

Jaffa: Shared and Shattered: Contrived Coexistence in Israel/Palestine. By Daniel Monterescu, Indiana University Press, 2015.

Anybody with an interest in the politics and sociology of Israeli/Palestinian relations needs to read this book. Daniel Monterescu provides a rich and theoretically sophisticated account of urban politics in Jaffa. A key strength of the book is in how he overcomes the traditional “methodological nationalism” that “chained sociological analysis of ethnically mixed towns to the category of the nation-state and thus concealed much of their interstitial complexities” (p. 34). This methodological shift toward a “dialectical theory of sociality and spatiality” (p. 34) provides a much needed counter to the prevailing tendency to frame research about Israelis and Palestinians in dichotomous terms according to the securitising logic of the nation-state. More generally, by raising our understanding of the politics of the city and urban landscapes, Monterescu offers a counter-weight to the conventional statist vision in Political Science and International Relations research.

The book is structured around a few different but complementary theoretical moves that offer a nuanced understanding of the urban politics in Jaffa between Israelis and Palestinians. Central to the analysis is the methodology of relationality. The spatial consequences of such an approach is the demonstration of Jaffa as a “heteronomous space” where the “spatial logic is characterized by an absence of clear correspondence between national-ethnic boundaries and spatial ones” (p. 44). Monterescu develops this position over a series of detailed anthropological descriptions, ultimately wanting to show how the spatial and identity politics in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict are easily misunderstood, mis-represented, and reified. The argument, ultimately, is that a relational approach can help lead to “a program of action and a call for reconciliation” (p. 301). It is hard to disagree with this goal, and the methodology is robust, but this side of the argument raises an important question that is regularly alluded to, but not always confronted and which pertains to our ability to develop a normative argument in regard to the normalization of everyday violence.

Monterescu explains how Jaffa has had many different identities over the years: from the “Bride of Palestine”, to the Arab other to the Jewish Tel Aviv, to a gentrified Tel Aviv neighbourhood. Jaffa exists in multiple planes, some spatial some temporal. At one point, he asks, in reference to Jaffa’s lost status as a Palestinian city, “How does one live in a zombie city? How do Palestinian citizens survive in a town marked by communal destruction, which is at the same time a bustling center of urban renewal and Jewish gentrification as well as a site of memory of Palestinians in exile?” (p. 101). Similarly despairing is the 85 year-old pharmacist and “only surviving member of the pre-Nakba Jaffan elite”, Dr Fakhi Jday’s comment that “Keeping Arabs in Jaffa after 1948 is the cruelest thing the Jews did to us” (p. 103). The grounding of identity, or rather the absence of a clear grounding and the pursuit of one amid a constant relational dialectic is a major focus of both analysis and example. It is not just Jaffa’s shifting identity from the Oriental to neo-liberal, or how the process of Judaization has accompanied market forces (p. 125) that is at issue. It is the very construction of meaning of both place and self.

As the Palestinian activist Raef Zreik is quoted as saying, “One day they are Israelis and the next day they are Palestinians; they are never Palestinian citizens of Israel” (p. 127). Similarly the phenomenology of gentrification, of Ashkenazi Jews finding authenticity or romance in Jaffa, represents the search for meaning and a sense of self, even when moving to Jaffa is done from a distance. As one of the interviewees recalled, “To cut a long story short, we finally rented a house in Jaffa, but although I’m committed to multiculturalism, and was willing to live with a mixed population in Israeli terms, I really didn’t know anything about Arabs” (p. 159). Relatedly, another Jewish resident who moved to Jaffa explains, “I have reservations about saying that I had a ‘Jaffa experience’ because ultimately I didn’t get to know many people. I never spent much time at the flat; I arrived late at night

and I didn't have time to talk to people on street" (p 164). Much of the ethnographic discussions reflect this pattern of simultaneous presence and distance.

