's usually accompanied by a shotgun microphone and a few accessories – a pistol grip to hold the microphone, a fuzzy, sock-like object called a dead cat (it looks like its name), which slides over the microphone and helps filter out the sound from the wind, and of course, headphones. Yes, shotgun microphone, pistol grip, and dead cat are all official nomenclature in the sound industry.

This is a bit of a heavy duty set up, and people tend to give me a wide berth as I spend much of the summer walking through the narrow passageways of the Old City recording ambient sounds for the documentary. Tonight, I left my headphones and large microphone behind for this reason. Instead of the priapic shotgun microphone, I opt for two miniscule mics the size of a pinky nail that rest inside my ears. They are each a black dot in the center of a translucent plastic ear piece. My hope is that if anyone even notices, they will be mistaken for hearing aids.

The microphones record sound omnidirectionally. This means they pick up noise from all directions equally unless there is a null point blocking their ability to register sound waves. Tonight, the null point is my head. One microphone picks up what my left ear hears and the other my right. When played back together in a stereo mix, the audio mimics human hearing better than any other method of recording.

Although the Western Wall is a public space funded by Israeli taxpayers and I'm legally allowed to record there, it's a little different than recording at your local community park. The wall is the last remnant of the *Beit HaMikdash*, the second great temple that historians believe was built between 538 and 516 B.C. It's considered the holiest site in all of Judaism. During the week, plenty of tourists hang over the rails snapping photographs of people praying. Some even take selfies while carrying out the famous ritual of placing handwritten messages to God in the cracks between the ancient stones. But on *Shabbat* all electronics are prohibited out of respect for observant Jews. I don't want to disrupt anyone's prayer with my equipment so I'm hoping my stealth setup will go unnoticed.

I justify the ethics of my recording two ways. If all goes according to plan, no one will know I have broken *Halakhic* law. And during my research, I've noticed that on the official Western Wall website there are cameras that livestream. I want to share the many different rhythms of Judaism that reside here. The soundscape is richly layered with a multiplicity of melodies that thousands of Jews from all over the world bring with them. All are chanting the same words at the same time in the same place, yet each has a unique custom passed down through their family. The medium of sound links these idiosyncrasies together with a detailed



attentiveness that is lost in a photograph or video. A wide angle shot shows a large crowd separated by gender and made up of smaller groups with various religious sects – Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform dancing and singing in their own circles. A recording highlights the overarching connectedness of the space as the sounds mix with each other in a way the people may not. Although recording tonight is a delicate task, I think it is worth the risk.

My bag clears the x-ray machine unscathed. I pick up my pack from the conveyor belt, strap it to my waist and take a few deep breaths. Large youth groups stand in circles sing-shouting *am yisrael chai* (the nation of Israel lives) and *sha sha Shabbat shalom*. I check my levels, make sure my microphones are secure in my ears, and press record.

\*\*\*

Every Friday night my family gathers at my grandparents' house. *Shabbat* begins with the smell of sulfur dioxide as my grandmother strikes a match and lights two candles. She covers her eyes with her hands and whispers the blessing. My grandfather's baritone *shahhh* always manages to come in right as she's finishing up, leading us all into song. We stand around the table and hold hands while singing *Shalom Aleichem*, a traditional Jewish prayer whose title translates to Peace Be Upon You. The song welcomes the angels who accompany you home and usher in peace as the sabbath begins. My Judaism revolves around the feeling I have in this moment – a feeling almost ineffable. For an instant there's complete clarity. I am sharing love with the people who have the ability to accept it and reciprocate it more than anyone else in the world. I feel it flowing through them, transferring from hand to hand. There's a sense of weightlessness that comes from such security and comfort. Wherever I am in the world, when I hear *Shalom Aleichem*, my heart swells and I'm back with my family.

\*\*\*

I'm a little nervous as I approach the wall because of an incident the week before. Adam and I have been filming in the Old City for a couple weeks now since we stopped filming Issa and we've begun to settle into a rhythm. We've explored much of the Christian and Muslim quarters, the areas that feel newer to me. We've avoided the Jewish Quarter by accident, but the Wall on purpose. Last Friday afternoon we finally decided to visit and watch the crowd usher in *Shabbat* to scout out the area and see what we'd be allowed to record. We were filming outside the wall, observing tourists streaming through one of the checkpoints. The sun was setting behind us. Golden light crept up and over the Wall and a woman tapped my shoulder. "You know you can't film on *Shabbat*," she scolded.

"Hi." I replied, taken aback. "Yes, I know, thank you. Shabbat hasn't started yet."

The camera often draws attention from passersby. The irony of documentary is that often in the pursuit of capturing a semblance of reality, the necessary technology creates an environment that can negate any sense of authenticity. Strolling down the street wearing headphones and pointing a fur-covered microphone at noise is unnatural. A barrier forms between you and your surroundings. People tend to avoid you or gawk. You become an outside observer. Sometimes you become the attraction – people ask you what you're working on, or see the camera and begin to act performatively. Its presence can form a barrier between cameraperson and subject just as easily as it can become a catalyst for extraordinary openness.

There are also the rare moments that make countless days of hard work and frustration worth it – brief instances when the camera seems to live alongside filmmaker and subject, a separate organism intent on memorializing intimacy.

Aside from these moments, there is a certain otherness that stems from the physical connection to the equipment. Wearing headphones and holding a microphone transforms a human into a type of cyborg. When I'm listening to the microphones record in real time, I can't help but focus on their immense power. The microphone democratizes all sound based on loudness rather than frequency. Normally when we walk down the street there are scores of sounds our brain perceives but doesn't consciously register. Lower frequency sounds, like the rumbling of a heater or air conditioner, are easier to ignore or adjust to, causing them to blend into the background. Higher pitched sounds, like sirens, laughter or screaming, are perceived as consequential because they normally are.

Tonight, there are thousands of people surrounding me and soon most of them will be singing. Their footsteps form a mosaic of shuffling, a man with a deep voice utters a blessing in Hebrew, groups of middle and high school students sing songs with high pitched fervor, some of which I recognize from my time at Heschel. Two children laugh as one chases after the other. Each sound has an individual rhythm, a heartbeat. Together the soundscape hums and crackles with energy.

I hone in on the voice of the *Haredi* Jew in front of me who asks me if he can wrap *Tefillin* on my arm. I answer yes and he takes out a cloth bag. Inside are leather phylacteries which contain parchment with Hebrew prayers written on them, the *Tefillin*. There is a small opening between the zippers of my fanny pack and I can see the screen on my audio recorder glowing faintly. I feel a lump in my throat and my lungs tighten as I wonder if he'll ask about the wires snaking down my back or the binaural microphones in my ears. I decide to be proactive and ask him, "Do you think they are going to make me take out my hearing aids for *Shabbat*?"

"No, no you'll be fine. No one will say anything. Where are you from?"

"I'm from New York."

"Cool, I'm going to Brooklyn next year."

He begins to wrap the *Tefillin* on my left arm. I stop him. There is a loud rhythmic thumping behind us. Some youth group must've brought a drum.

"I'm a lefty, shouldn't it be on this side?" I say, pointing to my right arm.

"Oh, I didn't realize, thanks for telling me," he says, quickly unwrapping the leather straps and beginning to put them on the other arm.

After my Bar Mitzvah I used to wrap *Tefillin* each morning at Heschel. I haven't worn them in years, but as he places the straps over my arm seven times I know I could finish from memory. I let him continue. I don't mind letting him place the leather box on my head.

"Boruch Ato," he begins.

"Adonai Elo-hay-nu Melech Ha-Olam," I jump in.

"Asher Kidshanu," he calls back as if we are playing catch.

"B'mitz-vo-tav. V'tzi-vonu L'ho-" and here I stumble.

"L'honiach," he recites.

"L'honiach," I repeat and I speed up as I say, "*Tefillin*" quite confidently. It feels like slipping back into an old worn coat.

The last time I had worn *Tefillin* at the Western Wall I was fourteen and I still believed in God.



\*\*\*

That year my family takes a trip to Israel with my cousins. We hike and camp in the Negev Desert in the south of Israel. There is van support. After each hike we return to tents already pitched and a fresh hot dinner. We spend a few days in Eilat, the southern tip of Israel where there's great swimming and SCUBA diving in the Red Sea. Afterwards, we cross into Jordan for a few days to see Petra, the ancient city carved out of rock by the Nabataeans. While traveling through Wadi-Rum by Jeep we may or may not try on *keffiyehs* and pose for a photograph. In the back of the Jeep my cousin Sarah and I sit together listening to songs on her iPod Nano. She loops Simon and Garfunkel's greatest hits singing along enthusiastically but slightly off-key. This forms an earworm I still cannot shake. We probably ride camels. I strike up the courage to confront my uncle Bob about an oft-repeated family rumor – turns out when he was in high school he really did cut open tennis balls and fill them with weed to evade airport security on the way home from Jamaica. We spend that afternoon drinking tea with Bedouins. My parents finally grant me permission to make a Facebook account as a reward for not annoying my sister for an entire week. Together we all believe in an ancient and holy land, a land of our collective imagination, which translates to a freedom we behold before us. I realize now this was our last family trip before my parents' divorce.

