Negotiating Space

Analyzing Jaffa Protest Form, Intention and Violence, October 27th, 1933

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Introduction

It is Friday morning in Jaffa, Palestine, 1933 (Figure 1). An image captures a young boy standing on a flat roof of a building, looking at the square below. The site is the Government Square in Jaffa, usually referred as the Clock Tower Square (Figure 2). The square was developed at the end of the 19th century outside the city walls, and included government buildings, the market, a mosque, and Jaffa’s clock tower, built at the beginning of the 20th century to celebrate the silver jubilee of the reign of the Ottoman Sultan Abd al Hamid II. The plaza bordered on the al Mahmudiyya Mosque, Jaffa’s most important mosque, and the Kishle (prison) inside the old city. On the other side of the plaza stood the monumental government palace, the New Saray, built in 1897 to
replace the Old Saray that was located inside the city walls. In the lower portion of the picture, we can see a mass of men and women, some holding sticks. They are facing a line of horsemen and what seem to be soldiers a little further off. Other soldiers are positioned on the flat roofs on the west side of the square. The photograph captures a moment in time when the police are approaching the crowd and trying to push them back.

A substantive literature exits on protests and social mobilization. However, in this paper I draw mainly on the significance of the spatial attributes of protests by asking, what is the role of the space’s design in relation to the socio-political gathering occurring there? I will use the events of Palestinian Arabs demonstrations in Jaffa in 1933, the largest city in Palestine, as a focus for my discussion. In particular this paper demonstrates how these cohesive relationships between space and protest – defined here as gatherings or events rather than organizations or movements - collided prior to the event itself in the bargaining process. As noted, protest is a bargaining process intended to provide “relatively powerless people”1 with access to resources. However,
prior to the event itself, there is a bargaining process over the form of bargaining itself (i.e. the form of an action within a particular space), and its symbolic significance. Over the demonstration’s long history, organizers frequently struck bargains in advance with authorities and police. Negotiations among organizers, demonstrators, authorities and police, both before and during the event, create limits on all parties and increase the predictability of encounters in the course of demonstrations. Violence that occurs is a result of failed bargaining or unanticipated encounters. One question is, how does place come into play in this process of bargaining?

The argument of this paper is twofold. First, the process of bargaining over the use of place and the form of the event play a crucial role in the action’s meaning and representation, contributing to a construct of an imagined community. The contested bargaining over the spatial form of the Jaffa protest validates the tension between opposition and polity, and the way the latter relies on a prescribed pattern of action and people’s political awareness and values. Second, protestors take a pragmatic approach in the process of planning the event, symbolism (i.e. site, or special date) has an added value, although it is often not the generator of the event’s form. The generator is space, its availability, surveillance, scale, and so forth – crucial factors when trying to figure out the form of the contemporary protests and in mega international scale protests. Thus, although this protest took place in 1933 in Palestine, an analysis of the procession goes beyond the geographical and historical boundaries of the event itself, becoming one example out of many that reveals the interrelationship between citizens’ civil participation and the space in which the events occur.

**Context of the 1933 Events**

Many grassroots protests, by Palestinian Arabs against the Zionist Project, took place in Palestine prior to Israel’s establishment as a state. The increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine and Great Britain’s pro-Zionist policy, symbolized by the Balfour Declaration of 1917 and the calling for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, was accompanied by an intensification of Palestinian Arab political resistance. The initial goal of the resistance was to force Britain, which had gained mandatory control of Palestine at the end of World War II with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, to halt Jewish immigration, prohibit the transfer of Arabs lands to Jews, and establish an independent, representative national government in Palestine. The settings of 1933 protests were Jerusalem, Jaffa, Haifa and Nablus. The dates within the period mentioned are as follows: the first protest in Jerusalem took place on October 13th. The Jaffa and Nablus protest occurred on October 27th, the Haifa protest on October 27th and 28th, and the Jerusalem protest on October 28th and 29th. Differing from the events of 1920, 1921 and 1929, these demonstrations were directed not against the Jews but against the mandatory government, which was accused of tilting the balance against the Arabs in its administration of the mandate.
The first event in October 1933, the Palestinian Arab Executive committee proclaimed a “general strike,” which implied the cession of businesses, the closing of shops, and the termination of public transport. The idea was to hold a demonstration in Jerusalem, which would move from the gate of the Holy Mosque to the Holy Sepulcher, then on to the Jaffa Road via Sweiqat Allon, to the general Post Office and to the Damascus Gate where the Arab Executive should deliver statements to the demonstrators. Planning this political procession challenged the 1929 government’s prohibition on holding political protests in Jerusalem. However, and against the government will, the protest in Jerusalem took place and ended in violence. As reported:

