Edward Keith-Roach's Favourite Things: Indigenising National Geographic's Images of Mandatory Palestine

Yazan Kopty

My research on *National Geographic Magazine's* 110-year coverage of Palestine began with an article in the January 1920 issue titled 'The Last Israelitish Blood Sacrifice: How the Vanishing Samaritans Celebrate Passover on Sacred Mount Gerizim' by John D. Whiting.¹ I came across the article while looking for photographs of Nablus and its environs to supplement the trove of family photographs that I had found at my grandparents' house that were taken in the first half of the twentieth century. I had dozens of images of private spaces, of family members posing, of celebrations and visits, and wanted to situate those domestic and familial scenes within the larger geographic, cultural and socio-political contexts. The first photograph in Whiting's article is of a stretch of road on the lower slopes of Mount Gerizim (Jarizīm), perched just above the southwestern corner of Nablus with Mount Ebal ('Aybāl) rising in the distance. Even though I had never been there or seen any photographs of that particular spot, I knew exactly where it was within the imagined geography that I had constructed from my family's stories and photographs.

While the main text of Whiting's article meandered through the history of the Nablus region and of the Samaritan community in particular, the accompanying photographs sped ahead to the Passover rituals that would be described later in the text. In the backgrounds of these photographs, I scanned the faces of the non-Samaritan onlookers – Muslim and Christian visitors from Nablus and the surrounding villages, including my family's ancestral village of Rafīdiyyā – for anyone who resembled the ancestors I knew from our family photographs. I had heard that as neighbours and friends of the small Samaritan community, my family attended the festival every year, and even though I did not find any definitive matches in the photographs, I imagined them into those moments nonetheless.

1 The article is advertised on the cover of the issue as "The Last Blood Sacrifice, a Samaritan Rite in Palestine".

Whiting and the editors' objective with the article was to weave together geographic descriptions, historical narratives, Biblical references and first-person travelogue to transport, inform and entertain their readers in 1920, while mine was to insert my family memories and stories into it decades later and to extract from it images, descriptions, and the lived knowledge that I was missing. I continued this work by identifying and collecting every article published in *National Geographic Magazine* about historic Palestine and began excavating them in a similar way.

Through this process, I began to notice recurring tones and tropes in the magazine's coverage of Palestine and Palestinians that made me wonder who were the writers, photographers and editors that represented Palestine to the magazine's readership, and what perspectives, prejudices, knowledge and opinions they brought to that work? These questions led me to the National Geographic Society archives where I began searching the feature files associated with each published work including background research, editorial notes and correspondences. During the course of my research, I was given access to the photographic archives of the Society which contain both the images published in the magazine and a much larger collection of images that were never published. It was my encounters *with* and *between* these two sets of images that shifted my project and its questions away from the makers of the magazine to those represented in its pages. My project *Imagining the Holy* became my attempt at creating a methodology to reframe National Geographic's images of Palestine from the perspective of the photographs' subjects, and to activate them as sites of indigenous knowledge, memory and power.

1 The Magazine

By the time that *National Geographic Magazine* began its coverage of Palestine in 1909, the publication had already begun to shift from its initial incarnation as a scholarly journal of the National Geographic Society towards the popular scientific-educational publication that it has been ever since. The Society was founded in January 1888 as a scientific institution modelled after geographical societies in Europe and the Americas, such as the Royal Geographic Society in London and the American Geographical Society in New York. As Tamar Rothenberg notes in her study of the first six decades of *National Geographic Magazine*, these geographical societies 'existed as centres of geographical information, broadly construed to include commercial, botanical, geological and anthropological angles, among others, with emphasis on knowledge

about and derived from exploration'.² In October 1888, the Society published the first issue of its magazine with an announcement asserting its mission 'to increase and diffuse geographic knowledge', and explaining the *raison d'être* of its magazine as 'one of the means of accomplishing these purposes'.³ During its first decade, the Society's focus on professional and academic geography was evident in the makeup of its membership and the magazine's list of featured writers, both of which included a core of scientifically trained geographers. By the turn of the century though, the magazine had evolved into a more accessible, friendly and visual publication, and with it, the Society's membership began to boom.

In their seminal work on the magazine's influence on American culture, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins examine the surge in the magazine's popularity within the wider context of mass circulation magazines at the turn of the century and the ways that it successfully positioned itself on the border between science and pleasure.⁴ The membership numbers alone testify to this success: from 1,300 members in 1898 to 2,300 in 1903; from 3,400 to 11,000 in 1905 alone; and by 1912, over 100,000 due-paying members.⁵ Internally, the rise in the magazine's prominence and popularity coincided with the beginning of the half-century-long tenure of its most formative editor, Gilbert H. Grosvenor (1899 to 1954);⁶ externally, it was driven by the Spanish-American War of 1898 and national interest in the American takeover of Spain's colonial possessions of Cuba, Puerto Rico and the Philippines, and annexation of the islands of Hawaii. As John Hyde, the magazine's first editor, remarked in the June 1899 issue, 'It is doubtful if the study of any branch of human knowledge ever before received so sudden and powerful a stimulus as the events of the past year have given to the study of geography'.⁷ *National Geographic Magazine* was eager and perfectly poised to meet this demand.

While many of the places the magazine covered were new to American readers – including the United States' new colonial possessions – Palestine was both *familiar to* and *cherished by* its mostly white and Protestant readership, at

2 Tamar Y. Rothenberg, *Presenting America's World: Strategies of Innocence in National Geographic Magazine, 1888–1945* (Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007), 26.

3 "Announcement," *National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (October 1888): i.

4 Catherine A. Lutz and Jane L. Collins, *Reading National Geographic* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993).

5 Julie A. Tuason, "The Ideology of Empire in National Geographic Magazine's Coverage of the Philippines, 1898–1908," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 1 (Jan 1999): 38.

6 Lutz, *Reading National Geographic*, 20–24.

7 John Hyde, "The National Geographic Society," *National Geographic Magazine* 10, no. 6 (June 1899): 222.

least in its Biblified form, imagined and represented in literature, art, Passion Plays and nativity scenes well before the invention of photography. This inherited Biblical lens through which the magazine's writers, photographers, editors and readers viewed Palestine created a foundational tension between what was in contemporary Palestine and what they were hoping to find there.

2 The Present-Day Inhabitants of the Land

The first mention of Palestine in the pages of *National Geographic Magazine* is in a December 1909 feature by Franklin E. Hoskins titled 'The Route Over Which Moses Led The Children of Israel Out of Egypt'. In his introduction, he recounts:

A few years ago a young woman about to visit the Holy Land called on an old lady friend who loved her Bible and read it frequently from beginning to end, and told her that she soon hoped to see Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Galilee and all the places associated with the life of Christ. The old lady put down her work, removed her silver-rimmed spectacles, and exclaimed: "Well now! I knew that all those places were in the Bible, but I never thought of their being on the earth!"⁸

Hoskins, a Presbyterian missionary based in Beirut, quickly assures his readers that indeed 'the Desert of the Exodus has an actual existence upon the face of the earth, and that the route of the Exodus is being mapped and studied and photographed by enthusiastic scholars and travellers'.⁹ In Hoskins' account of his forty-day journey across Sinai to 'earthly Jerusalem', the mandate of the Society vis-a-vis geographic knowledge and the stories from his Bible are presented as inseparable and mutually reinforcing. Indeed, the purpose of his account is to prove the veracity of the Book of Exodus through his geographical observations of 'the almost changeless Peninsula of Sinai'.¹⁰ In the decades that followed, several other magazine contributors wrote features that echoed the goal of Hoskins' 1909 piece: to use the contemporary people and places of Palestine to illustrate and prove the Bible.