One night in Jordan I smoke for the first time. The waiter places a menu with different *shisha* flavors on the table next to the dessert. My mom decides to order some *hookah*. She chooses the apple flavor after the waiter tells us that's the most popular. I am afraid to inhale because I don't want to get cancer. I have asthma. I bring the plastic tip to my lips. No, first my chin. I hesitate. I barely draw in. The *hookah* doesn't bubble. Nothing happens. I don't remember her words.

"Come on, really suck in, like a straw," she says. Is it peer pressure or is my mother just telling me what to do?

I suck in like a straw. The *hookah* bubbles. I exhale smoothly.

\*\*\*

Every year in April, Heschel's eighth grade class spends two weeks in Israel. It is the culmination of years of teaching, a final celebration for classmates a few weeks before they graduate and go their separate ways. Before Heschel added a high school, the trip carried more weight. This year, most of my class are continuing on together to Heschel High School. I am one of the few starting a new school in the fall. I join my classmates at the airport and say goodbye to my family. Heschel provides a packed itinerary. We spend most of our time zipping around the country on buses. We hike up Masada before sunrise, float in the Dead Sea, hike in the Negev and stay overnight, gazing at the stars. There is a lot of time for prayer.

I spend most of the trip uncomfortably wrestling with nostalgia. Most of my thoughts are spent on a bucket list. Who will I hook-up with? Who will I stay friends with? What do I need to say before I leave? Which bridges will I inevitably burn? (This one is more of an intuitive process, not much planning involved.)

I walk up to the Wall and away from my classmates. I reach out. I hesitate. The stone is cool. My fingers stretch to familiarize with the smooth yet uneven surface. I close my eyes. I am

praying in the place that I have always been told is the holiest place on earth, a place where I have always been told Jews have worshipped for thousands of years, a place that now proves what I have always been told. Even through a Holocaust my people have kept alive the words that I now whisper. For a moment I believe in immortality. God feels alive. My body starts tingling.

Listening back to my conversation with the *Hasidic* Jew who wrapped my *Tefillin*, I had to replay the recording five or six times to differentiate who was speaking. In the moment, I had thought he had read me the prayer and I had recited it back to him. But instead, we pass the words back and forth. At first, he coaxes me on and then as I begin to remember I respond quickly and continue forward as if to show that I know it on my own. To prove to myself that I remember the prayer as well as I did in eighth grade. But I don't. I stumble again and he begins to lead me forward before I jump back in, his first syllable spurring my recollection. I never say the full prayer. Neither does he. We say it collectively.

I listen back to fact check my dialogue and the order of events and to spark memories. I can see the man who wrapped my *Tefillin*. He is wearing a white shirt and frameless glasses with square lenses. He has *payot* and a wispy beard. He can't be much older than me, thirty at most. I think he even has a birthmark on his right cheek near his chin, but I am not certain.



# Stress Test

A minute after I walk off the plane, I'm standing on an escalator. The next thirty minutes are spent winding through Ben-Gurion Airport, traipsing through passageways with glass walls and standing on moving walkways. I place my two large carry-on backpacks on the ground. My back aches. Below is a food court with palm trees, a duty free, advertisements for endless brands of chocolate and perfume, and Swarovski crystals.

I am constantly moving forward but making no noticeable progress, swept up in an inertial limbo with my throng of fellow passengers. Suddenly, we are at the final stretch. There are signs demarcating the various lines for Passport Control. Israeli citizens stay on the left, all others to the right. A long and straight descent. The floor is smooth marble sloped at an angle so severe your momentum rushes you forward. I have dreamed of heelying down this floor. The incline is long enough for two moving walkways, one after the other. Walking downhill on a moving walkway practically deposits you into Border Control's open arms.

The four main lines for passport control are clogged. I jump to a line on the periphery. It's less than half the length of the others but somehow it moves slower than the rest. When it's my turn to step forward I hesitate for a second. I know I have done nothing wrong. I have no intention of doing anything wrong. Still, I feel guilty.

Two men in a glass box wave me forward. One looks over the other's shoulder. They both stare intently at a computer screen. I hand over my passport and one man grabs it and scans it. His face registers a brief look of surprise. A few minutes of silence pass as they scroll through information on the screen. I stand there trying not to look nervous. I tell myself *I am not nervous*. I breathe deeply but not loudly because if they hear me breathing heavily they may think I'm nervous. If they find me nervous, they will think I'm guilty.

They stare intently at the screen in front of them, never at me. One of them steals a glance and we make eye contact. It's awkward, as if we've broken protocol. I try and read their faces but they are emotionless. Why am I sweating? Finally, one of the men turns to me.

"Where are you coming from?"

"Newark."

"What is the number of your flight?"

"Uh hold on." I pull the crumpled boarding pass out of my pocket and struggle to open it. I can feel the men's eyes on the back of my neck. "Flight 90. United Airlines."

When I look up they've both returned to their screens. Typing. Silence.

Finally, "What is the purpose of your trip to Israel?"

"To see friends."

"Where will you be visiting?"

"Jerusalem."

"Where are you staying?"

"1 Avraham Granot and in the Old City."

"Where in the Old City?"

"In an Airbnb in the Christian Quarter."

*Why did I tell them the Christian Quarter? Now they'll know I'm staying with Palestinians.*

"What do you do? What is your profession?"



“I’m a student.”

“Where?”

“Brown University.”

“What do you study?”

“English – nonfiction writing.”

One man shoots me a look of incredulity. “But you are here to make a film no? You’re producing a film here?”

For a split second I’m shaken. *How do they know?* “I’m working on a project for school,” I reply.

“What school?”

“Brown University.”

“Oh.” When he realizes that I’m not working with a university here he almost seems disappointed.

“It’s part of my thesis,” I interject to break the silence.

They go back to looking at the screen. Finally, they hand me back my passport through the plastic slot.

*How do they know I’m working on a film here?*

I don’t normally think about my trips to the airport other than to make sure I’m a couple hours early in case there’s a long line for security. But since I began filming in the Old City that has changed. After our first trip over the summer Adam had some trouble leaving the country. He was placed in a line separate from most other travelers where they made him unpack all of his carry-on belongings. He had to strip his equipment down to the barest parts – unscrewing lenses from camera bodies, even removing batteries and memory cards. Then security officers pulled out a small wand shaped object with a swab on the end and probed every piece of equipment, presumably testing each item for explosive material.

“Occasionally the woman would come back with the wand and reopen my laptop and probe it again,” Adam told me later. “It wasn’t clear why she was doing it. Every time she was doing it I saw the screen and it flashed green. There was no alert detected.”

Once they cleared him and told him to repack all of his belongings, they made him wait. After a few minutes an officer came up to him and told him to unpack everything again. “There’s no organization,” he recalled. “You cannot touch your items until they tell you to. Otherwise they’ll yell at you.”

When Adam asked for an explanation, the officer ignored him. So Adam went through the entire process again, unscrewing lenses and removing all of his batteries and memory cards. As they swabbed each piece a second time, he began to worry that he might miss his flight. He waited for them to clear him or tell him to unpack his belongings again. Really to say anything. The most frustrating part, Adam said, is that, “They keep checking your passport. There’s not any real clear organization. They’re just chatting with each other and taking their sweet time.” After a few minutes, he tried to pick up his equipment. Immediately security yelled at him not to touch it. After that he didn’t move until they cleared him. He estimated the entire process took at least an hour.

I’d never met anyone else who had experienced difficulties at Ben Gurion – especially an American like Adam who is half-Jewish and had entered the country on a Birthright trip. I’d even heard a story from a rabbi at Brown’s Hillel chapter who had overheard American passengers demand that they be allowed to take their shoes off in the security line. They thought

since this was mandatory in America, Israeli security was dangerously inadequate. Adam and I believe that his singling out is related to the fact that he's filmed hundreds of the CCTV cameras in the Old City for our documentary. Folks in the modern-day panopticon might have felt unnerved when a young man stared straight into their eyes and then pointed his camera back at them.

After that first trip, I started asking my friends if they'd had any difficulties in the airport. Most Israelis I spoke with couldn't remember having trouble and didn't even know about the special lines. One airline pilot who worked for the Israeli national airline, *El-Al*, had seen some discrepancies but he justified it as a security measure.

Every Palestinian I ask has at least one airport story. Issa has mentioned a few times offhand how difficult travel is for him. Most of the time the headache is having to go to different consulates and pick up a visa every time he wants to leave the country. His Jordanian travel document necessitates it. But he's also mentioned heading to the airport four or even six hours early because almost all Palestinians are placed in these special security lines. When I asked him about it directly, he told me that the only time he flew El-Al an airline employee escorted him to his seat on the plane and sat behind him the entire flight. Issa asked him why he was doing this and the man apologized to him but told him it was part of protocol. A friend who owns a bookstore in East Jerusalem and became an Israeli citizen this past year said that aside from providing a permanent future for his two little girls in their hometown, the number one perk of his newly granted citizenship was the ability to travel more freely. He thought showing his Israeli passport would speed up his time in the airport, but when he recently traveled to Austria, only a few weeks after pledging allegiance to the Jewish State, he was still placed in the special line.

