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CHAPTER 12

Epilogue

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From heated debates on access and transparency of archives to large-scale digitisation projects, the field of photography witnesses an opportune moment with a wealth of new material being made publicly available. Interdisciplinarity opens up the field, shifting the focus towards the study of photographs as objects of cultural analysis, beyond their use as mere illustrations. Recent historiography looks at photographs as new primary sources, rather than accompaniments to written sources. In the past two decades, the field has seen a rise in scholarly work that deals with materiality of photographs, practices of photographic production, and circulation. Particularly vernacular photography has emerged as a key area of focus that offers new and much more nuanced readings on socio-economic, cultural and political histories.

In this opportune moment for the study of photographs, *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens, 1918–1948* offers a great invitation to rethink the British Mandate period through the works of professional and amateur photographers from different classes and communities. Exploring the works of those who photographed Palestine, the way they understood and imagined it back then, this volume is a much-needed exercise to trace the visual history before 1948, and examine the making of Mandatory Palestine within the framework of biblification that reproduced Palestine as 'a familiar site of European consciousness', and Orientalism that imagined Palestine as the exotic other.[1] In its three sections, this volume focused on specific photographic archives in and outside Palestine, the perspective of individual photographers, as well as conceptual and methodological approaches to the study of photography.

Palestine in the British Mandate period, much like the Middle East, witnessed a major shift in political and social mobilities following the collapse of the perennial Ottoman rule. This shift, leading up to the *Nakba* and the foundation of the State of Israel, laid the foundation for a renewed identity for Palestinian photography outside the centre-periphery dynamics of the Ottoman Empire. At the same time, the Mandate-era Palestinian photography

1 Issam Nassar, "'Biblification' in the Service of Colonialism: Jerusalem in Nineteenth-century Photography," *Third Text* 20, no. 374 (2006): 317–326.

was marked by increasing social, political and religious tensions due to the ownership of heritage, modernity and economic renaissance.

Having inherited the modernist agenda of the Ottoman elites, the British Mandate era corresponds to a period where, with the introduction of new technologies, studio photography rapidly spread while snapshot photography increasingly entered upper and middle class households across the region. Studio and itinerant photographers remained instrumental in the growth of vernacular portraiture from the 1910s to the late 1940s. Commercial photographers continued to be involved in the production of biblified material, catering to the needs of the market in Palestine and abroad, from local inhabitants and Western travellers in the Holy Land to 'armchair tourists' at home in the West. As Nassar points out, the photographic production of Biblical scenes was not limited to the nineteenth-century but persisted throughout the Mandate period as a tradition that many Western and indigenous photographers continued to follow. Accordingly, this volume has examined the role of the market of photography and the various taxonomies it catered to within the context of Mandatory Palestine. It explored the work of Palestine's indigenous Arab and Armenian photographers as well as the affinities between British colonial photography and Zionism while probing the class connotations of photographic representations and the role of Christianity in the production and dissemination of photography of the era.

For many decades, the process of interpreting Palestine and Palestinians in photography among Western networks focused on the use of Biblical themes to domesticate what was seen as a 'foreign' world. The familiarity of the Biblical as a textual narrative and as a familiar imaging trope served to bridge the gap between the Western consumer and the otherness of the 'Orient' through the construction of a Western Biblical imaginary as Zananiri has shown in his study of the Frank Scholten Collection. Ironically, biblified imaging was in fact enabled by modernity, while actively excluding and erasing Palestinian modernity. Aiming to reverse this omission and help decolonise photography, this volume has proposed the concept of 'speaking back' or 'writing back' in order to indigenise narratives and counter the marginalisation of Palestinians. Looking at the archives like the National Geographic Society archive (Kopty) and the Dominican photographic-library of Jerusalem (Sanchez Summerer and Neveu), the work of studio photographers such as Khalil Raad and Elia Kahvedjian (Sela and Sheehi respectively), as well as the collection of the Dutch traveller Frank Scholten (Zananiri), we have been urged to question the ways in which photographic production can propose readings that challenge Orientalist narratives surrounding the biblification of Palestine and holiness of the 'Holy Land', and more specifically of Jerusalem. In this, Kopty's *Imagining*

the Holy offers a fascinating example of producing new indigenous knowledge and narrative. By connecting thousands of images of historic Palestine from the National Geographic Society archive with Palestinian community elders and scholars, Kopty explores as to how memory can be activated as a form of resistance. These images and their original captions give new insights into the processes of image production, selection and circulation, and provide a candid view of how photographers and editors participated in and reinforced the power-relations between the colonised and colonisers.