“At about 12:20 p.m. the people left the mosque. The crowd was then estimated by one witness at between six and seven thousand…it was anticipated that the crowd would leave the city by the Jaffa gate and attempt to reach the Government offices following the route outside the city wall which would have been in accordance with the resolution of the Arab Executive issued on the 8th October, but just before reaching the Jaffa Gate, the crowd turned to the right and took a shorter route inside the walls of the Old City towards the New Gate…The District superintendent of Police, calling upon the crowd to go back and disperse and blowing a whistle, ordered a baton charge…”

From the report it seems that the turning point of the event is the unexpected initiative to modify the route of the procession. From the report, which continues to describe an aggressive negotiation between the people and the police, is it possible that the ensuing violence would not have taken place if the people had followed the expected route?

This question is particularly interesting as the occurrences almost repeated themselves two weeks later in Jaffa. Among the various events of 1933, the Jaffa procession in the city’s central square provides us with significant details about the process of negotiation over the procession route, and allows us to understand the clash between the regime and citizens as a contest over space and its control.

Much has been written on the British policy regarding the Jewish immigration and the resistance of the Palestinian Arabs during the Mandate period. In these writings, the events are portrayed as riots, a clash between the regime and citizens, but they fail to consider the complex dynamic created by the spatial dimension of the act and its cultural meaning. The sources for the analysis of the Jaffa procession are archival documents, newspapers, and images of the event, mostly by the British government witnesses accounts, or those belonging to one of the government services. Throughout the analysis, my intention is not so much to focus on the moral justification of the Arabs’ claims or to criticize the extreme force used by the police,
but rather to discuss the overlap between spatial form and the social dynamic of the event.

Disputed Codes: Spatial Form, Intention and Violence

“A demonstration directed against government, is likely to take place in Jaffa on Friday, 27th of October, 1933. It is anticipated that this demonstration will be in the nature of a march through some of the main streets of the town, during the course of which an attempt will be made to register a protest in front of the District Commissioner’s office (District Police Headquarters, 1933).

This statement appeared in a secret document issued by the British police headquarters in Jaffa, on 25th October. Two days later, the Palestinian Arab community gathered in the square to protest against Jewish immigration and Jewish nationalistic aspirations in Palestine. The Jaffa procession, later referred to as a riot or disturbance, started at 10 a.m. and ended at 1.15 p.m. In the event many people were injured, and twenty one others died.

The site of the protest was the Clock Tower Square, where the British headquarters and government offices were located in 1917; this space was thus housing the civic, cultural, commercial, and religious arenas of the Palestinian Arab community and British government offices, which required increased surveillance of the area. In the early 20th century, Jaffa was a conglomeration of ethnic and religious communities and the Square, a civic and commercial center, also served the Palestinian Jewish community in the city and the Jewish neighbourhoods beyond it.13 However, by the 1930s, it was no longer the locus of the Palestinian Jewish community. The parallel development of the two communities, and especially the Jewish demands for autonomy, contributed to the British Mandate’s decision to separate Tel Aviv from Jaffa.14 The existence of two entities also implied separate civic arenas. For the Palestinian Arab community, the civic locus was Jaffa, in particular the area of the Clock Tower Square. For the Jewish community, there was no distinct locus protests took place in different locations in the city of Tel Aviv.15