In his book *War Against the People* Jeff Halper describes Israeli domestic policy as a trend of cumulative deterrence, "the use of limited yet persistent force over time to instill fear and respect."<sup>10</sup> This policy has achieved neither peace nor submission but it has normalized a military presence throughout the land. Adam and I sit down with Jeff for an interview at a small café in Jerusalem. Halper was born in Minnesota and emigrated to Israel in 1969. Aside from writing about surveillance he is the founder of the non-profit Israeli Committee Against Housing Demolitions, an organization that fights to prevent the Israeli government's demolition of Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Halper is in his 70s with a bushy white beard, wire-rimmed glasses and a jolly laugh. He told us sardonically that if we mentioned we "know Jeff Halper" to Israeli police it would be a "kiss of death" and that, "then you'll get a six on your [passport]". The six on the passport Jeff is referring to is part of a rating system Israeli airport security employs to track who they consider a threat. This sticker system decides whether you're in the special security line or the normal one. Every time you exit Israel it is customary to get questioned by the airport attendant. It's the first thing you do after you print out your ticket – before you can check your bag or head over to the security line. They ask you a series of questions and then place a sticker on the back of your passport. My last conversation in Israel before I landed in New York was the following:

"What was the purpose of your visit to Israel?"

"I came here to see friends."

"Who did you come here to visit?"

---

<sup>10</sup> Halper, Jeff. *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification*. Pluto Press, 2015. Page 43.

“Uhhh, Shai Doron, Orly Doron, Ronit Cohen, Shmuel Rabinovich, Sara Rigler, Yisrael Rigler.”

“How long were you here for?”

“Twenty-five days.”

“Where did you stay?”

“Jerusalem.”

“Where in Jerusalem?”

“1 Avraham Granot.”

“Are you Jewish?”

“Yes.”

“How many times have you been to Israel?”

“I think this is my seventh time.”

“Do you belong to a congregation in the U.S.?”

“Yes.”

“What kind?”

“It’s Orthodox. It’s called K.J. Kehilath Jeshrun.”

“And how often do you go there?”

“I normally go for the High Holy Days.”

“And what do you do there?”

“What do you mean? I pray?”

“When do you pray?”

“On Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur.”

“And what do you do on Yom Kippur?”

“You repent.”

“What else do you do?”

“You ask for forgiveness.”

“Oh yes.”

The attendant looks at a computer screen, prints out a sticker and places it on the back of my passport.

“Alright sir, you are free to go.”

Not once does she ever take notes. I don’t even think they care about the information, they just want to see if you’re nervous or not. It’s a stress test. For both of us. How does your view of Palestinians change if you stamp every single one of them a threat?

Every few years the specifics of the sticker system change. At first, non-Jews received a sticker that was a different color from their Jewish counterparts. But in 2007, after public outrage over this blatant profiling, Transportation Minister Shaul Mofaz told the Israeli newspaper *HaAretz* that the color system would be discontinued to avoid “embarrassing” non-Jews.<sup>11</sup> Instead, Israel implemented a numbering system. Some claim the size of the sticker still changes based on whether you’re Jewish or non-Jewish. Jews receive smaller stickers than their non-Jewish counterparts. I peeled back the layers of stickers on my passport to try to see if I could surmise a pattern. I could see six layers of stickers, each from a different trip to Israel. All of them were white and the same size, except for the bottom-most layer, which was yellow. Older stickers had ten digits and newer had eleven. All began with the number one except for my

---

<sup>11</sup> Blumenkrantz, Zohar, and Yoav Stern. “Colored Tags for Arabs’ Luggage at Ben Gurion Airport Discontinued.” *Haaretz*, 7 Aug. 2007. *Haaretz*, <https://www.haaretz.com/1.4959764>.

most recent, a two. Issa and Yazeed showed me their passports and both of their numbers began with six. Adam currently has a five. When you're a level five or six, you are placed in the special line for security.

On a particularly frustrating day in the Old City, two subjects who had previously been enthusiastic about being interviewed abruptly cancelled at the last minute. This had started to become a trend. Yazeed and I would come up with a plan for the next day – to speak with a nurse who runs a local eye clinic or a man whose house lies between two *Yeshivas* that are constantly looking for housing violations so they can evict him and take over his house. When Yazeed and I first speak with people without the camera and discuss the project, they seem excited to share their story. But when the morning of our interview arrives, they get cold feet.

To Yazeed this is the frustrating reality of producing projects in the Old City: people often back out at the last minute out of fear that by speaking their mind they'll draw unwanted attention from the authorities. "You know there are two types of occupation: the military occupation, you know, the hard occupation, and then there's the soft occupation," he tells me. The soft occupation is made up of a variety of factors that all contribute to a sense of unease and fear. The Israeli government has created a system of mistrust stemming from intense surveillance (even checking people's toothbrushes to make sure they're living where they belong, like Sharon mentioned) and convoluted tax and construction laws, which if broken can lead to devastating consequences, like losing your business or your home.

In the Old City, it is extremely difficult to obtain a permit to build or renovate. Over the years, almost every resident has added a small renovation to their house, whether it's an added window or an extra floor on the roof. These are all considered housing violations and could lead to eventual demolition of the house if the Israeli Housing Authority chooses to pursue the case. Because almost every resident is guilty of violating the law, Israel has created a system of selective enforcement that the state can use to punish or intimidate when and where it chooses. Often people receive a notice from the Housing Authority incentivizing them to self-demolish their homes for a lesser fee. "You know where the most housing violations per capita are in all of Israel?" Jeff Halper asks me and Adam during our meeting at the cafe. "In the Jewish Quarter of the Old City." Yet you never hear of a Jewish house getting demolished, because the municipality chooses to ignore the violation or fine them instead of demolishing their house. Any Palestinian in the Old City knows that if he challenges the authorities, they can punish him under the guise of the rule of law. Israel is a democracy. The law is the law.

Adam pointed out that there is a barcode on each of the stickers placed on our passports. They don't need to use a numbering system if they can just scan the barcode and pull up a file with all of your information on it. They don't need to ask you questions, especially ones they already know the answer to. When the man at Passport Control said to me, "But you are here to make a film, no? You're producing a film here?" he wasn't asking a question to gain information. He wanted to send a message. If they've swabbed every belonging in your bag and none of it comes up suspicious, why make you wait and then do it again?

The answer is simply because they can. Intimidation is an effective form of control. They are also saying to you: we know what you are doing. Don't think you can hide from us. And to Adam, maybe think twice about what you do so you will avoid being searched repeatedly.

My sticker tells me I am a two. I am a blip on their radar. For all I know their information could depict me as Zach the nice Jewish boy who has visited the country many times with his family and still takes his grandpa to synagogue for the high holidays where he repents. And now

Zach is making a nice little film in the Old City for his thesis at Brown University. Or I could be a Zach they're warier of, a political activist who spends more and more time with Palestinians and was almost arrested in the Muslim Quarter. Or maybe it's a mixture of the two, the most perplexing of all. One minute I'm the Zach they're wary of walking with Adam, the man with a camera exhibiting abnormal behavior and documenting their surveillance, or I'm chatting with Yazeed, Issa, Mahmoud, Sumud, or any of our other Palestinian friends. The next minute I'm walking into Ateret Kohanim, the largest settlement movement in the world and interviewing the chief Rabbi Shlomo Aviner or Adam is standing right behind the mayor of Jerusalem, the Rabbi of the Western Wall and the Chief Rabbi of Israel filming 100,000 Jews praying before them. Most likely it's none of these approximations. They probably don't give a shit about me, but it seems at the very least from the way they've questioned Adam and told me they know we're filming, they want us to be afraid of them. And it's working.





# Religious Objects

It is very easy for me to believe in the power of a strict belief system. When I was young I saw its effects every day: the way it imbues objects with life and reduces certain people to objects. I grew up in a building on the Upper West Side of Manhattan that was owned by a religious Jewish family. Over half the building was Orthodox and there was a synagogue in our lobby. Elevator rides were shared with men donning *kippot* on their heads and women wearing long black skirts and wigs. Occasionally we exchanged small talk, but most of the time there was only the hum of the elevator. The Orthodox kept to themselves. I was the other. Even to the children my age.

My lobby had a perfectly smooth floor and a long hallway that connected both sides of the building. Ramps on both sides made it the best lobby in all of New York for a kid to heely on. With a good running start and no gunk in my wheels, I could heely from one end of the hallway to the other, the entrance of the synagogue, in one go.

Heelys, for those who don't know, are the greatest invention of all time: sneakers with a wheel in the heel. At any moment a hop start could transform walking into gliding, the mundane into a spiritual experience. Having this power as a child was exhilarating. I couldn't control many things but I could control how I moved.

Since I had school during the week, the majority of my heelying happened over the weekend. On *Shabbat*, for those observing. I don't think I ever wanted to grow *payot*, wear a *kippah* or lose my Heelying privileges on *Shabbat*, but I longed for the Orthodox kids to at least say hi. Instead, we grew up silently alongside one another. The young girls soon began to care for their infant siblings, pushing them out of the elevator in strollers; the boys soon wore black suits and black hats, no longer carrying around wiffle balls and bats. Still, one wore a *kippah* with a Mets logo on it. I often floated past them as they headed into synagogue. I believe they wished they could heely too.