8 Franklin E. Hoskins, "The Route Over Which Moses Led the Children of Israel Out of Egypt," *National Geographic Magazine* 20, no. 12 (December 1909): 1011.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 1038.

This approach to Palestine places *National Geographic Magazine's* early coverage within the vast and abundant genre of 'Holy Land' travelogues written by Europeans and North Americans from the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alexander Schölch describes this literary landscape as part of a religious-cultural 'opening up' of Palestine that accompanied European economic and political penetration of the region beginning around 1831. Schölch discusses not only the records written by 'missionaries, pilgrims, and 'Palestine explorers', but also writings by national associations with religious and Biblical-archaeological interests in Palestine that had 'confessional, scientific, and political orientations and which had their own publications'.¹¹ While *National Geographic Magazine* was not one of these pilgrim-tourist travelogues or Holy Land-focused journals, its coverage of Palestine overlapped with both while reaching a much larger and broader audience than either in the United States. Like these works, the first decade of Palestine coverage portrayed contemporary Palestine primarily as a land of Biblical ruins and residues, and viewed everything in sight through a religious lens in an effort to marry a Euro-American Protestant imaginary to actual places and populations.¹²

Issam Nassar explains this 'biblification' of Palestine in his discussion of nineteenth century photography of Jerusalem and draws links between the photographic practices that were part of this genre of Holy Land exploration and European colonial expansion.¹³ He argues that these practices which included emptying landscapes of people, a focus on sites featured in the Bible, the mislabelling and misrepresenting of people and places, and the posing of native people as Bible characters, as contributing 'to the shaping in the European mind of an image of Palestine as a dream land ... 'waiting to be reclaimed both spiritually and physically'.¹⁴ British and Zionist colonisation of Palestine and the ongoing erasure and subjugation of Palestinians as necessities of those projects cannot be understood without examining this genre of literature and photography which helped inspire and fuel both projects.

11 Alexander Schölch, *Palestine in Transformation, 1856–1882*, trans. M.C. Gerrity and W.C. Young (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993), 60.

12 Sometimes quite literally as evidenced by the titles of two features written by John D. Whiting in March 1914 "Village Life in the Holy Land: A description of the life of the present-day inhabitants of Palestine, showing how, in many cases, their customs are the same as in Bible times" and in December 1915 "Jerusalem's Locust Plague: Being a Description of the Recent Locust Influx into Palestine, and Comparing Same with Ancient Locust Invasions as Narrated in the Old World's History Book, the Bible."

13 Issam Nassar, "Biblification' in the Service of Colonialism: Jerusalem in Nineteenth-century Photography," *Third Text* 20, nos. 3/4 (2006): 317–326.

14 Nassar, "Biblification' in the Service of Colonialism," 326.

In the case of *National Geographic Magazine's* coverage, the impulse to 'biblify' Palestine was at times at odds with the magazine's ethnographic interests. An early example of this tension can be seen in the March 1914 issue in an article by John D. Whiting titled 'Village Life in the Holy Land: A description of the life of the present-day inhabitants of Palestine, showing how, in many cases, their customs are the same as in Bible times'.¹⁵ Here, instead of erasing or minimising the native people of Palestine, they are brought to the forefront of Whiting's storytelling, but with the intention of using them as Biblical reenactors rather than protagonists in their own right. In a section titled 'The Land, Not the People, Conserves the Old Customs', Whiting asserts that 'One cannot become even tolerably acquainted with Palestine without perceiving that it is the *land* that has preserved the ancient customs. Its present-day-inhabitants, who have nothing in common with the modern Jews who crowd Jerusalem, are still perpetuating the life of Abraham and the customs and ways of the people who lived here at the time of Christ'.¹⁶ In order to explain how these mostly Arab and mostly Muslim people fit into the static Biblical framework that he and his readers have in mind, Whiting offers this theory which at once fetishises villagers as symbols of Biblical continuity while disinheriting Palestinians at the same time: they look and live like the people of the Bible, but they are not the descendants of those people.

In a companion piece published in the January 1937 issue titled 'Bedouin Life in Bible Lands: The Nomads of the 'Houses of Hair' Offer Unstinted Hospitality to an American',¹⁷ Whiting similarly punctuates his account of Bedouin life in Palestine with Biblical references in an effort to dress his descriptions of their contemporary cultures as illustrations of the Bible. Unlike the way he frames the *fallāḥīn* (villagers) in his first story, here Whiting calls back to Bible-era Bedouins as direct ancestors of his subjects and even uses examples of contemporary social and material culture to explain Biblical episodes and details.

In both cases, Whiting's commentary proffers many of the ambiguities relating to the portrayal of Palestinian indigeneity in the Western Biblical imaginary during interwar years.¹⁸ In the middle of the two decades that separated his village and Bedouin stories, Whiting wrote to Dr. Franklin L. Fisher, the magazine's Chief of the Illustrations Division, in 1928: 'I have planned to

15 John D. Whiting, "Village Life in the Holy Land," *National Geographic Magazine* 25, no. 3 (March 1914): 249–314.

16 Whiting, "Village Life in the Holy Land," 251–253.

17 John D. Whiting, "Bedouin Life in Bible Lands," *National Geographic Magazine* 71, no. 1 (January 1937): 58–83.

18 Sary Zananiri "From Still to Moving Images: Shifting Representation of Jerusalem and Palestinians in the Western Biblical Imaginary," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 67 (2016): 73–74.

write 'Bedouin Life in the Holy Land' as a sort of mate to 'Village Life' that you long ago used. Other stories such as 'City Life', 'The Fishermen of Galilee', 'The Talisman' etc. have suggested themselves'.¹⁹ It is unclear why an urban life story never materialised, but it would have offered an interesting case study in regard to biblicisation, the way it ascribes/undermines Palestinian indigeneity, and the class dimensions that both entail.

The question of Palestinian indigeneity would remain unresolved in the magazine for many decades to come, informed and complicated by its dependence on Biblical archetypes to drive its Palestine storytelling. As recently as June 1992, in an aptly named article titled 'Who are the Palestinians?', Tad Szulc asserts that, 'The ancestors of today's Palestinians appeared along the south-eastern Mediterranean coast more than five millennia ago and settled down to a life of fishing, farming, and herding. But they also endured wars with Israelites; domination from Assyrians, Chaldeans, Persians, and Romans; and eventually 400 years of rule by the Ottoman Turks'.²⁰ On the same page as this statement is a caption for a photograph from inside the Ibrahimi Mosque that explains, 'Jews and Arabs share a common ancestor at Hebron's Tomb of the Patriarchs (right), where Judaism's first families – Abraham and son Isaac, their wives Sara and Rebecca – are said to be buried. Abraham fathered another son, Ishmael, from whom Arabs claim descent. Nearly all Palestinians are Arab, and most are Muslim'. A few pages later, Szulc mentions King David and his battles with the Philistines, who he says are 'among the forefathers of the Palestinians'.²¹ These assertions are made matter-of-factly without an indication of complexity or controversy, or any attempt to reconcile them. The only consistent logic between the three origin stories is that they are anchored in Biblical hagiography, rather than historiography. The inability of the article to coherently answer the question it poses in its title is both the result, and another example, of the magazine's century of biblified coverage and the limitations of this framework.