The study of photographs from the archives of missionaries, such as the photographs from the American Colony's Christian Herald Orphanage and the Swedish School in Jerusalem, analysed by Jacobson and Okkenhaug respectively, gives us a better understanding of how photographs were produced, and circulated and consumed among humanitarian and other networks in Palestine and abroad, and the colonial tensions that resulted from such photographic interactions. Throughout the volume, a number of case studies have thus examined the ways in which institutions like the National Geographic Society (Kopty) and the American Colony (Lev, Okkenhaug, Jacobson) adopted underlying colonial narratives of bringing modernity and humanitarianism to Palestine and Palestinians through Western intervention.

In the first half of the twentieth century, Palestine witnessed remarkable transformations in its urban built environment, exacerbated under the British Mandate with the introduction of new urban infrastructures and statutory planning policies that controlled urban expansion and the construction of new settlements. Illustrating the idea of the *Biblical Moderne*, Abusaada has shown that the shift in the photographic representation of Palestine from a 'land of promise' to a 'land of progress' is discernible in the utilisation of photography by colonial architects and planners. Through photographic representations, urban environments were produced and repackaged to create a vision of Palestine according to distinct political agendas. An indigenous-produced vision was developed during this process as part of such tensions, which tasked itself with promoting the Arab-led nature of the remaking of modern urban spaces, concerned with offsetting and diffusing the discourses of Zionism and British colonialism. In this context, Abusaada has brought up the question as to what extent the cities captured in photographs are colonial cities and to what extent they are Arab, problematising the categories of 'colonial' and 'Oriental' themselves when examining photographic reproductions.

As Zananiri has pointed out, the formative period witnessed the setting up of a plethora of ethno-confessional taxonomies with different political inclinations and interests. 'Arab' and 'Jew', a by-product of a modern colonial terminology, as Zananiri, Abusaada, and Kopty have analysed, served to wash

away the complexities within indigenous communities and further orientalise the existing social fabric. This volume is thus concerned with addressing the cultural porosity across indigenous, transnational and transcolonial categorisations in British Mandate Palestine when exploring the narratives of conformity and strategies of resistance among a great diversity of ethnic, religious and cultural taxonomies that came to reside in Palestine. Simultaneously, it also examines possible internalisations of the Western colonial discourse by Palestinian actors as we delve deeper into the entanglements and permeabilities across the different communities.

The concern to promote indigenous-led urban progress is closely linked to the formation and propagation of the Palestinian middle-class identity in the 1920s and 1930s, whose visual representations were marginalised by the dominant Zionist, British and more generally Western narratives. The relationship between biblification and modernity is implicitly vested in transnational questions of class. Photography itself largely remained an activity of middle and upper-middle classes in the 1920s and 1930s. In this context, Nassar has asserted that family albums offer a wealth of material in terms of looking at classed and gendered selves within Palestinian communities. Family albums function as affective tools through which to build a family's narrative as much as they serve as an attempt to affirm a normality for a Europeanised bourgeois life. Family albums provide intimate stories from within, challenging the ways in which Palestinians were imaged and imagined by colonisers, Zionists, Western travellers and journalists over decades. Similarly, Lev, Jacobson and Okkenhaug have shown that albums and travel books produced for commercial or institutional use offer more carefully constructed narratives than an individual photograph might be able to offer. Whose stories are told in albums? Who produced them and for whom? How have photo albums survived? Do albums transmit a coherent and distinct narrative or do we need to intellectualise the production of the album to construct a narrative? As we attempt to find answers to some of these questions, the album presents itself as an archive, a source giving meaning to the photographs it integrates. As Nassar has highlighted, for the collectors of photographs and albums today, the act of collecting becomes an act of reclaiming and re-narrating Palestinian history and collective memory post-1948, which represents a great juncture in the historical narrative of the Palestinians.

This volume has demonstrated that negotiations of colonial tensions between different groups among the Palestinians and the British, and the resistance to the Mandate and the Zionist agenda, can be observed not only in the photographic representations (Abusaada, Nassar, Zananiri, Sheehi, Sanchez Summerer and Neveu), but also in business practices of photographers and

photo studios as well as the local and foreign consumers they catered to (Sela, Kopty, Lev, Jacobson), bringing up once again the notions of locality, indigeneity and agency. How do we position an American Colony photographer like Whiting, who, at 14, became a member of the American Colony Photo Department and soon started to lead archaeological expeditions through Palestine? How do we negotiate Larsson's documentation on the pupils of the Swedish School as Head of the American Colony photo department? How do we interpret the agency of Khalīl Raʿad whose work was intertwined with the colonial regime of knowledge and biblified cultural material? The issue of agency urges us to explore the dynamics of the market, and its intended and unintended audiences.