Walking through the Old City exposes the economics of belief. There are many ways to capitalize on religion, especially t-shirts. I've mentioned the throngs of tourists clogging up the narrow streets and you can probably imagine the trinkets that go with them – menorahs, crosses, wreaths, crescents, rosaries and Jewish star necklaces, Qur'ans, Torahs, bibles and a million other things that you buy, cherish and forget about the minute you put them on your shelf back home.

You can't walk five minutes in the Old City without seeing a shirt shop. They aren't clothing stores. They don't sell pants or caps or shoes. Just shirts. Shirts stacked from floor to ceiling, overlapping in a mosaic so only the graphic in the middle of each is displayed. Every shirt shop carries the same designs as the others. As far I can tell there is no secret shirt empire. Each store has an independent owner but an identical product. Best-sellers must be the green Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) shirt and the shirts with Israeli and Palestinian flags on them (each shirt has one or the other, never both on the same). These are always featured front and center. The designs that surround them baffle me.

Most of these shirts bear the brands of Western cultural staples – Coca-Cola, Google, Star Wars, Spiderman and almost all of the American sports teams on both the professional and collegiate levels. All of them are translated phonetically into Hebrew. Next to them are shirts with cringeworthy puns, all in English – the *Holy Rock Café* with the Hard Rock Café logo,

*PikaJew* (the Pokémon Pikachu with a beard, *payot* and black hat), a figure that looks vaguely like Bruce Lee with the caption *Jew Jitsu*, the Jordan Jumpman logo except it's a *Hasidic Jew* dunking a basketball and the slogan underneath is *Just Jew It*.

The list goes on and on before it suddenly veers into the political. On the same stand as the IDF shirt is a shirt with a Google search bar that has the word *Israel* typed in and the suggestion *Did you mean Palestine?* below it. There's Che Guevara with the caption *Palestina Libre* (the rare shirt not in English). The vilest shirt I've discovered says *I got stoned in: A) Gaza, B) Hebron, C) Jerusalem, D) Ramallah, E) Bethlehem and F) Mea Shearim*. Directly above it, is a shirt that simply says *Peace* in large English letters, with Arabic and Hebrew translations in smaller fonts above and below it. The shirts reinforce an insulated culture. They capitalize on providing a slight variation to a known and comfortable environment – a nostalgia for America desperately craved after spending only a few days in a foreign environment.

In October, on my flight home, I sit next to Robin, an airline pilot from Phoenix Arizona. He normally flies from San Francisco to Chengdu or Sydney, but he had an unexpected gap in his schedule. As a devout evangelical Christian, he decided he'd take his daughter to Israel for a few days. They traveled all over – hiking up Masada at sunrise, floating in the Dead Sea and walking through the streets of the Old City. I ask him if he bought any souvenirs. He tells me he and his daughter bought matching rosaries.

He asks me if I am Jewish. I say yes. He tells me how impressed he is by Israeli ingenuity. "Your people have really turned Israel from a desert into a remarkable place, a hub for innovation." He starts to point out the differences between Gaza and Tel Aviv. I cut him off because that comparison is ridiculous and he interjects, "Oh cut it out with that liberal woke snowflake bullshit." We sit in silence for a few moments before I decide I'll treat our conversation like an interview.

I scroll through photos from the past week on my phone looking for the painting I saw hanging outside a gift shop in the Jewish Quarter. It surprised me more than any shirt. The painting is mixed media - a black and white photograph of the Western Wall pavilion printed on canvas with gold paint and glitter slathered over the Wall. It takes a minute to realize the garish highlights distract from a stronger message. The Golden Dome of the Rock, which sits only a few hundred feet behind the wall and normally looms in the background of every photograph taken from this angle, has been erased from the frame.

Robin and I share an armrest and I tap his arm. I show him the painting and ask his opinion. "Beautiful," he answers reflexively.

"You see there's no Dome in the background?" I press him.

"Yeah, I like it better without it," he replies. He turns in his seat and asks nonchalantly, "Do you think it should be there?"

"I've never even thought of that question before," I answer truthfully. "I mean it's there and it's not going anywhere. I think it's beautiful –"

"Yeah but isn't that where the Temple is supposed to be built? I would think you of all people wouldn't want a Dome there."

Both Jews and Muslims find the Temple Mount, the area where the Dome of the Rock and Al-Aqsa mosque reside, holy for different reasons. Muslims believe this is where Muhammad ascended and Jews believe this is where the great temple, the *Beit HaMikdash*, once stood. This shared reverence is the reason the Old City lies at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The Second Intifada is commonly referred to as the Al-Aqsa Intifada because the

violence started after former Israeli prime minister Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount in September 2000.

My dream shot is to fly a drone over the Temple Mount on the day Ramadan and the Jewish holiday, Tisha B'Av, overlap. You'd be able to look down on close to half a million people praying simultaneously, only divided by the Western Wall. But a drone flying on such a sensitive occasion could lead to a Third Intifada.

Instead, I settle on filming Selichot – a ritual when 100,000 Jews gather at the Western Wall to pray for forgiveness the night before Yom Kippur begins. After a fair amount of phone calls and a lot of luck, I found out the Rabbi of the Western Wall, Shmuel Rabinovich, hosts a small private viewing party for friends and family from the roof of his office which overlooks the crowd. We both get press passes so Adam stands directly behind the famous cantor, Rabbi Moshe Habusha, as he leads the prayers. I am inside Rabbi Rabinovich's office, pointing a microphone out of his window to record from a wider vantage point. We are both positioned perfectly to capture the shot we've fantasized for weeks. Before me is the largest crowd I have ever seen. They are packed shoulder to shoulder, a sea of white *kippot* that stretches from the base of the Wall to the rooftops of the *Yeshivas* in the Jewish Quarter.

Around midnight Habusha begins the prayer. His voice pierces through the night, slightly distorted by the loudspeakers. He dances from octave to octave with supreme control. If I didn't understand Hebrew, it would sound almost identical to the *Muezzin's* call to prayer.

Most Hebrew prayer is led by a cantor and repeated by the congregation. The first time the crowd responds I forget for a moment that I am documenting. The hairs on the back of my neck stand and my body grows warm as the shared energy courses through me. I look down at the audio recorder and see that it's flashing red – the collective response is much louder than Habusha, even with the aid of the loudspeakers, and my levels have peaked, ruining the audio. I struggle to adjust the levels in time with the responses because I am not familiar with any of these prayers - *Selichot* is a Sephardic ritual and Heschel taught me only Ashkenazi customs. But eventually I find a rhythm. I keep one headphone on and one off so I can enjoy the natural environment while monitoring the recording.

After a few minutes I put the other headphone back on to double check the audio quality. I immediately realize that the recorder is picking up sounds my ears hadn't noticed – sounds coming from inside the office. I turn to see that a group of young men have raided the Rabbi's fridge and pantry and are eating and drinking noisily behind me. I don't want to turn to them and say something because then the recording will certainly be ruined. But now, the only sounds I can focus on are their laughter and loud conversation. I hear a crash and instinctively whip my body around, pointing the mic directly at them. A couple of the plaques and awards the Rabbi proudly displays on his windowsill lie shattered on the floor. The men back away from the window and resume their conversation on the Rabbi's couch. No one looks for a broom. One man with a diamond earring sits in the Rabbi's leather chair behind his desk. They are all wearing *kippot*. One holds a prayer book.







# Ginger Curls

My grandparents keep a kosher household. They have different plates for meat and dairy that are washed separately. I remember the first time I unknowingly took parmesan out of their fridge and sprinkled it on spaghetti Bolognese, just like I do back home. The only other time my grandfather yelled at me was when I accidentally turned on his bidet at such high pressure that the water hit the ceiling and broke a lightbulb.

Over the years their tolerance has grown as their expectations have waned. Now, sometimes I'll show up to dinner with a paper bag from Chipotle and a burrito filled with chicken, rice, beans, guacamole, cheese and sour cream snugly wrapped in tinfoil. Occasionally my grandfather still winces or makes a snide comment. Whenever I've told him about trying lobster, or shrimp, or pork, he always says with a hint of disgust something along the lines of, "You really like that *chazerai*?" Then he laughs, both to ease the tension from his clear distaste and maybe so that he can stomach the fact that I'll never be the type of Jew he wants me to be.

My Judaism has always been centered in community rather than strict adherence to specific *mitzvot* – the hundreds of religious commandments that God requires Jews to obey. Of course, certain religious customs must be observed if I want to be welcomed by Orthodox Jewish communities. This only gets difficult on the High Holy Days, when I attend synagogue with my grandfather. It is here that I must find creative ways to practice my Judaism while respecting his. I enjoy the strict religious services because it's the only time of the year that I get to be alone with him. He can no longer walk all the way to synagogue from his apartment so we take a cab there. We used to get out a couple blocks away so no one would see we'd broken *Halakhic* law. Now that he's 93 the cab drops him off right outside the entrance. No one says a word; they're just happy he still shows up.