Even today, contemporary Palestine is rarely mentioned in the magazine or any of National Geographic's content without at least a nod to its Biblical past, often in juxtaposition to the political realities of modern-day Palestine/Israel, as though the mythologised history recounted in the Bible is essential to understanding its contemporary condition.²²

19 J.D.W. to F.L.F., 3 July 1928, NGS Library and Archives.

20 Tad Szulc, "Who are the Palestinians?" *National Geographic Magazine* 181, no. 6 (June 1992): 92.

21 Ibid., 102.

22 Interestingly, while Palestine cannot be mentioned without evoking the Bible, sites and events of Biblical interest can be mentioned without Palestine, such as the 2017–2019

3 The Reconquest of the Holy Land

National Geographic Magazine's second decade of coverage of Palestine coincided with the beginning of the British Mandate, adding an explicit promotion of colonialism to its Bible-tethered storytelling. In Charles W. Whitehair's October 1918 article 'An Old Jewel in the Proper Setting: An Eyewitness's Account of the Reconquest of the Holy Land by Twentieth Century Crusaders',²³ readers are given a front-row seat to the British military conquest and occupation of Ottoman Palestine. Whitehair, who apparently travelled to Palestine at the invitation of General Allenby,²⁴ plays the role of embedded war correspondent while using his account to justify and celebrate the beginning of British colonial rule in the 'Holy Land'. It is clear in the article that he is not only an eye-witness to this acceleration of the British colonial project in Palestine, but an active agent in its propaganda. He praises the British generals, disparages the Turks and Germans, claims that the local population has been freed from tyranny, and that the land has been rescued from misuse and is promised to the Jewish people. Whitehair ends by stating that 'Palestine today is beginning a new chapter of her history, which is entirely due to the courageous and wise administration of her British liberators'.²⁵ This statement exemplifies how *National Geographic Magazine* would go on to portray the next two decades of British colonialism as a force of modernisation, economic progress and religious redemption. Over the course of the Mandate period, Zionist colonisation would come to share credit for this trifecta of progress in the magazine's coverage until the end of British rule when the mantle is passed to the State of Israel as the embattled, pioneer nation making the desert bloom. Unlike the biblified lens applied uniquely to Palestine, the magazine's support for British colonialism was not a unique instance of pro-imperialist coverage.

The Spanish-American War was a watershed moment in the history of the magazine, both in terms of rapidly expanding its readership and in marking the beginning of several decades of pro-imperial coverage. As Julie A. Tuason

Tomb of Christ exhibition at the National Geographic Museum in Washington D.C. which did not mention Palestine/Palestinians (or Israel/Israelis) in any of the text-based or audio-visual information about Jerusalem and the renovation of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, including explanations about the indigenous *sabt en-nour* (Saturday of Fire) ceremony celebrated by Palestinian Christians.

23 Charles Whitehair, "An Old Jewel in the Proper Setting: An Eyewitness's Account of the Reconquest of the Holy Land by Twentieth Century Crusaders," *National Geographic Magazine* 34, no. 4 (October 1918): 325–344.

24 "The Red Cross in Palestine," *The Red Cross Magazine* 14 (1919): 60.

25 Whitehair, "An Old Jewel in the Proper Setting: An Eyewitness's Account of the Reconquest of the Holy Land by Twentieth Century Crusaders," 344.

explains in her examination of the magazine's coverage of the Philippines between 1898 and 1908, *National Geographic Magazine's* status as a reputable scientific publication allowed it to 'effectively proffer an essentially imperialist agenda under the guise of scientific progress'.²⁶ Whether it was American imperialism in the Philippines or British colonialism in Palestine, the magazine's outlook on Anglo-American colonial projects was the same.

In the context of the unfolding colonial project that would result in the ethnic cleansing of Palestine,²⁷ Whiting's reference to Palestinians as 'the present-day inhabitants of the land' takes on an even more sinister tone. The dislocation of Palestinians from their history by *National Geographic Magazine* and others in order to satisfy the logic of Palestine as Bible Land should be understood as foundational – not exceptional or incidental – to the success of British and Zionist subjugation and displacement of Palestinians.

Most often, the magazine's support for the British colonial project in Palestine manifested itself in the tone and scope of its coverage rather than praise for specific policies or actions. Yet a closer look reveals a symbiotic relationship between the magazine and the British colonial administration. This relationship is most evident in two features that were written by Major Edward Keith-Roach while he served in the colonial administration, the first in December 1927 when he was the Deputy District Commissioner of Jerusalem and the second in April 1934 when he was the District Commissioner of Northern Palestine. The 1927 article titled 'The Pageant of Jerusalem: The Capital of the Land of Three Great Faiths Is Still the Holy City for Christian, Moslem, and Jew',²⁸ is of particular interest as it was written by Keith-Roach and illustrated mostly with photographs taken by the magazine's most famous staff photographer at the time, Maynard Owen Williams.

In her chapter about Williams and his 30 years as *National Geographic Magazine's* chief foreign correspondent, Rothenberg notes that if 'someone were looking for a representative figure to embody the physiognomic and cultural essence of 'National Geographic land' in the early-to-mid twentieth century, Maynard Owen Williams would be a prime candidate'.²⁹ She describes him precisely: 'White, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, big and athletic, well-educated

26 Tuason, "The Ideology of Empire," 50.

27 See Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (London: Oneworld Publications, 2006) and Nur Masalha, *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2012).

28 Edward Keith-Roach, "The Pageant of Jerusalem: The Capital of the Land of Three Great Faiths Is Still the Holy City for Christian, Moslem, and Jew," *National Geographic Magazine* 52, no. 6 (1927): 635–681.

29 Rothenberg, *Presenting America's World*, 99.

and bespectacled, friendly and affable'. Before joining the magazine as one of its first staff correspondents, Williams worked as a missionary teacher in Beirut and Hangchow and as a foreign correspondent for the *Christian Herald*. His most famous assignment for *National Geographic Magazine* was his coverage of the Citroën-Haardt Trans-Asiatic Expedition from Beirut to Beijing in 1931. With some proficiency in Arabic and years of experience in the Levant, he contributed text and photographs to ten of the 26 features that included coverage of Palestine between 1919 and 1952. Despite frequent disagreements with the editorial staff of the magazine, Williams believed in the potential of *National Geographic Magazine* to foster international brotherhood, and his role as a mediator between the magazine's readers and the beauty of the world and its peoples. In this way, Rothenberg notes, Williams' work not only supported, but also embodied 'the *Geographic's* apolitical pretensions and humanist pronouncements'³⁰ even as the magazine was implicitly and explicitly supporting imperialism, capitalist penetration and Euro-American supremacy at home and abroad.

