

Jerusalem: Across the Divide

Transcript ENG



Jerusalem: Across the Divide (2014) was produced by Sarit Larry with the support of Artsbridge and the Institute for Liberal Arts at Boston College for the Guestbook Project's "Exchanging Stories — Changing History" initiative.

Participants:*
Rafik
John
Avigael
Ron
Aya
Alex
Dana
*last names have been withheld

JERUSALEM: ACROSS THE DIVIDE

Narrator: Jerusalem. The five thousand year old city that has resonated at the core of the three Abrahamic religions is facing a new battleground in the last century, one that dances to the tunes of national sentiments.

The ancient religious attachments to this city now resonate with a new undertone that is manifested through and constituted of the areas two fledgeling national identities: Israeli, that, at the moment, rule Jerusalem east and west as its capital, and Palestinian, that regard the east side of the city as the capital of the future Palestinian State.

Rafik, Palestinian Muslim: Jerusalem means to me...the mother country. Yeah, it's my mother country. I bor—I was born here, and I studied here, I graduated here. I have a big number of friends here. So I can't go anywhere.

John, Israeli-Palestinian Christian: Jerusalem? Well, as I am Christian, of course it will have a big meaning for me as, like, a holy place.

Avigael, Israeli Jewish: I respect what the Jews think about Jerusalem, and what the Muslims and Christians think about it. And, I guess, it should be open to all of us and not just the Jews because we are Israeli.

Narrator: This Israeli liberal secular voice should not be taken to represent the entirety of the feeling concerning the east side of the city and the city as a whole. The unification of both sides of the city and the Israeli rule in 1967 was a founding moment in Israeli national identity that manifested itself both in emotional outburst of euphoria and in actual legislation. Since 1980, for example, Israel, that has no constitution, but rather several basic laws, declared united and complete Jerusalem as its undivided capital.

Ron, Israeli Jewish: Sharing Jerusalem? I don't mind. I would even love to do that if it would...if it solved the problems. So it's a good idea, I think.

Aya, Palestinian Muslim: I think Jerusalem should not be splitted, like each side separated the Israelis alone and the Palestinians alone. I think it should be shared because when you're living with the Israelis, like, and communicating, then you make a change. And I think it should be shared between us because they have a holy place, we have a holy place, Christians have a holy place That's why we all should be living in it. We should have the same rights, same human rights.

John, Israeli-Palestinian Christian: Why...why doesn't it be all new Jerusalem and all live together, Arab and Jewish?

Alex, Israeli Jewish: I don't know if... if both sides can really... can really find a solution.

Rafik, Palestinian Muslim: Jerusalem—especially Jerusalem—I don't think there will be a solution for...I don't know. Sure, they tried different times before to do but till now they didn't find a solution.

Narrator: Sadly, Rafik's and Alex's disbelief is not unjustified. To say that they Jerusalem issue has been stagnating would be an understatement. The contested eastern side is mainly Palestinian and it contains the old city in which Muslim, Christian, and Jewish holy sites exist in very close proximity. Since the unification of Jerusalem under Israeli rule in 1967 Israel has built many Jewish neighborhoods in the east side of the city as an assertion of the fact that indeed, the united city not just the west is the capital of the Jewish state. Although the international community perceives east Jerusalem as an occupied territory just as the West Bank, in Israeli mainstream consciousness, East Jerusalem is legitimately Israeli. It was not until recently, when Israel decided to settle Jewish families in strictly Palestinian neighborhoods such as Sheik Jarach and Silwan, that this forgiving state of mind started to both bifurcate and shift.

[News footage: ...right wing activists are sending out a clear message both to the Arab residents of this neighborhood and to North American Special Envoy to the region, George Mitchell, they will never give up East Jerusalem.]

Narrator: The Israeli left on the other hand has been systematically demonstrating in Sheik Jarach to manifest the exact opposite sentiment. Not once, these demonstrations ended with Israeli Jewish citizens arrested by Israeli police.

[Footage of Demonstrators: Settlers and IDF get out of Sheik Jarach. Fascism shall not pass!]

Narrator: To make matters even more complicated, in 2002, Israel decided to construct a separation wall between itself and the West Bank. Both east and west sides of Jerusalem ended on the Israeli side of the barrier, thus cutting the city off the Arab population in the West Bank and making it difficult to enter Jerusalem from it.