My favorite Jewish custom occurs the moment we step out of the cab. He clutches my hand and we slowly walk together, my footsteps matching his, until we can finally reach our seats near the front, the same seats his great grandfather sat in and every generation of Gottesman has sat in ever since. The service begins and I always briefly remember praying every morning at Heschel. Back then prayer seemed like just another class, often an annoying one. Some days I refused to sing, other days I sang with great fervor. But always I was listening to my friends, my enemies, my crushes and my exes all singing together. It's been 11 years since Heschel and the words still have not left me, thank God. Right as we sit down my grandfather always turns to me as we begin to sing together, his eyes glistening with pride.

2019 is the first year I haven't spent the High Holy Days with him because I am in Jerusalem filming with Adam. The day after we film *Selichot* at the Wall, Adam and I decide to attend synagogue for Yom Kippur. We are invited to a small, private minyan at the Inbal Hotel. We step into the makeshift synagogue in the hotel lobby and pick up prayer books. The majority in attendance are religious Jews from North America visiting Israel. The rest are *Hasidic* Israelis who follow the Lithuanian Jewish tradition. Any word with a *t* is substituted with an *s* – *Shabbat* becomes *Shabbas* – and most vowels are twisted to sound like 'oy'.

I am apprehensive because these are not the traditions I am used to. But there are some similarities. The service is just as strict as back home – the women and men are separated by a veil and the ark holding the Torah is only on the men's side with the cantor and the rabbi. Without my grandpa sitting next to me, I realize how uncomfortable this makes me. At least at

our synagogue back home the women are seated above the men in a mezzanine. Here they cannot even see the Torah or the Rabbi. I almost tap Adam and tell him we should leave. But there are too many eyes looking at us – we aren't even wearing suits because we forgot to pack them for the trip.

Right before the service begins one of the North American Jews comes up to us. Instead of asking what we're doing here, as I expected, he asks me if I am a Kohen – a descendant of the holiest tribe in the twelve tribes of Israel. The Kohens were the priests, the only Jews allowed to enter the *Beit HaMikdash*, and are the only ones who can sing a special prayer on the High Holy Days. Shamefully I admit to him that I am. He smiles and walks away to ask any other strangers if they are a Kohen. I look down at my wrinkled collared shirt tucked into my jeans and my leather boots caked in dirt, the only shoes I brought on the trip.

The service begins with a fantastic surprise. Instead of a single cantor, a group of three Hasidic men draped in *Tallit* form a barbershop quartet. The fourth member is a little boy with bright red *payot*. In the rare moments when a single cantor is required, the grown men go silent and the little boy leads us on his own. He sings in an angelic register, his voice straining to reach notes only prepubescence allows him. His innocence reverberates throughout the room. I repeat his melody with a passion I haven't realized has been absent since I was a child. Adam was raised secular and doesn't know any of the words, but he soon picks up the melodies and hums along. I realize how much I've missed praying with my peers.

When it comes time for the *Amidah*, one of the holiest prayers in Judaism which requires one to look inward and pray silently, I complete the entirety of the lengthy prayer for the first time in years – even though it means standing far longer than most others as the congregation respectfully waits in silence.

The time comes to open the ark and take out the Torah for the blessing only the Kohens can perform. In our synagogue back home, my grandpa and I take off our shoes, wash our hands and go up to the bima with the many other Kohanim in the congregation. Today the man who had initially asked me if I was a Kohen lets me know that I am one of only two in the room. My presence is not just tolerated but necessary, so I follow him to stand and face the congregation. The man takes out the Torah and I drape the *Tallis* over my head. Everyone is standing and staring at me. I shift nervously, the weight of the Torah pressing all the way down to my boots. I make eye contact with our leader and his ginger curls. He sings a line and I repeat alone as is the custom. We do this three times. As we're singing to each other I think of the Jew I could've been. And just as quickly it's over. The little boy sings another verse and the quartet harmonizes with him. I take off my *Tallis* and rejoin the group. Still there are times when the quartet sweeps me away and I reflexively sing at the top of my lungs. Always, I contribute what I can, as the Jew that I am – one who may not own a suit but still discovers vitality in the liminal space between tradition and self-expression.

\*\*\*

The last time I spoke to Rachel, my fifth-grade teacher, was when I was thirteen. She helped me prepare my *D'var Torah* for my Bar Mitzvah. We studied Torah together for a year or so. After I write *Projected Slides*, I message her on Facebook and we schedule a phone call.

“Hello, Rachel?”

“Hey Zach! It's good to hear from you.”

We talk for an hour and a half. She left Heschel a year after I was in her class. Now she teaches Hebrew Studies at a religious day school in Riverdale in the Bronx. She has a nine-year-old son named Akivah. I quickly learn that she definitely would have said something about Gilad Shalit, but she doesn't remember exactly what it was.

"Ay, that's terrible, right?" she asks me. I wonder if she wants me to reassure her that it isn't.

I ask her about my theory that Heschel taught us more about cultural Judaism in an effort to connect us to Israel rather than the traditional aspects of Judaism, such as the Messiah, which I only really started to learn about this year since I began talking with an Orthodox rabbi at Brown's Hillel once a week. She agrees with me but makes it clear that she can only comment on the fifth-grade curriculum.

"I only knew fifth grade. But I knew fifth grade well."

She mentions that we never learned much about Israeli history, even in the books we read that were historical novels. She doesn't remember ever mentioning Palestinians to us. She tells me about a series in particular called *Minheret Hazman*.

"Kind of like the Magic Treehouse for Israeli kids. It was Israeli history as early as Herzl. It was about a couple kids who found this tunnel. They go into the tunnel whenever they feel angry at the world or lonely or want to get away. The tunnel starts to rumble and it takes them to another era."

The kids don't know which era until they're already in the middle of the story. The book we read was called *Yerushalayim BaMatzor*, Jerusalem in siege. "It doesn't talk about the politics at all," Rachel explains. "It just talks about two kids who get to Jerusalem when it's under siege. It mentions HaAravim (the Arabs) but there's no [Arab] people."

We also read a book about the early Zionist Joseph Trumpeldor entitled *Tov LaMut LeAd Artzenu* – It's Good to Die For Your Country.

Finally, I ask Rachel the question I've been thinking about this whole phone call, really since I met Sharon.

"Did they indoctrinate us?"

"Indoctrinate you to what?" Rachel pauses. "Indoctrinate you to love Israel?" Again another pause. I can tell she hasn't thought about the question before. "Indoctrinate you to see Israel in a certain way? Any private school, any religious school, any school with an agenda is in a way indoctrinating you to their value system and belief system." She says this last part more as a question than a definitive statement.

"If you mean they encouraged you and surrounded you with things and made it almost impossible for a little kid to not love Israel because that's what they surrounded you with? Then yes, it's indoctrinating you to love Israel. Then yes they did that." Again, she pauses.

"Did they indoctrinate you to believe one story? That gets a little more complicated... I'll tell you for sure what I didn't hear – you didn't hear things like, 'Oh yeah you should bomb them.' I didn't hear anyone encouraging any hatred. I can't imagine any of that happening at Heschel because it's built on the notion of social justice and equality. Did they not teach the fact that there are these huge disparities and inequalities? Yeah, in the lower school they didn't teach that. I'm not sure they should teach that."



# Truth(s)

Adam and I arrive in the Old City just before Christmas. This is our last time here for the foreseeable future. We're here for a month – until late January of 2020. Then Adam must return to Los Angeles and I to Brown. It isn't until we're standing outside the entrance to the new home we're renting, our luggage at our feet, that we realize that the house is only about 100 feet away from Issa's. The apartment is perfect – two bedrooms and our own rooftop view of the Old City skyline with the Dome of the Rock and the Mount of Olives in the background.

Adam and I quickly get into a routine. Every morning we start our day with two dates and a cup of coffee, just like Issa, and on the days we're especially tired, even a cigarette, too. Then we head to Ikermevi, a hole-in-the-wall hummus shop across the street from the Damascus Gate. The hummus here is our favorite. It has lots of lemon and garlic, as is the Palestinian tradition, and a fair dollop of olive oil from Nablus. It isn't too smooth or too chunky. The falafel isn't great but it does the trick, and the pita is served on a piece of tissue paper instead of a plate. Recently, Adam decided to replace the pita with a sesame seed *bagele*, the long ovular bread iconic within the Old City, baked fresh each morning at the bakery around the corner from our apartment.

Then we meet up with Yazeed, or walk the narrow streets from quarter to quarter on our own, focusing on one story and then another. Christians, Jews, Muslims, Israelis and Palestinians welcome us in to record their lives. We film them in their shops, selling electronics or jewelry, or in their community centers, leading after-school programs. A *Muezzin* invites us into his mosque and sings us a personal call to prayer. An Orthodox Jew sits in his room, a thin wall separating him from his parents, and tells us when he first realized he was gay. Adam and I seem to work together as one entity; I barely need to turn my head and he points the camera where I'm looking. We've reached a point where sometimes I don't even have to ask him to start filming because we both can sense the feeling of comfort that signals that our subject is ready to begin.