In her review of Edward Keith-Roach's memoirs *Pasha of Jerusalem: Memoirs of a District Commissioner under the British Mandate*, Jane Power describes Keith-Roach as 'an almost stereotypical British district administrator: decent and conscientious; concerned for the natives and interested in their customs and surroundings, but liable to misinterpret them; secure in western cultural superiority; willing to improvise a solution to any problem'.³¹ One of twelve children of a Gloucester vicar, Keith-Roach went to India as a young man and started his career at the Mercantile Bank at the height of the British Raj. While serving in the British-officered Egyptian Army during World War I, Keith-Roach was stationed in Sudan where he learned Arabic and served as District Commissioner of Eastern Darfur. In 1919, he joined the colonial military administration in Palestine where he remained until 1943 as part of the Mandate civil administration, earning him the nickname 'Pasha of Jerusalem' by Reuters for what they saw as his even-handed dealings with both Jews and Arabs in Palestine. The fact that this nickname was given by Reuters and not by the indigenous or immigrant communities in Palestine is important to note, as is the fact that he styled himself as such in the title of his memoir. Keith-Roach's confidence in his intimate and authoritative knowledge of Palestine is not only apparent in the two Palestine features he wrote for *National Geographic*

30 Ibid., 103.

31 Jane Power, Review of *Pasha of Jerusalem: Memoirs of a District Commissioner Under the British Mandate*, by Edward Keith-Roach and Paul Eedle, *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 32, no. 2 (1998), 270–271.

Magazine,³² but also the two travel handbooks he edited with Harry Luke, *The Handbook of Palestine* (1922)³³ and *The Handbook of Palestine and Trans-Jordan* (1930).³⁴ In all of these texts, Keith-Roach displays no qualms in speaking for and about Palestine and its people, like a benevolent pasha describing the subjects and territory under his rule.

Keith-Roach's relationship with National Geographic began in the early 1920s when he met Gilbert Grosvenor at a luncheon in Washington D.C. Grosvenor, a high-society figure and known Anglophile, was fascinated by Keith-Roach's stories from his postings and would later publish the first of Keith-Roach's contributions to the magazine in January 1924 about his time in Darfur titled 'Adventures Among the 'Lost Tribes of Islam' in Eastern Darfur: A Personal Narrative of Exploring, Mapping, and Setting Up a Government in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan Borderland'. In addition to his seemingly friendly relationship with Grosvenor, it is clear from his letters to and from Williams that the men shared a close professional relationship while working on the December 1927 issue and that Keith-Roach had a significant influence over Williams' experience in Palestine and the subsequent coverage that came out of it.

Firstly, Keith-Roach facilitated Williams' shooting trips around Palestine by supplying assistants and most probably transportation and introductions.³⁵ This offers some insight into the access that Williams had, how he might have been received by the subjects of his photographs, and the circumstances and power dynamics of his interactions with them. Secondly, it is also clear that Keith-Roach was very sensitive to his official position as Deputy District Commissioner and saw his article as both a potential liability and an opportunity to increase his influence. In a correction to one of the captions written by Williams, he says, 'The great thing in describing a man of importance in no circumstances, should you draw attention to either his bigotry, his conservatism or anything which may detract from the dignity of his own religious thought. For example, Rabbi Kuk only shows half his decoration, as he does not like to

32 His second feature on Palestine titled "Changing Palestine" was published in April 1934 when he was District Commissioner of Northern Palestine.

33 Harry Charles Luke and Edward Keith-Roach, *The Handbook of Palestine* (London: MacMillan, 1922).

34 Harry Charles Luke and Edward Keith-Roach, *The Handbook of Palestine and Trans-Jordan* (London: MacMillan, 1930). Salim Tamari notes that the 1922 handbook was written primarily as a military manual, but that it also targeted civilian visitors to Palestine. See Salim Tamari, "Shifting Ottoman Conceptions of Palestine, Part 1: Filistin Risalesi and the two Jamals," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 47 (2011): 33.

35 M.O.W. to E.K.-R., 12 September 1927, NGS Library and Archives.

be seen wearing the cross. Rabbi Meier does not. There is however, no necessity or need to draw the public's attention to this idiosyncrasy.³⁶ While on the one hand, he worried about offending individuals of high rank, he also saw the opportunity to use his article to boost his own reputation and promote it as a form of soft diplomacy between his office and those same individuals and important institutions in Palestine.

After the completion of the article, Keith-Roach requested that 27 copies of the December 1927 issue be shipped to him in order to be gifted to high-ranking members of Jerusalem's social, political, and religious elites.³⁷ In another letter the following month, Keith-Roach even suggested that the Society prepare bound copies that could be presented to the President of the United States, His Majesty the King, the Secretary of State for the Colonies and the High Commissioner.³⁸ Keith-Roach's eagerness to promote his feature among the most important and powerful and the Society's eagerness to do the same indicate both a proximity to power and an aspiration for greater prestige and influence. Besides this elite list of recipients, the greater influence that Keith-Roach and Williams had was on *National Geographic Magazine's* readership which reached over a million members by the end of 1927.

The final article is structured as a grand walking tour of Jerusalem beginning outside the walls of the Old City near the citadel where women from the surrounding villages were selling their agricultural produce in the morning and ending at the Damascus Gate where the 'Last Post' can be heard being played from the police camp on Mount Scopus as night falls. Little effort is spent to explain or justify British rule or the author's position vis-a-vis the places and people he describes. Instead, the benevolence of the colonial regime is suggested in the fanfare of multi-ethnic, multi-religious coexistence and the seamless mingling of ancient and modern. Jerusalem, 'where eras jostle one another as races do'.³⁹ This vision of and for Jerusalem echoes that of the Pro-Jerusalem Society in its paternalistic and charitable tone towards the improvement of public works while simultaneously fetishising and codifying the supposedly authentic and ancient. Keith-Roach's approach is less didactic though as he revels in the exciting sensory experience of walking through Jerusalem, sharing his detailed knowledge of each trade, place, dress, and

36 E.K.-R. to M.O.W., 12 August 1927, NGS Library and Archives.

37 E.K.-R. to M.O.W., 20 August 1927, NGS Library and Archives.

38 E.K.-R. to M.O.W., September 1927, NGS Library and Archives.

39 Keith-Roach, "The Pageant of Jerusalem: The Capital of the Land of Three Great Faiths Is Still the Holy City for Christian, Moslem, and Jew," 641.

scene. Interspersed between Keith-Roach's beautiful and energetic descriptions are photographs mostly by the American Colony Photographers, Khalil Ra'ad and, of course, Williams.

As a reminder of the intimate relationship between photography and colonialism, the story opens with an aerial photograph of Jerusalem taken by the British Air Ministry; a grid system is noted along the top and left margins with corresponding coordinates in the caption that mark Jerusalem's most important sites. The American Colony and Ra'ad photographs come from each studio's respective commercial catalogues of Holy Land photographs, including semi-posed, naturalistic scenes and vistas of daily life. Williams photographs, on the other hand, are mostly posed portraits, the type of character studies that he was most known for and which marked both his and *National Geographic Magazine's* style. Exactly as Keith-Roach emphasises Jerusalem's diversity in his text, Williams' portraits include a representative sample of every religion, ethnicity and rank of Jerusalem's inhabitants.

While Keith-Roach notes in the article that all roads in Palestine lead to Jerusalem, his descriptions detach it from the rest of the country save the list of specialised agricultural produce brought from different parts of Palestine to be sold in Jerusalem: 'luscious oranges from Jaffa, grapes from Hebron, apricots from Bethlehem and Beit Jala, nectarines and peaches from near-by villages, bananas from Jericho, and enormous watermelons from the coast near Caesarea'.⁴⁰ And, while the ethnic and religious makeup of Jerusalem was indeed unique to Palestine at that time, there is no indication of what the rest of the country looked like or how Jerusalem was linked to it, either geographically, economically, culturally or politically. In Keith-Roach's telling, Britain's colonial power (and all the violence and subjugation that it entailed) gets subsumed by the city's internationalism as if the British are just one of the many groups of people who roam the narrow and ancient alleyways of the Holy City rather than being the ones who forcibly rule it. As Keith-Roach writes in his last letter to Gilbert H. Grosvenor about his 1927 piece: 'Jerusalem, belonging as it were not only to Palestine but to the whole world, one cannot but be sincerely grateful for the manner in which you have been able to put these photographic records before your readers, and I hope that my article may not prove unworthy of its distinguished place'.⁴¹ Keith-Roach rightly emphasised the importance of the magazine's photographs in driving its popular appeal and storytelling power, in this instance working in tandem with his text to

⁴⁰ Ibid., 637.