Dana, Palestinian Christian: I mean, for me, living in Bethlehem and every day having to cross the checkpoint and I had a lot... because my school was in Jerusalem, my friends were in Jerusalem, all my activities, all my extracurricular activities were in Jerusalem, so I had to go to Jerusalem every day. Evening, morning, and all the time. And it's part of my life, to cross the checkpoint actually. So it's...yeah...that's how...a really Palestinian who I...That's how I knew who I am.

Ron, Israeli Jewish: The truth, the conflict doesn't influence, you know, directly on my life, but if I...if I want to go to malls though, I need to do security check. There are places that are not so safe for me in Israel, and in the past there were, you know, bombs, and people were killed.

Rafik, Palestinian Muslim: Every day... every day I hear the helicopter. Every day I see M16. Every day I see the conflict in my eyes.

Avigael, Israeli Jewish: Me personally, no one died from my family, but I feel the conflict in my

life. You can talk to the Palestinians so they can tell you how they suffer, and every one of us suffer in a different way. Like, I had a kid in my class that his family died, and I'm thinking about maybe in the future I want to go to study in the US or something and I can't just leave this situation in Israel like this because it's my home. And I know it's also the Palestinian's home.

Aya, Palestinian Muslim: In the year 2000, I guess, they built the separation wall and my home was part of the West Bank. So it's not Jerusalem anymore. It's part of the West Bank. And there I had a brother, and he was really sick at that time. Really sick. And he like needed to go to the emergency and then we could not move or go to the hosp...like really good hospitals in Jerusalem. So I lost my brother. I really lost him —we could not get transportation and go over there. We could not pass from one point to another just due to the wall that is separating people apart and destroying villages in between.

Avagael, Israeli Jewish: This year I am going to the army. I still...I'm still not sure what I'm going to do in the army, but I think something with Arabic, because I learned Arabic in school.

Alex, Israeli Jewish: Serving in the army is really important. I think it's something that everyone should do... everyone that lives here should do because it's really important, it's helping, and it's serving and defending, you know, our country so we need that.

John, Israeli-Palestinian Christian: It hurts. It hurts to see them go to the army. They work against Palestinians.

Interviewer: Do you think that will affect your friendships?

John: Somehow, yeah.

Interviewer: So, how does one get over that?

John: If they don't go to the army. [laughs]

Interviewer: Have you ever seen Alex in her [IDF] uniform?

Sarin, Israeli-Palestinian Muslim: At the mall
Alex, Israeli Jewish: —At the mall, at the...

Sarin: I think it was really funny because I was not expecting to see her. I was like, “Oh my god!” I hugged her. I ran to hug her.

Alex: Well, first I thought... Is this... this could be weird, right? No, no, doesn't matter. It's Sarin.

Narrator: The youth interviewed for this documentary engaged in a dialogue group called Artsbridge. Artsbridge brings together Israeli and Palestinian youth for artistic activities and guided dialogue groups. For three weeks each year, Palestinian and Israeli youth eat, sleep, and create together, sharing the similarities and differences in their lives.

Dana, Palestinian Christian: It's not necessarily for...to make peace and to have, like a wonderful life and live is lalaland. It's...it's just knowing the other side. It's what matters. I mean, because all I know is the soldiers and the checkpoint, and the government and the decisions they make, and the more rules they make against us. It's interesting to know those people, to learn from them, because otherwise I'm not...I don't think I'm going to meet Israeli Jews.

Ron, Israeli Jewish: I learned a lot. I...I met Palestinian and people, and I learned facts and things that I didn't know about their life, and about even about my country and even about myself.

Rafik, Palestinian Muslim: Small groups could keep continuing to know each other, Palestinian and Israeli. There could be a peace. That's what I think... because every small group will be a big group.

Avigael, Israeli Jewish: I'm not saying I know everything, maybe I don't know everything that's done by my army and I guess I'm not... I don't know, like, what's true or what's false. I can't say that I know it, but I really want to know the truth if there is one.

Aya, Palestinian Muslim: I think we should never stop. We should always, like, continue and do our best because peace is what's best for us. It's what is right. It's what's better for all humans.

This document has been provided by the Guestbook Project, an international project committed to transforming hostility into hospitality, enmity into empathy, and conflict into conversation.

Jerusalem: Across the Divide was produced as part of the Guestbook Project's “Exchanging Stories - Changing Histories” initiative, creating opportunities for young people from communities that have been polarized by religion, race, ethnicity, or culture to come together to trade stories and make short videos. Working with peace organizations, community art groups, innovative schools and cultural workers from areas torn by conflict and injustice.

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