When someone agrees to be filmed, they are letting Adam and I know that they have faith in us. They believe that we will listen to them, that we will respect them, and ultimately, since I am the director, they believe that I will represent them truthfully. This is a complicated faith because there are many truths. No one can lay claim to a single one. Not even if someone makes a documentary – a film that lives within a genre from which we expect the unvarnished truth but has a long history of manipulating real events.

Cultivating this faith is different with each person. Sometimes it's as simple as the nod of a head and eye contact, other times it can require spending months with someone, and even then, like with Issa, that type of connection may never get established. When I first began filming, I expected that this trust would come naturally as both my subjects and I got used to the camera. I felt like every moment with Issa was something I needed to capture because I was afraid it would never happen again. I was too focused on capturing the moment to realize that my actions were often ruining it. Perched on a rooftop above the Damascus Market or walking through the Western Wall pavilion, I worried that if the people around me discovered I was recording at all, then those moments would vanish as well. I've learned that the camera is a sensitive instrument. It can sense guilt and indiscretion just as easily as intimacy and love. All of these energies are reflected in the footage.



Interviewing is my favorite part of filmmaking. It gives me the opportunity to sit down with someone, eye to eye, and share stories, often for hours. My purpose in an interview is to listen and to engage – to make sure the person in front of me feels heard. I often forget about the camera during these moments; my focus shifts entirely to this other person. But the camera still remains, held by Adam slightly behind me, or even resting between my hands. I look someone in the eye and they look back at me. Yet sometimes we can't help but notice the lens looking as well. It is a reminder of my responsibility. Once the interview is over, these intimate moments are no longer only between filmmaker and subject. The camera offers the potential for this time to be shaped into a variety of stories. I have learned that if this intimacy is mishandled, it can destroy relationships.

It is easy for me to imagine a hauntingly beautiful film about Issa's devotion to his mother, Nahil. I've done so many times. The film consists of only the footage shot over the summer. It tells the story of a man in the last chapter of his life, a little past his prime but wise and energetic, with plenty of life ahead of him. He is an eccentric. A multi-talented artist whose work has taken him all around the world. Freedom has always been his main priority and he has worked hard to never simply be seen as a Palestinian or a Jerusalemite. Instead, he maintains the image of a musician, a painter, and a filmmaker. He is a sensitive man in touch with his surroundings. A man who loves to garden. Although he was born in a city at the heart of an ancient conflict, he has found the means to not let that define him when all the powers and people around him are intent on defining everyone as one thing or another. When he walks down the street, he emanates an inner peace that translates into charisma – his shoulders swaying, head held high, long hair flowing, quick to smile – everyone can't help but be drawn to him. Of course, the camera loves him too.

"I'm stuck," he tells me last summer. For the last eight years he has lived in the house he was born in, taking care of his aging mother who suffers from Alzheimer's. Only a day ago he started feeding her by hand. She spends her time moving back and forth between her bed and a chair in the living room covered by a plastic sheet in case of accidents. The walker squeaks as she drags it across the floor. There is a rhythm to her routine that reveals her resilience. Sometimes she'll spend the day re-reading the same five pages of a book, or counting a deck of cards over and over again. The television perpetually drones on in the background.

He chain smokes cigarettes and sporadically wears the same clothes for a few days at a time because he's too busy washing and cleaning her soiled dresses. He cooks all her meals but hardly eats. He hasn't touched an instrument in months. A massive painting of the Temple Mount with grey scaffolding snaking around the golden Dome of the Rock hangs from his studio, almost finished.

Sometimes he squirms beneath the camera's gaze. Other times he'll shower, put on a fresh shirt, sit up straight and recount an old story from the days he worked at *60 Minutes* or played the upright bass in the popular Palestinian band *Sabreen*. There are times when I record his mother and he gets nervous and mad. "I don't film her anymore because she's not herself now," he tells me. "It's not who she is. This is not who my mother is." When he massages her feet with tea tree oil, he smiles at her and winks. There are times when she smiles and winks back. This is a story of slowly sacrificing one's life so that someone you love may have a peaceful ending.

If I made this film, it would irrevocably harm my relationship with Issa. It's not the story he wants told. Writing about it is one thing. Seeing it is another — a more visceral confrontation

between conflicting truths. No one understands the power of visuals better than Issa. He doesn't want his mother preserved this way. He does not want himself preserved this way.

"I wasn't myself this summer," Issa tells me in October. "I was depressed. The person you filmed was not me." This person may not be him. It is not the Issa I remember. But it is the Issa I recorded. He revealed a part of himself that isn't the proud, confident man I first saw, the man I idolized. This brought us closer. I no longer look up to him as a heroic figure and he has realized that he can confide in me, that we can support each other.

I still believe that there is a great film to be made about Issa, but it is not the one I originally imagined and it is not worth the cost of sacrificing our relationship. This was a difficult realization to come to. I love Issa more than any project I'll ever make. Still, my mind was set on telling his story. I had spent months planning and preparing. I hadn't thought about the possibility that a story could not be told. I thought that Issa's mentorship and experience as a filmmaker would mean that he would understand and be helpful. And he was, until the camera began recording. Maybe Issa understood too well. Maybe he could see the film as well as I could and he did not want to be memorialized in that way. He ultimately chose not to be represented, even if it meant disappointing me, which was not easy for him. There are some conversations that are still too difficult for me to type.

So Adam and I were faced with a choice – pursue a new project or pack up our equipment and treat the last two weeks of our trip as a vacation. We decided that we wanted to continue learning about the people living in the Old City even if that meant doing so without Issa. Looking back, his refusal to be filmed was a gift because it forced us to find our own story. This pursuit led us to discover our own community as well.

\*\*\*

On one of my last nights in the Old City, I sit on Issa's couch and we drink Louisa tea. A few times a week, mostly later in the night after Adam and I finish offloading our footage from the day, I stop by Issa's. Sometimes it's with Adam, or Issa's friends, Nasser and Jack, will be there. Other nights, it's just us. We play music together or watch short films. Sometimes we just sit and watch the news, exhausted and half asleep, but happy to chill out together. The only time I ever bring a camera over is when he looks through photos I've taken and gives me feedback. My favorite nights are when we have a smoke and share stories. Tonight is one of those nights.

One afternoon in January I invite Sharon over for dinner. She hasn't been to our new house yet and Adam and I are excited to show it to her. As the sun sets, I begin to get nervous. This isn't my place. I barely know the neighbors. Freda, the kind-hearted old woman who lives below us baked us delicious spinach pies as a welcoming gift. She always smiles at us in the mornings and wishes us good day. In the evenings, she asks us how our project is going. We live in a Palestinian Christian neighborhood that already has a few Israeli settlements on the block. Adam and I are two strangers with film equipment. If Freda hears me speaking Hebrew with Sharon as we climb the stairs to my apartment, what will she think?

For the most part I have kept my friendships with Israelis and Palestinians separate. I want to avoid misunderstandings or discomfort. And quite honestly, I have been afraid to reconcile the different parts of myself I present to these different communities. I would love to bring Yazeed to a shabbat dinner at my friends Shai and Orly's house. I know he would be sweet and charming and funny. He's smart and may know many of the answers to the weekly 20

questions trivia game they play after dinner. On Issa's second visit to New York, he came to our shabbat dinner at my grandparents'. My grandpa was apprehensive about a Palestinian coming over for dinner but he ended up having a nice, albeit brief, conversation with Issa. But Yazeed is not Issa. I fear Yazeed may get uncomfortable being the only Palestinian in an Israeli household, sharing a table with Israelis who support a Jewish state when he does not. He may even be embarrassed when we all sing *Shalom Aleichem* and he doesn't know the words. Dinner would be awkward for me too. My own discomfort and fear would close me off to both him and to Shai and Orly.

Israel and Palestine have combined into one larger place for me. I have had the privilege of befriending people who have helped me see past the prejudices I was raised to believe. Now that I have created a connection on my own terms, instead of following one that was fed to me in school, I feel much more invested in this shared land. And my faith in this combined Israel and Palestine is deeper and more complicated.

Israel no longer holds the idealistic hopes it once did. It is not a miracle. It is not a beacon of democracy in the Middle East. It is not even a Jewish State. It is a place filled with various groups of people where Jews, who are the majority, are granted special privileges. Israel is still a place where many beautiful memories were made with my family. It is still a place my grandfather loves passionately. And there are parts of Israel that I love as well. I love my friends who live there. I admire their care and compassion for one another, their fervent belief in *Tikkun Olam* – repair of the world. But the problem with most Israelis is that they don't see the other. They either don't take the time to, or pretend they don't see at all. Sharon told me, the final stage of denial is to come to terms with the truth but choose not to believe it because the problem the truth reveals seems impossible to fix. It's easier to pretend the truth doesn't exist. But it does and it's not going anywhere.

Because of Issa and the exploration of the Old City that he indirectly set me on, I can't unsee people. Especially the Palestinians who are my friends. I have sat with them and heard their stories. And after all the stories I have listened to, none is more legitimate than the other.