⁴¹ E.K.-R. to G.G., November 1927, NGS Library and Archives.

de-emphasise Jerusalem's Arab Palestinian character and popularise its image as a timeless, global and *ownable* place.

In this feature, in particular, the published images closely reflect the perspective and narrative of Keith-Roach's text; this was not always the case in *National Geographic Magazine*, and even when it was, images could be (and often were) viewed on their own. Examining the magazine's published photographs this way becomes even more interesting when encountering them within National Geographic's larger photographic archive which includes not only the photographs that were printed in the magazine, but the millions that were not.

4 Edward Keith-Roach's Favourite Things

There are over 12 million objects in the photographic archive of the National Geographic Society. The archive itself began as the editorial archive of *National Geographic Magazine* and the majority of the photographs it contains are images that were collected or commissioned by the magazine. Most were never published. Today, the archive remains among the foremost records of natural and human history, containing images from every corner, terrain, depth and altitude of the world, as well as many from beyond our planet. The archive holds a vast collection of images from Mandatory Palestine, including 3,000 black-and-white prints and almost 200 autochrome plates. The majority of these images were taken by magazine staff or commissioned photographers, but the collection also includes many photographs taken by amateur and professional photographers who gifted, sent samples, or sold their photographs to National Geographic. The largest share of the collection are images made by Maynard Owen Williams.

The black-and-white photographs are gelatine silver prints, dry-mounted on linen boards, with a typed caption pasted on the back, and at least two stamped dates indicating when the photograph was received by the archive and when it was indexed. In the case of Williams' photographs, the majority were received in 1927 with detailed captions that include a mixture of personal anecdotal narratives, explanations of local customs and details, and general information about locations, events and subjects. In very few cases, and only with individuals of religious, political or social importance, subjects are identified by name. Although thousands of people are represented in the images which cover a wide range of subjects, themes and geographies, only one perspective is seen and heard: that of Williams through his camera and his captions.

FIGURE 9.1 'Zerin, formally Jezreel, city of Ahab and Jezebel, looks off past Little Hermon to Nazareth and its well, here seen, is not far from the road, but it is seldom visited by travelers. The costume of the women is unusually colorful but I could not get them to pose for color plates. In the background are the Galilean hills west of Nazareth. Palestine.' Unpublished photograph and caption by Maynard Owen Williams, 1927

IMAGE COURTESY OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY LIBRARY
AND ARCHIVES

As I began exploring the collection through Williams' eyes and eavesdropping on his one-sided conversations with the magazine editors and staff who were the primary audience for his captions, I found it difficult to engage with the photographs beyond the frames and frameworks that he had set. This was partially due to the sheer number and high aesthetic quality of the images, and the detailed and immersive captions that accompanied them. There was so much to engage with that was authored by Williams, that I felt trapped in a Palestine that could only be viewed through his eyes. Within that space, the most I could do was critique what he chose to photograph and write (in particular, the biblicization of people and places, as well as frequent examples of misogynistic, racist and racialised language); mine his images and texts for details that I wanted to explore further; and corroborate or challenge the information that he presented. Unexpectedly, it was the presence of Edward

FIGURE 9.2 'Photograph of Abdel Kader Shihabi, Official Calligrapher to the Government of Palestine, and the finest calligrapher in this part of the world. Among Moslems, calligraphy is the highest form of art and the best work commands prices for which very fair painters would gladly do a portrait or a landscape. In this view are shown some famous samples of calligraphy, some of them very old and many of them very valuable. (\$200 to \$700). Jerusalem.' Unpublished photograph and caption by Maynard Owen Williams, 1927. A portrait of Shihabi posing alone in his studio was published with Keith-Roach's December 1927 article
IMAGE COURTESY OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Keith-Roach in a few of Williams' unpublished photographs that helped me traverse his frames and frameworks and encounter the images in a different way.

Edward Keith-Roach is present in five sets of images taken by Williams. He appears first as a subject in two sets of photographs, one with his Arabian pony and another with his wife in their 'Bean Twelve' car. He is present again in relation to another photographed subject, Keith-Roach's personal *qawās* (body guard/ceremonial armed guard) who posed for portraits on the grounds of Government House in a military-style uniform and outside of the American Colony in local dress. And in two other instances where Keith-Roach's desires and opinions are recorded in Williams' captions: the first, a pair of images of a traffic policeman outside the Jaffa Gate in which Williams notes that

FIGURE 9.3 'Governor Keith-Roach's personal *qawās* wearing a head scarf and camel hair crown, outside the American Colony at Jerusalem, Palestine.' Unpublished photograph and caption by Maynard Owen Williams, 1927
IMAGE COURTESY OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

Keith-Roach is 'very desirous' of a photograph of him and that he would like a photograph included with his story, and second, in series of portraits of a young woman taken at the American Colony as Williams notes: 'A young Christian Arab girl, whom Governor Keith-Roach thinks the prettiest girl in Palestine, wearing the Bethlehem costume'.

These series of photographs were mixed between the hundreds of other photographs taken by Williams in Palestine between 1926–1927, disconnected from Keith-Roach's published article. Indeed, before I read the captions that mentioned Keith-Roach, I had not connected the creation of this larger body of photographs to Williams' travels through Palestine for that particular feature – the same series of trips that Keith-Roach helped facilitate and influence. Even without Keith-Roach's assistance or direction, Williams' travels across Palestine would involve vastly unequal interactions between the American photographer and his local subjects. Connecting Keith-Roach to the rest of Williams' photographs further emphasises and exemplifies the intense concentration of power that is both documented and maintained in the National Geographic archives.

Understanding these connections also transformed my encounter with the photographs that were published in the 1927 issue. Whereas in the magazine, the photographs of Jerusalem had helped isolate and detach it from the rest of Palestine (geographically, culturally, politically, etc.), in the archive they were easily placed back into the larger collection that they were pulled from and re-encountered within the whole. Prompted by Keith-Roach's spectre, I could see more clearly how images could be reimagined through their placement, presentation and reception, regardless of their geneeses.

In *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* Ariella Azoulay offers a useful framework that distinguishes between 'the photographed event' and the 'event of photography'.⁴² *The photographed event* – the policeman directing traffic in the road, the *qawās* posing for his portrait, the young woman posing in Bethlehem dress – is distinct from the *event of photography*, encounter(s) with the photograph itself. Azoulay argues that even the knowledge that a photograph exists, extends the *event of photography* around it as the viewer or potential viewer encounters it in person or in their imagination. Furthermore, while the political circumstances and power relations that led to *the photographed event* are fixed and frozen (and documented in the image),

42 Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans. L. Bethlehem (London: Verso, 2012).

the political circumstances and power relations around the photograph and encounters with it are not.