Many of these contradictions in Jaffa play out in the city's process of gentrification, which Monterescu describes in rich theoretical and empirical detail. Gentrification has become an increasingly important phenomenon across many cities, where run-down areas are revitalized, with local real estate prices often skyrocketing and traditional local residents being priced out. Much of this complexity is addressed in the book via Andromeda Hill, an expensive, gated housing complex involving Israeli architects, Canadian investment, and the creation of an architectural "Jaffa style" that was produced to conform to an Orientalist image. Monterescu highlights the very real and significant (international) political consequences of gentrification. However, gentrification in Jaffa is not just the usual neo-liberal market forces at work, it also further complicates relations between Israelis and Palestinians through the marketization of Judaization, the invocation of liberal multicultural empowerment and cultural appropriations that reflect Orientalist re-drawings of Jaffa's public and private spaces, all of which serve to re-write and re-inscribe seemingly contradictory narratives. One of the more telling descriptions in the book about Israeli gentrification in Jaffa is when Monterescu wryly notes how, "The most common 'Jaffan' experience is from their apartment window" (p 195).

The gentrification process of the Andromeda Hill reflects and contributes to how narratives of conflict, appropriation and violence can be inscribed with ostensibly apolitical meanings – this is surely one of the great effects of the post-modern neo-liberal age. This is an important point, brought out eloquently in an exchange between a local Palestinian advocate and the project manager of Andromeda: "I was driven out of my house because I'm an Arab and to you they give a closed neighbourhood." To which the manager replied coldly, 'You were driven out of the house not because you're an Arab. You were driven out of your house because you have no money!'" (p. 207). This anecdote is in many ways reflective of much of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, where the Zionist enterprise displaced and then outpriced Palestinian residents.

For the scholar of politics and international relations, this book provides an important reminder that international relations is not an abstract arena. As Oded Löwenheim (2014, p. 2) points out in an article about auto-ethnography in IR: "how abstract and removed the international remains, a mostly imaginative realm that most people do not, cannot, physically experience or explore as such." Monterescu provides a helpful demonstration of how a phenomenological and hermeneutic analysis can provide profound insight in empirical political research, revealing just how much is lost by not taking seriously the shared-lives and meanings of the people who live in the international realm.

This book defies simple summation, but it does have at least one theme that runs throughout it. This theme is about exploring the politics of the local as they contribute to producing the conditions by which we understand our normative potential of a life among others who are not like us. Jaffa, and by extension Israel, is, as this book helps remind us, a diverse place. The empirical depth of this book makes absurd the idea that we can understand Israel according to the Zionist mythology of a single homogenous nation. Instead, this is a place of multiple identifies, identifications, contradictions and narratives. By coming to terms with this diversity and doing so via a relational approach Monterescu is offering a normative argument that is, unfortunately, not fully spelled out. The relational approach does yield a rich analysis, and also offers an important methodological critique. But it does not by itself provide the normative explanation for reconciliation. Something else is needed here.

The ethnographic analysis, with its focus on people's lived-experiences and the meaning they take from them, serves only to further emphasize the need to provide the normative link between politics and the everyday and a political responsibility for reconciliation. Alas, the reader is left to work this complex problem out, being given ample evidence that connects the politics of the everyday to multiple examples of injustice, including a fascinating discussion about Israeli and Palestinian activists being able to work together (it's complicated). Laced throughout the book is the question of political

responsibility. As one of the activists quoted in the book says, “The point is to acknowledge the wrongs of the past and to take responsibility for it, together with the historical fact that exists today, and to find a solution together” (p. 167). This is a position not unlike that of Ari Shavit (2013), but one that is not of great help in being able to relate to the needs of those who have been dispossessed and subject to regular appropriations, cultural and territorial.

In its normative content, the book speaks to the urban political theorist Warren Magnusson’s (2001, p. 137) argument that the search for politics is better sought out in the city, a space without sovereign authority: “When I see like a state, I imagine that things can be fixed, but when I see like a city I realize that my own wish to fix things in a certain way is part of the problem”. In this vein, Montersecu’s book is bookended with important normative comments, starting with Walter Benjamin drawing attention to the motives for writing about one’s city, to the hope for reconciliation. I too, find myself drawn to such normative positions, but in an otherwise outstanding book, it is a shame that the normative dimension to the argument is not addressed in equal detail to the rest.

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