Even though Sharon has volunteered at the Wadi-Hilweh community center in Silwan, even though she was the one who first led me on a tour of the Old City and explained to me what the occupation was, even though she is not in denial, my neighbors don't know this. She is still an Israeli who speaks Hebrew, that is all they will know as they hear her walking into the apartment I am merely renting.

Sharon texts me to let me know she's outside the New Gate, the entrance to the Old City closest to our house. She knows her way through the Old City, she could make it to our house on her own, but still she wants me to pick her up anyway. When I meet her at the New Gate, I ask her why she wanted to meet here. It's dark out, she replies.

On a late night in 2017 when I was visiting Israel with my family, I walked back from the bars in West Jerusalem alone and tipsy. I can't remember if this night was before or after my tour of the Old City and Silwan. As I turned from Jaffa Street toward Shlomo ha-Melekh Street, I heard a few young men a couple blocks behind me. They were laughing and pushing each other. I couldn't make out the language they were speaking until they were much closer. By the time I realized it was Arabic they had already thrown two glass bottles. One sailed past my head, the other shattered on the ground close enough that a glass shard nicked my leg. I could feel they were yelling at me but I couldn't understand what they were saying. I ran the rest of the way to the hotel. They didn't run after me; they only laughed.

As Sharon and I walk back to my house, I realize that in my last few months in the Old City I have become more familiar with its twists and turns than she is.

At first we walk right by the entrance to my house. I turn back and register that it is my door the old woman is slumped against. Sharon and I move quickly after we realize she can barely hang onto the handle to steady herself. We instinctively lock arms with her as she whispers to us, “Help me, I’m sick. Help me, I’m sick.”

We slowly half-carry half-walk her forward. She shakes and every step causes her to wince and moan. We both try to find out where she lives. I ask her in English and Sharon asks in broken Arabic and then Hebrew. The old woman opens her mouth to speak but can only produce a rasping wheeze. She nods her head toward a side street a little ways down from my door. I know that two settlers live at the end of this road.

After a few precarious minutes, all three of us slowly form a rhythm. We reach the hallway that leads to her door. It is pitch black. At her front door, we knock. No one answers. I start to get nervous. What’s waiting in the darkness? I open the door. I flip a light switch and nothing happens. The power’s out. I pull a lighter out of my pocket that’s probably Issa’s and spark it. The flickering light reveals a clean but empty apartment. Sharon and I tentatively step inside. We help the old woman into her bed and tuck her in. I light a candle that’s laying on a table nearby. It’s next to a pack of Marlboro reds. Sharon goes to the kitchen and brings her water.

After a few minutes the old woman seems to be recovering. “God bless you, I’m sorry.” she tells us. “I’m sorry God, bless you,” she repeats. Sharon asks her if there’s anyone she’s living with but the old woman doesn’t understand. “I’m sick. I’m sick,” she tells us before lapsing into Arabic.

I tell Sharon to stay with the old woman while I find a neighbor who knows her. As I leave, I can hear the old woman muttering faintly.

“God bless the sun,” she says into the complete darkness. As I walk out the door, I realize she’s said, “God bless the Son.” I flag down the first man who walks towards me. I explain the situation to him and he follows me. I bring him back with apprehension. I know he’ll realize Sharon is Israeli. It’s difficult for me to come to terms with the fact that I feel safe walking through any part of the Old City at any hour on my own but the minute I’m with an Israeli I immediately begin to worry.

When we reach the house, the man seems relieved. He knows the old woman and her son, who normally lives with her. After a brief conversation with the old woman in Arabic, he tells us that the power went out a couple hours ago and the old woman woke up from her nap to a dark and empty house. He thanks us for our help and lets us know he’ll stay with her until the son comes home. After dinner, Sharon and I go to check on the old woman. The power in the hallway has returned so we don’t knock on the door – we don’t want to disturb her.

\*\*\*

A couple days later Adam and I turn onto our block and see a familiar face – a little boy who goes to school around the corner and lives down the road. He’s part of a group of kids who live in the neighborhood and play soccer on our street. Lately, since it’s the middle of the winter, the kids have spent most of their time in a nearby internet cafe playing *Fortnite*.

I first met this boy and his friends over the summer. I could tell right away he was a natural leader. All the boys sat on a ledge looking up at him as he stood in front of them playing a recorder. It was a perfect photo so I asked him if I could take a picture. "No facebook he told me, no facebook." I pointed to the camera, not my phone, and still he shook his head. So I put the camera away and we all played in the street for a while. As I turned to leave he called me and pointed at my camera. All the boys sat down with him on the ledge and recreated the photo for me. He even played the recorder.

I first saw the boy this winter a week or so ago. I went up to him to say hi. I had a camera around my neck but not in my hands. At first he didn't respond. "Do you remember me?" I asked. I pointed to my camera. "From the summer? I was filming?" He shot me a look of recognition.

"Whatsup? Whatsup?" he said to me energetically as he moved toward me. In a flash he swung his arm at my face, not close enough to be in range of seriously hitting me, just to make me flinch.

I stood still and asked him, "What are you doing?"

He didn't respond and swung again. I stood my ground. For some reason my gut told me that no matter what he did next I couldn't show him any emotion. Part of me felt like an older brother who knows the only way to get his younger sibling to stop annoying him is to not respond at all. But I also was shocked. Why did he want to scare me?

Suddenly the boy yelled, "Go! Go! Go!"

Now as Adam and I walk down the block toward him, we see the boy has a gun in his hand. There's no orange plastic tip marking the gun as a toy but neither of us think it's real. I look at Adam and we both turn around and walk around the corner and out of range. Adam presses record and we turn around and back down our street. Now the boy's back is turned to us. We stand there watching him for a few seconds. He is wearing a winter coat with fur lining the hood. He starts walking down the block, away from us, gun swinging from his left hand. He reaches the sidestreet the old woman lives on, turns around and looks at us.

Adam says, "Salaam." The boy cocks the gun and begins firing. One of the pellets hits Adam in the foot. We move forward towards the boy. Adam points the camera towards the ground but doesn't hit stop.

\*\*\*

I sit with Issa on his couch. We both drink Louisa tea. I tell him abbreviated versions of both of these stories.

"And Adam and I, of course, like we've lived here now for almost a month. We just kept walking forward to him to say, 'hi, how are you?' But as we got closer, he would shoot more and more."

"I know the boy," Issa tells me. "I know the boy. I know the boy."

"He's probably 10 or 11," I reply.

"Yes, his father is a drug addict."

"His father came out of the house and told us to be careful," I tell him. "So we just walked away and turned the corner. And like I've seen him when he's a good kid, when he's a nice kid. He's like a natural leader of his friends."

"Yes, exactly," Issa replies excitedly. He's sure it's the same boy.



“It’s weird that only six months ago since I last saw him, and I probably saw him in October too, but six months since I last shot with him, he’s now doing this. There are a lot of young boys with toy guns in the streets. And it’s not just here. But today I saw a three year old with a toy gun.”

“Yeah yeah it’s very popular,” Issa says wistfully. “Every feast. Boys, what do they want? Guns.”

“It’s just tough because you live on this street,” I catch myself and make the correction. “Or, you live on this street and I have stayed on this street for a month and now school is back and you see all the little kids coming at eight and leaving at one. And they’re so joyful and innocent. Sometimes you see the mother walking behind them kind of slow and tired and they’re just running along and talking to each other and so hopeful, like any kids. At what point do you get interested in guns and why?”

The same day that the boy shoots us with the pellet gun, Adam and I go to a *Shabbat* dinner in West Jerusalem. We walk home around 10 or 11 o’clock. When we get to our street, we notice that the streetlights are out. Must be a power outage. We walk up our street, the same street where we saw the boy, but coming from the opposite direction. Two silhouettes walk toward us. One of them has an M-16 hanging across his back. For a moment you can only see the M-16 swinging in the darkness. Both Adam and I are wearing hoods. For a moment I am worried.

“But of course it’s an Israeli cop,” I tell Issa. “That’s the first thought that came into my mind. When I was 19, first of all I would never be walking alone while visiting you, but I would also think it was a terrorist.” Issa starts laughing. “But living here now I know it’s an Israeli cop – and it’s even worse.” At the punchline, we both lose it.

“That’s a nice one,” he tells me when we’ve caught our breath.

After a few more cups of tea and another smoke, it’s time for me to go. Adam and I still have almost a week left to film. I stand up and so does Issa. He walks me to the door and pulls me into an embrace. I hug him tightly. The hug lasts longer than usual. I think about how once this week is over I don’t know the next time I’ll see Issa again. We pull apart. He holds my cheek and looks me in the eyes. “I love you habibi,” he says.

“I love you too,” I reply.

“I’m proud of you.” He smiles and kisses me on both cheeks and then I walk out the door.

# Acknowledgements

This project was a labor of love. There are so many people who I must thank. Everyone who has read this far knows that I like to work right up until the last minute. You also know that I prefer to thank people individually and privately rather than detailing all of the intimate ways you've helped my work, and more importantly, my life. Still, I would like to put every person's name on the page. I hope you know that I will always think of you when I think of this thesis and the entire painstaking but ultimately liberating process.