In the case of Williams' photographs taken in Mandate Palestine in collaboration with Keith-Roach, the *photographed events* were determined by a complicated power landscape that included technological, economic, cultural and political dimensions. This is true of all of Williams' photographs, but for those images that were eventually published as part of the feature authored by Keith-Roach, they were also used to fortify and expand that same power landscape by extending the *event of photography* into every living room in which the December 1927 issue was read. For the majority of Williams' images which were not published, the *event of photography* remained dormant while access to the photographs and the knowledge of their very existence was suspended to all but a few people, until I had my own encounters with the images.

Take for example the photographs of the Jaffa Gate policeman. It is clear from Williams' unpublished captions that he took the photograph at Keith-Roach's request. The published caption says: 'THE TRAFFIC POLICEMAN OUTSIDE THE JAFFA GATE: Common sense rather than mere regulations is needed for the complex task of directing the movements of animals, people, and machines in the throbbing life of Jerusalem'.⁴³ Encountering the same image in the archive offers a slightly different interpretation, one focused on why the image was captured (at Keith-Roach's behest), rather than what it might illustrate. In the archive, the viewer can only guess why Keith-Roach was interested in this image and might arrive at a different reading, perhaps one about Palestinian modernity that is separate from an ancient-modern dichotomy or a suggestion of colonial improvement.

The portraits of the young woman in Bethlehem dress is another example. The published caption that accompanies her black-and-white photograph in Keith-Roach's article says, 'A CHRISTIAN GIRL OF JERUSALEM IN BETHLEHEM COSTUME: The coin-spangled, high tarboosh, which denotes the married woman, usually is hidden under the spotless veil'.⁴⁴ A few pages later in Williams' photo-essay which follows the Keith-Roach article, the autochrome of the same young woman is captioned as, 'MANY AMERICAN VISITORS TO JERUSALEM WILL RECOGNIZE THIS GIRL: A young Christian student in a handicrafts class at the American Colony is here wearing the Bethlehem

43 Keith-Roach, "Pageant of Jerusalem," 649.

44 Keith-Roach, "Pageant of Jerusalem," 643.

FIGURE 9.4 'Major Keith-Roach is very desirous of a picture of the Jaffa Gate traffic cop. I show him here amid such traffic as passes. The view is north up Jaffa Road from near the walls of the Citadel. Jerusalem, Palestine.' Unpublished photograph and caption by Maynard Owen Williams, 1927. A closer view of this policeman taken from a different angle was published with Keith-Roach's December 1927 article

IMAGE COURTESY OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY LIBRARY
AND ARCHIVES

costume'.⁴⁵ From these published images and captions, the magazine's readers would have no idea about Keith-Roach's desiring gaze, which also may have influenced Williams' decision to take the photograph in the first place.

The portraits of this young woman match a series of unpublished portraits of another young woman at the American Colony wearing an identical outfit. In the captions of the second woman's images, there is no mention of Keith-Roach, but she is referred to as a servant working at the American Colony. From close analysis of both series of photographs, it appears that the two young women are wearing the same exact dress and headdress, suggesting that this was a costume that both chose, or were asked, to pose in. Widad Kawar, the world's foremost expert in Palestinian textiles and dress, has identified the outfit as a low-quality Bethlehem-style dress and headpiece that would

45 Maynard Owen Williams, "Color Records from the Changing Life of the Holy Land," *National Geographic Magazine* 52, no. 6 (1927): 696.

FIGURE 9.5 'A young Christian Arab girl, whom Governor Keith-Roach thinks the prettiest girl in Palestine, wearing the Bethlehem costume. Jerusalem.' Unpublished photograph and caption by Maynard Owen Williams, 1927 A similar portrait of this young woman was published in black-and-white with Keith-Roach's December 1927 article and another in colour in Williams' companion photo-essay of autochromes from Jerusalem in the same issue
IMAGE COURTESY OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES

have been produced for the tourist market⁴⁶ rather than worn by Palestinian women as their personal attire.⁴⁷

This analysis widens the gap even further between what these images actually capture and what was presented by the magazine and perceived by its readers. For example, the *shaṭwa* which the published caption calls a 'high *ṭarbush*' is correctly explained as a headdress worn by married women from the Bethlehem region, yet if this outfit was a costume worn only for the photograph, the marital status of these women may be different than what is suggested. Similarly, the published caption mentions that American visitors to Jerusalem would recognise the young woman, indicating that she was a fixture at the American Colony; could she also have been a servant like the other woman who was photographed in the same outfit, and not, or not only, a handicraft student as is indicated in the magazine? Would identifying her as a servant instead of a student take away from the photograph's charm or perceived authenticity to the magazine's readers? Were the power relations between this young woman and the Americans (the residents of the Colony and Williams) sanitised for the sake of cheerfulness? How did these possible misrepresentations affect the way that the images were viewed by readers of the magazine?

From the captions describing the photographs that include Keith-Roach's wife and car, we also learn that the couple lived at the American Colony during that period while they awaited the completion of their residence. Keith-Roach would have therefore been in close proximity to this young woman on a daily basis. What did the everyday interactions between a female Palestinian student/servant and a desiring male British colonial administrator of high rank look like? The possibilities become more sinister with one of the photographs from the series where the young woman is photographed without her head-dress or embroidered outfit in what appears to be a kind of t-shirt. Whether her outfit and uncovered head is representative of what the young woman normally wore or whether she was asked to pose with her head uncovered in a type of undergarment, is difficult to tell, but it raises many more questions about the encounter between photographer and subject that is captured in this series of photographs.

Without encountering the same images in multiple locations, in multiple ways, and with a range of associated information, I would not have been able to increase and complicate my understanding of the *photographed*

46 It is noteworthy that the American Colony ran their own Holy Land souvenir shops in Jerusalem and abroad.

47 Interviews with Widad Kavar during the course of *Imagining the Holy* project 2018–2020.

event, or separate it from the *events of photography* and the possibilities that each encounter with the image offered/offers. In my initial encounters with Williams' published photographs, it was difficult for me to recognise and exercise the agency I had in viewing those images. They were presented as fully and authoritatively explained with the full weight of National Geographic and colonial narratives about Palestine behind them. The only option I could see was to react to how they were presented: to counter-argue, debunk, and qualify. While these types of critiques are important, they felt bounded and insufficient.

Unlike the published images that were codified in the magazine, the unpublished images felt more open to new interpretations and purposes. If the captions were just conversations between Williams and magazine staff, I could eavesdrop, but also ignore them if I wanted to, or complicate them with other information that I could piece together. Even the composition of the photographs – something that seemed fixed by Williams for all eternity – appeared more fluid as I pieced together images taken in series, a few disparate moments stitched back together into a longer encounter with new angles, new interruptions and new possibilities. Among those unpublished images, I finally understood the full agency I had as Azoulay's *event of photography* was extended to include my encounters with each photograph.

In the end, what I wanted to hear and amplify was the perspective of the subject. Already during both the *photographed event* and the *event of photography*, the photographer and his perspective dominated, especially when the *event of photography* occurred in the pages of *National Geographic Magazine* with an entire text written with the perceived legitimacy of someone like Keith-Roach. Without any accompanying record of the subject's perspective or experience – and with very little information about them to help reconstruct it – it seemed like an impossible task at best and a project of fiction-making at worst.

5 Indigenising the Images: A Methodology

In 2018, I began a collaboration with the National Geographic Society Library and Archives to activate my research with the Society's collection of Palestine photographs and develop a methodology to re-examine images from the perspectives of the subjects represented. The project, named *Imagining the Holy*, was designed as a community-based project meant to connect the images in the archive with the descendants of the people, places and moments captured in them, while also creating new spaces for critical discussion of how Palestine and Palestinians are imagined and represented.