The issue of textuality through the captions on photographs, as Kopty, Sanchez Summerer and Neveu, Nassar and Abusaada have questioned, has emerged as another central theme across the chapters in this volume. Recent historiography has looked at photographs as new sources, as alternatives to written sources, giving historians new objects and new ways to do research without necessarily using writings. In this regard, captions on photographs provide multiple layers of metadata for the study of photographs. What do captions tell us about the production and circulation of images? Several chapters have explored what text does to, for and against a photograph, as well as how the process of selecting and captioning images transforms and restricts their meaning. Several authors in this book have investigated how we can work with textuality to unpack the ideological mechanisms in which captions were generated, revised, rewritten and disseminated, and the ways in which to gauge the audience the captions were intended for. Similarly, scholars like Nassar have asked how captions on family photographs and albums, meant to be shared primarily among familiar networks, can help decolonise photography. This volume has thus examined the ways in which to disentangle the politics behind the production of photographic captions in archives, create tools for the indigenisation of photography and provide new voices for those in photographs.

Tackling all of these issues, *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens 1918–1948*, encourages us to rethink photography of and by the Palestinians in a cross-regional approach integrated into the social and political histories of the broader region. In this, vernacular photography emerges as a key area to explore in imagining Palestine in personalised and intimate ways. Family albums need a particular attention, as this volume has revealed, where a sense of intimacy takes the centre stage. The dynamics between photography and gender have also been touched upon across chapters through various case studies and microhistories from Scholten's sexuality

and its effect on his photography (Zananiri) to the politics of photographing the sisters in the collection of the French Biblical and Archaeological School in Jerusalem (Sanchez Summerer and Neveu).

Looking at an intricate network of producers and consumers of photography, the volume offers a comprehensive overview of photography of the Mandate period, placed within a broader transnational narrative that highlights the complexities of Palestine's social fabric at the time. In the past two decades, the rapid growth of institutionalised collections and digital resources accessible to researchers and general public has broadened the study of Palestinian photography in unprecedented ways. These resources proffer a much broader perspective on the social histories of the region, encompassing multi-layered stories of the diverse communities that came to reside in Palestine. Among the new exciting initiatives, the Armenian Museum, designed by Raymond Kevorkian and Claude Mutafian, will showcase the Armenian presence in the 'Holy Land' from antiquity to the present day, displaying a large variety of Armenian objects from fifth- and sixth-century mosaics to medieval manuscripts. Instrumental in the growth of indigenous photography of Palestine, the works of Armenian photographers are expected to take the centre stage in the museum. The photography section will draw on three major collections, namely the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem collection (Fig. 12.1 & 12.2), the Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU) collection hosted at the headquarters of the Union in Heliopolis, Cairo, and the AGBU Nubar Library collection in Paris (Fig. 12.3). Due to open in 2021, the Armenian museum will not only examine the role of Armenians in the history of Palestine and the broader region but also the significance and function of photography in shaping, assembling and evincing the collective memory of a nation.[2]

Photographic collections, series and albums as 'objects' offer different tools for studying photographs, with the multiple layers of curation that they go through at different times periods. Despite the recent growth in available digital resources, the question of access to archives remains a key issue that needs to be addressed immediately by scholars and policy-makers alike. In the case of Palestine, the situation includes a political difficulty, due to the fact that a great number of materials are in Israeli archives that Palestinians have no access to. A starting point for addressing this issue could be a comprehensive mapping project of Palestinian archives and collections, along with the details of access with regard to each archive, not only within the Eastern Mediterranean region but more globally to include collections like the Scholten Collection at Netherlands Institute for the Near East (NINO), the Swedish Jerusalem Society

2 Email interview with Raymond Kevorkian by Karène Sanchez Summerer, October 2020.

FIGURE 12.1 *Ceremony to lay the foundation stone of the Calouste Gulbenkian Library, Jerusalem*, 1930.
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM COLLECTION

FIGURE 12.2 *Untitled*, 1920s. Members of the Jerusalem community, with in the centre a secular priest, probably not belonging to the congregation of St James, who is also a refugee in the neighbourhood, 1920s
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE ARMENIAN PATRIARCHATE OF JERUSALEM COLLECTION

FIGURE 12.3 *Departure of the children to Jerusalem*
IMAGE COURTESY OF THE AGBU NUBAR LIBRARY

collection at the Uppsala University Library, the G. Eric and Edith Matson Photograph Collection at the Library of Congress as well as the collections at the Harvard Museum of the Ancient Near East (HMANE) and the Palestine Exploration Fund (PEF). Decolonising photography is only possible through the decolonisation of archives, making them available with consistent access and transparency to all researchers, including Palestinians.

We hope that *Imaging and Imagining Palestine* will pave the way for further works, books and exhibitions, focusing on photography and photographic archives with regard to the histories of Palestine as well as the broader region.