I would like to thank my friends, my family, especially my first and second readers Kate Schapira and Kevin Quashie, whose wisdom, patience and care taught me more than I can put into words, ironically enough. Thank you to my *habibis* Issa Freij and Adam Hersko-Ronatas without whom none of this could have happened. Thank you for the no-nonsense support and encouragement from Catherine Imbriglio and Michael Stewart since day one. I am so grateful for the kindness and trust Yazeed Abu-Khdeir and Sharon Casper both offered me the minute I met them. My conversations with Moshe Moskowitz and Eli Makovetsky were vital week in and week out. They always brought me peace, joy, and a deeper understanding of both friendship and Judaism. Thank you to Kenny Batu of *YEAIKNOW* Studio for creating a beautiful cover.

Thank you to my second family who make me feel at home when I'm in Israel: Shai, Orly, Ira, Illy, Tal and even Sonya Doron. Thank you to my friends in Israel, Palestine and around the world: Mahmoud Muna, RaMell Ross, Ronit Cohen, Moti Peled, David and Dorothy Harman, Sara Yocheved Rigler, Yisrael Rigler, Jeff Halper, Daniel Seidemann, Frederic Brenner, Avner Goren, Zeev Veledniger, Carol DeBoer-Langworthy, William Salhab, Tareq Salhab, Mohamed Salhab, Jamil Freij, Lucia D'Anna-Freij, Leen Freij, Nahil Freij, Waheeb Hijazi, Waseem Hijazi, Emad Abu Khidijeh, Jack Persekian, Nasser Attah, Apo Sahagian, Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovich, Joumana Emil-Abboud, Rachel Kirschbaum, Omer Bartov, Raya Hallak, Riman Baraket, Betsy Reed, Nick Huston, Neomi Agami, Nivi Margolin, Akos Ronatas, Judit Hersko, Stefanie Mekler, Luke Van Duun, Mariel Ostrower, Ness and the entire team at Sam Spiegel Film School, and my fellow classmates writing nonfiction honors theses at Brown University.

And of course thank you to my family. To my mother Alice who I look up to every day for her creativity, work ethic, generosity and kindness – without which Issa would've never stayed at our house in the first place. To my grandparents Ruth and Sandy whose love and support are the sun and moon in my life. They have provided such an amazing example of what a positive and ethical Judaism can be. Every Friday night they bring our family together. They are the heart and soul of the Gottesman-Zuckerman clan. Thank you to my beautiful and kind sisters Eleanor and Jessica who I love immensely. And thank you to my cousin Ben who I will always admire. Your wisdom, patience and knowledge has been invaluable.

Finally, I would like to thank my father who this book is dedicated to. I am so lucky to be your son. You have supported my writing for as long as I can remember. Thank you for being my editor for all my work. Your wit, humor, kindness, sensitivity and patience have helped me find my way in this world. I love nothing more than coming home and talking with you about what you've read that day.

## Works Consulted

- Alatout, Samer. "Walls as Technologies of Government: The Double Construction of Geographies of Peace and Conflict in Israeli Politics, 2002–Present." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, vol. 99, no. 5, Routledge, Oct. 2009, pp. 956–68. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, doi:10.1080/00045600903260473.
- Als, Hilton. *The Women*. Macmillan, 1996.
- Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son*. Beacon Press, 1984.
- Carr, David. *The Night of the Gun: A Reporter Investigates the Darkest Story of His Life. His Own*. Simon and Schuster, 2008.
- Cohen, Hillel. *The Rise and Fall of Arab Jerusalem: Palestinian Politics and the City Since 1967*. Routledge, 2013.
- Cole, Teju. *Blind Spot*. Faber & Faber, 2017.
- Cole, Teju. *Known and Strange Things: Essays*. Random House, 2016.
- Dumper, Michael. *Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City*. Columbia University Press, 2014.
- Forman, Jeremy, and Alexandre Kedar. "From Arab Land to 'Israel Lands': The Legal Dispossession of the Palestinians Displaced by Israel in the Wake of 1948." *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, vol. 22, no. 6, 2004, pp. 809–30.
- Gans, Chaim. "The Palestinian Right of Return and the Justice of Zionism." *Israel and the Palestinian Refugees*, edited by Eyal Benvenisti et al., Springer, 2007, pp. 255–93. *Springer Link*, doi:10.1007/978-3-540-68161-8\_9.
- Gordon, Neve. "From Colonization to Separation: Exploring the Structure of Israel's Occupation." *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 29, no. 1, Routledge, Feb. 2008, pp. 25–44. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, doi:10.1080/01436590701726442.
- Green, Arthur. *Seek My Face: A Jewish Mystical Theology*. Jewish Lights Publishing, 2003.
- Halper, Jeff. *War Against the People: Israel, the Palestinians and Global Pacification*. Pluto Press, 2015.
- Jabareen, Hassan. "The Green Line's Challenge to the Statehood Project: The Green Line's Challenge to the Statehood Project." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 43, no. 1, University of California Press, Institute for Palestine Studies, 2013, pp. 41–50. JSTOR, *JSTOR*, doi:10.1525/jps.2013.43.1.41.
- Klein, Menachem. "Jerusalem without East Jerusalem: The Palestinian as the 'Other' in Jerusalem." *Journal of Israeli History*, vol. 23, no. 2, Routledge, Mar. 2004, pp. 174–99. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, doi:10.1080/1353104042000282375.
- Makdisi, Saree. "The Architecture of Erasure." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 36, no. 3, The University of Chicago Press, Mar. 2010, pp. 519–59. *journals.uchicago.edu (Atypon)*, doi:10.1086/653411.
- Matthews, Scott L. *Capturing the South: Imagining America's Most Documented Region*. UNC Press Books, 2018.
- Nasrallah, Rami. "Future Scenarios for the Old City of Jerusalem." *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture*, vol. 21, no. 4, 2016, pp. 49–56.
- Nassar, Issam. "Familial Snapshots: Representing Palestine in the Work of the First Local Photographers." *History and Memory*, vol. 18, no. 2, Indiana University Press, 2006, pp. 139–55. JSTOR, *JSTOR*, doi:10.2979/his.2006.18.2.139.
- Novak, David, and Matt Sakakeeny. *Keywords in Sound*. Duke University Press, 2015.
- Nusseibeh, Sari, and Anthony David. *Once Upon a Country: A Palestinian Life*. Macmillan, 2008.
- Oz, Amos. *A Tale of Love and Darkness*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2005.
- Papp  , Ilan. "The 1948 Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 36, no. 1, University of California Press Journals, Oct. 2006, pp. 6–20. *jps.ucpress.edu*, doi:10.1525/jps.2006.36.1.6.
- Persekian, Jack. "Past Tense." *Jerusalem Quarterly*, vol. 77, 2019, pp. 7–105.
- Rouhana, Nadim N. "Decolonization as Reconciliation: Rethinking the National Conflict Paradigm in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 41, no. 4, 2018, pp. 643–62.
- Rouhana, Nadim N. "'Jewish and Democratic'?: The Price of a National Self-Deception." *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 35, no. 2, 2006, pp. 64–74.

- Sandberg, Haim. "Jerusalem: Land Title Settlement and Expropriation." *Journal of Israeli History*, vol. 23, no. 2, Routledge, Mar. 2004, pp. 216–31. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, doi:10.1080/1353104042000282393.
- Seidemann, Daniel. *A Geopolitical Atlas of Contemporary Jerusalem*. Terrestrial Jerusalem, 2015.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. "E-Resistance and Technological in/Security in Everyday Life: The Palestinian Case." *The British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 52, no. 1, 2012, pp. 55–72.
- Shalhoub-Kevorkian, Nadera. "The Politics of Birth and the Intimacies of Violence Against Palestinian Women in Occupied East Jerusalem." *The British Journal of Criminology*, vol. 55, no. 6, Oxford Academic, Nov. 2015, pp. 1187–206. *academic.oup.com*, doi:10.1093/bjc/azv035.
- Shehadeh, Raja. *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape*. Profile Books, 2010.
- Subhi S. Ghosheh, . *Jerusalem: Arab Social Life, Traditions, and Everyday Pleasures in the 20th Century*. Olive Branch Press, 2013.
- Tawil-Souri, Helga. "Media, Globalization, and the (Un)Making of the Palestinian Cause." *Popular Communication*, vol. 13, no. 2, Routledge, Apr. 2015, pp. 145–57. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, doi:10.1080/15405702.2015.1021470.
- Tawil-Souri, Helga. "Uneven Borders, Coloured (Im)Mobilities: ID Cards in Palestine/Israel." *Geopolitics*, vol. 17, no. 1, Routledge, Jan. 2012, pp. 153–76. *Taylor and Francis+NEJM*, doi:10.1080/14650045.2011.562944.
- Yacobi, Haim. "Jerusalem: From a 'Divided' to a 'Contested' City—and next to a Neo-Apartheid City?" *City*, vol. 19, no. 4, Routledge, July 2015, pp. 579–84. *rsa.tandfonline.com (Atypon)*, doi:10.1080/13604813.2015.1051748.