My primary goals as Lead Researcher were twofold: first to facilitate access to these images which have not circulated before and which presently can only be viewed in person in Washington D.C.; and second, to create a process by which new layers of indigenous knowledge and narratives from Palestinians are attached to the images, opening them up to new and future meanings.

Many questions arose in the process of designing and launching the project. These can be divided into three primary sets of questions. Those that pertain to ideas of decolonisation and theoretical questions around how the project was conceived; those that consider the transformation of power and agency; and those that relate to the practical aspects of such a project and the possibilities and limitations that they create.

In a theoretical sense, and fundamentally, can we conceive of this as a project of decolonisation? Afterall, my central critique of *National Geographic Magazine's* coverage of Palestine is that it directly and indirectly supported colonial projects that disenfranchised the same Palestinians whose images it was taking and selling. Yet, after returning to my understanding of a photograph as a document of an encounter between a photographer and a subject, and after examining the conditions and regimes that the images are held under and were being made accessible to me, the term 'decolonisation' fell short.

The images of Mandate Palestine in the National Geographic collection were taken during and within that period of colonialism. This is marked permanently in the construction of the images and in the relations that shaped the encounter between photographer and subject which the photographs document. They are images *of* colonialism, in addition to being images that were colonised and/or used to further colonial projects. Furthermore, trying to decolonise an image that captures a colonial moment felt like we would be limiting our work to the frame set by the photographer and the coloniality of that moment. Instead, I wanted to repurpose these fixed frames as a border to imagine beyond them, rather than be restricted inside them. As Elizabeth Edwards explains, the 'Frame, in the way it contains and constrains, heightens and produces a fracture which makes us intensely aware of what lies beyond. Thus there is a dialectic between boundary and endlessness; framed, constrained, edged yet uncontainable. It is the tension between the boundary of the photograph and the openness of its contexts which is at the root of its historical uncontainability in terms of meaning'.⁴⁸

Another set of questions followed: how can images of Palestine and of Palestinians be decolonised when the colonisation of Palestine and of

48 Elizabeth Edwards, "Photography and the Performance of History," *Kronos* no. 27 (2001): 17.

Palestinians is ongoing? Even if the colonial potential of these images is less potent today than it was when they were made and circulated, the effects that they had are still evident and accumulating. As Stephen Sheehi notes in this very volume, 'Decolonisation of photography then is not magical undoing. It is not an ahistorical process or a reading through nationalist frameworks that sees indigenous photography as 'speaking back' to power'.⁴⁹

My answer to these questions was to position the project as work of indigenisation rather than decolonisation. To indigenise images means to *make connections to* and *take ownership of* the people and places from which we come. It means working to connect each body and each place to itself and its descendants, image by image, rather than trying to symbolically remove the colonial from what is – at least in part – permanently colonial. It also means shifting our focus from the photographers to their subjects. The information provided by Widad Kawar about the woman in the Bethlehem dress is one such example.

With this shift in focus, a shift of power followed. This renegotiation demanded an additive process rather than a subtractive one. As such, our method to indigenise evolved to include three parts. Firstly, to recall and emphasise the subjectivity of the photographer as it manifests in image and text. The unpublished captions were the key to this process, revealing thoughts, actions, and agendas that shaped the making of the photographs, but reside silently or subtly within them.

Secondly, to create space within and around the photograph dedicated to holding the subjectivity of the photograph's subject. This began as a theoretical space by simply asking what the subject of the photograph might include in their own captions; it became materialised over the course of the project as it transformed into an active site for research and conversation, and eventually into a proposed metadata field assigned to collect possible answers. Even when this space remains unfilled, the act of holding space is essential to the redistribution of power.

Thirdly, to fill this space with the voices and spirits of the photographs' subjects, if not by themselves, then with the knowledge and experiences that those connected to them have inherited. With this final part of the process, the subject was no longer only represented in image alone, but with a similar presence and potential to speak as the photographer.

In this way, the project to indigenise these images not only illuminates the colonial power dynamics frozen in them, it fortifies the images against being

49 See Stephen Sheehi's chapter in this volume, "Decolonising the Photography of Palestine: Searching for a Method in a Plate of Hummus".

used to further ongoing colonisation by drowning out their colonial potential rather than trying to remove what is colonial but intrinsic to them.

The last set of questions we had to address involved the more practical elements of the project, but also questions that had to do with its fundamental purpose and spirit. Mostly importantly: who specifically would speak on behalf of the subjects since, as is the case for most of the photographs from the Mandate period, they could not speak for themselves? This led to another question: was a single new description enough to represent the perspective and experiences of the subject? A hierarchy of ideal participants emerged: the descendants of and/or those who knew the subjects first hand; community elders from the same places and communities who were familiar with the contexts and details around the subjects' lives and time period; academics and cultural heritage experts with specialised knowledge about the various tangible and intangible parts of the subjects' lives and experiences captured in the photographs; field researchers based in Palestine/Israel and around the world in the Diaspora who could help extend our research into communities of Palestinians all over the world. Once this list was established, the answer to the second question became clear: we needed as many new layers of description from as many ideal participants to even *begin* to approximate the voices and lived experiences of the subjects. In this way, we aimed to create a community of witnesses to speak near them, rather than for them.

In order to connect the thousands of images from the archive with these participants, we built an online digital research platform to host research copies of each image along with the photographer's captions and any archival metadata mentioned on the back of the photographs. Through this platform, participants anywhere in the world could view the collection, add new descriptions to the images, and read the descriptions added by other participants. The platform was built in consultation with the archive team at the National Geographic Society to ensure that the data collected through the platform could be migrated to the archive and its content management system in order to link each new description with its corresponding photograph.

In addition to the digital research platform, an Instagram account, <https://@imaginingtheholly>, was created for the project in order to share previously uncirculated images and to solicit new leads for our research. The popularity and ease of accessibility of this platform allowed us to introduce the project to a larger, younger and more diverse audience including recreational viewers and more active contributors who have used their own personal and professional networks to help us connect pieces and find new threads to follow. This platform has become indispensable for one of the most important contributions we are making through the project: giving names to the nameless subjects in the photographs. These leads have helped us connect to many descendants of

FIGURE 9.6 Hilweh Abu Tayr, born in the village of Umm Tuba in the Jerusalem District and raised in Bethlehem, identified by her grandson, Rauf Malki. 'Moslem woman wearing the fine costume seen on the day of the Nabī Mūsā procession, Jerusalem, Palestine.' Unpublished photograph and caption by Maynard Owen Williams, 1927. Another portrait of Abu Tayr was published with Keith-Roach's December 1927 article and three other images in colour of her and her mother were published in Williams' companion photo-essay of autochromes from Jerusalem in the same issue

IMAGE COURTESY OF NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY LIBRARY
AND ARCHIVES

subjects and to add the most important information to the photographs in our quest to listen for and amplify the voices and spirits of the subjects. It has been the clearest and most effective way to transform the power-dynamics in and around the image: placing the name of the subject directly beside the name of the photographer and transforming his subject from an anonymous model or Biblical stand-in to a person with a body, a name and a story. Maynard Owen Williams' photograph of a Moslem woman in Jerusalem becomes a photograph of Hilweh Abu Tayr taken in Jerusalem by Maynard Owen Williams. The photograph is transformed from being a work authored by the photographer to a document of an encounter between a photographer and a subject that resulted in the making of a photograph.

6 Conclusion

My encounters with the photographs in the National Geographic Society's archives transformed my understanding and relationship with the stories that *National Geographic Magazine* has published about Palestine and Palestinians over the past century. My initial interest in the writers, photographers and editors was driven by an inability to imagine the images in the magazine separate from the voices and narratives that asserted sole authority over them. My project *Imagining the Holy* became an attempt to reimagine the images from the position and perspective of their subjects. In the course of piloting a methodology that would allow me to do this, a few things became apparent.

Firstly, the indigenisation of photographs, which involves both a shift in focus and in power, also involves a shift in temporal boundaries. Whereby the voices and narratives ascribed to them by the writers, photographer and editors locked the images near the time of their making, our methodology created a way for voices and narratives to be newly and continually introduced. Indeed, *Imagining the Holy* ended up being an opening and a beginning, rather than a project that can or should be completed. As such, the project is ongoing and has transformed National Geographic's Palestine collection into a site of active conversation, reflection and negotiation.

Secondly, in a similar vein, our methodology to indigenise photographs could also be applied to photographs of Palestine and Palestinians held in other collections, as well as to photographs of other regions and peoples in National Geographic's collection. While colonial circumstances differ across geography and history, the process of elevating and centring indigenous subjectivities where they are missing, silenced or erased, can and should be replicated. This process does not aim to excise the non-indigenous from images (which as

I argue above, is not possible), but rather, it aims to complicate and redistribute power in order to reduce the colonial potential of the images and activate them as sites for indigenous knowledge, memory and power.

Thirdly, in the process of designing and implementing the project, it became clear that we were not only connecting Palestinians to images of ourselves and our homeland – and vice versa – but that by organising and participating in a community-based method, we were also connecting to each other. As Sheehi notes, ‘The photograph is a social space, a collective process, a cultural and geographic articulation and a social object. As such, all are available for re-appropriation by the colonised in order to emancipate the subjects of the photograph, the *verum factum* and truth value of their experience, and the visibility of facts that are disavowed, permitting us as liberated subjects to create the opportunity for new social relations’.⁵⁰

In the face of the ruptures and separation caused and exasperated by our colonial history, we could use photographs as a site of reconnection. As Edward Said wrote, ‘All of us speak of *awdah*, ‘return,’ but do we mean that literally, or do we mean ‘we must restore ourselves to ourselves’?... But is there any place that fits us, together with our accumulated memories and experiences?’⁵¹ *Imagining the Holy* asks whether photographs of our ancestors, of ourselves, and of our homeland can be such a place.

Bibliography

Correspondence and Editorial Files Sources

National Geographic Society Library and Archives, National Geographic Society, Washington D.C.

Secondary Sources

“Announcement.” *National Geographic Magazine* 1, no. 1 (October 1888): i–ii.

Azoulay, Ariella. *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*. Translated by Louise Bethlehem. London: Verso, 2012.

Edwards, Elizabeth. “Photography and the Performance of History.” *Kronos* no. 27 (November 2001): 15–29.

Hartman, Saidiya. “Venus in Two Acts.” *Small Axe* 26, 12, no. 2 (June 2008): 1–14.

Hoskins, Franklin E. “The Route Over Which Moses Led The Children of Israel Out of Egypt.” *National Geographic Magazine* 20, no. 12 (December 1909): 1011–1038.

⁵⁰ See Stephen Sheehi’s chapter in this volume.

⁵¹ Edward Said, *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986): 33.

- Hyde, John. "The National Geographic Society." *National Geographic Magazine* 10, no. 6 (June 1899): 220–223.
- Keith-Roach, Edward. "The Pageant of Jerusalem: The Capital of the Land of Three Great Faiths Is Still the Holy City for Christian, Moslem, and Jew." *National Geographic Magazine* 52, no. 6 (December 1927): 635–681.
- Keith-Roach, Edward and Luke, Harry Charles. *The Handbook of Palestine*, London: MacMillan, 1922.
- Keith-Roach, Edward and Luke, Harry Charles. *The Handbook of Palestine and Trans-Jordan*, London: MacMillan, 1930.
- Lutz, Catherine A. and Jane L. Collins. *Reading National Geographic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993.
- Masalha, Nur. *The Palestine Nakba: Decolonising History, Narrating the Subaltern, Reclaiming Memory*. London and New York: Zed Books, 2012.
- Nassar, Issam. "'Biblicization' in the Service of Colonialism: Jerusalem in Nineteenth-century Photography." *Third Text* 20, nos. 3/4 (2006): 317–326.
- Pappe, Ilan. *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine*. London: Oneworld Publications, 2006.
- Power, Jane. "Review of *Pasha of Jerusalem: Memoirs of a District Commissioner Under the British Mandate*," by Edward Keith-Roach and Paul Eedle, *Middle East Studies Association Bulletin* 32, no. 2 (1998), 270–271.
- Rothenberg, Tamar Y. *Presenting America's World: Strategies of Innocence in National Geographic Magazine, 1888–1945*. Hampshire: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007.
- Rossi, Roberto "The Almoner Altar and the 'Pasha of Jerusalem'" *Museum of the Order of St John Blog*. <http://museumstjohn.org.uk/almoner-altar-pasha-jerusalem/>. Accessed December 3, 2019.
- Said, Edward. *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1986.
- Schölch, Alexander. *Palestine in Transformation, 1856–1882*. Translated by M.C. Gerrity and W.C. Young. Washington, D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1993.
- Sheehi, Stephen. "Decolonising the Photography of Palestine: Searching for a Method in a Plate of Hummus", 346–365. In: Sanchez Summerer, Karène and Sary Zananiri, *Imaging and Imagining Palestine: Photography, Modernity and the Biblical Lens*. Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2021.
- Szulc, Tad. "Who are the Palestinians?" *National Geographic Magazine* 181, no. 6 (1992): 84–113.
- Tamari, Salim. "Shifting Ottoman Conceptions of Palestine, Part 1: Filistin Risalesi and the two Jamals." *Jerusalem Quarterly* 47 (2011): 33.
- "The Red Cross in Palestine." *The Red Cross Magazine*, January 1919.
- Tuason, Julie A. "The Ideology of Empire in National Geographic Magazine's Coverage of the Philippines, 1898–1908." *Geographical Review* 89, no. 1 (Jan 1999): 34–53.

- Whitehair, Charles. "An Old Jewel in the Proper Setting: An Eyewitness's Account of the Reconquest of the Holy Land by Twentieth Century Crusaders." *National Geographic Magazine* 34, no. 4 (October 1918): 325–344.
- Whiting, John D. "Bedouin Life in Bible Lands," *National Geographic Magazine* 71, no. 1 (January 1937): 58–83.
- Whiting, John D. "Village Life in the Holy Land." *National Geographic Magazine* 25, no. 3 (March 1914): 249–314.
- Whiting, John D. "The Last Israelitish Blood Sacrifice." *National Geographic Magazine* 37, no. 1 (January 1920): 1–46.
- Williams, Maynard Owen. "Color Records from the Changing Life of the Holy Land." *National Geographic Magazine* 52, no. 6 (December 1927): 682–707.
- Zananiri, Sary. "From Still to Moving Images: Shifting Representation of Jerusalem and Palestinians in the Western Biblical Imaginary" *Jerusalem Quarterly* 67 (2016): 73–74.