The demonstration in Jaffa was proposed by the Palestinian Arab executive leadership in Jerusalem.16 The route of the march, as designed by the Committee of the Moslem Christian Association and the Executive Committee of the Palestine Youth Congress in Jaffa, was to start at the mosque, continue through the adjacent streets, and end at the bandstand on King George Avenue (Figure. 3). The route was not approved by the High Commissioner, and on October 24th the District Commissioner suggested receiving a Palestinian Arab delegation from the mosque gate in his offices, situated just across the square. He was prepared to accept a peaceful presentation
Figure 3. Arabs proposed route, (1). The route started from the mosque and went along Ajami Hill (residential area) then along Salahi Road and King George’s avenue to the bandstand where it was to end. The counter-suggestion route proposed by Palestinian Arabs and accepted by the British (2). The route started from the mosque and went along Port Road to the government offices where it was to end. (Author’s illustration, Palestine Survey 1934, National Map Archive).
of grievances, but would not tolerate any defiant public demonstration. The Palestinian Arab leaders rejected his proposal. The British offer to receive a delegation disregarded two key elements of a mass demonstration, namely: the sense of equality achieved by the breaking down of hierarchical representation, and secondly, the recognition that a demonstration is a form of inclusion, not reduction as in the case of a small delegation. As soon as it exists, it wants to engage more people, and this urge to grow is the first and supreme attribute of the mass, contributing to the construction of an imagined community. In other words, the protest’s ritual performance components (i.e. marching, gathering, singing, etc), clothing, and schedule (i.e. timing and length of the event) reveal the way participants saw themselves, either as supporters of, or protesters against, the social order. Thus, this spatial choreography has a dual role: it is a mechanism for constructing meaning and for interpreting social reality, and a device for negotiating between the state and the citizen.

The leaders then proposed an alternative route that would end at the Commissioner’s office (Figure 4). This route, shorter than the previous one but longer than that first suggested by the Commissioner, was in fact approved by the Commissioner on behalf of the government. The differences between the long and short routes were crucial to the British, who stated clearly that they would regard any procession via the long route as illegal and would disperse it by police action. Thus it is evident that the British were concerned with the length and legality of the routes. But what were the differences between these routes?

In the original route suggested by the Arabs, no direct confrontation with the government officials or the police was planned. The march was to start at the mosque, perceived both as a religious place but also a community arena, and avoid entering the square. The original route was through residential streets, ending at the Avenue bandstand, where speeches would be given. The British, on the other hand, preferred the short route, where the demonstrators’ movement from mosque to police station had to comply with the city ordinances, thereby limiting the spatial form of the march. In the case of large assemblies, as in the case of Jaffa, powers (i.e. political parties, institutions) often choose to maintain control and order by actually collaborating with activists through a careful selection of spaces of a certain size, scale, and orientation. These highly controlled gatherings offer a benefit to participants because their scale enhances the mass’s experience of togetherness and solidarity, which in turn intensifies their impact. This bargaining over the form of the protest suggests that its spatial array was not altogether spontaneous.

The insistence on the form of protest is connected to the role of spectators who are not actively involved but who play an important role in it, either voluntarily or involuntarily. A march attracts spectators with noise, symbols and physical disruption in the streets, and this also contributes to the impact of an event. Paths of movement also attract those not involved in an event. Thus, the form of a march and its route are
critical in attracting spectators. The route proposed by the Palestinian Arab community along residential streets would probably have attracted many spectators, whereas the route suggested by the British, through the square with its public buildings, offered no advantages. At most, some viewers might have been on the roofs or at windows that, in any case, were mainly occupied by the police.

Furthermore, the procession as envisaged by the Palestinian Arab community had a dual purpose, both as an act of protest against the British, but also as way to enhance the shared narrative of the community. These views of the protest - internal (facing themselves) and external (facing a target) - further extended the role of space and its

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Figure 4. Route taken by the protesters.
1. Musa Kazim Pasha Attempt to turn the processions northwards.
2. The procession advancing along the long route.
3. The mass turned round and faced the square.
symbolic use. Thus, by choosing to walk along residential streets rather than through
the Square occupied by the British police, the Palestinian Arabs aimed at reclaiming,
“possessing,” their daily environment. The practice of “possessing” space, even
temporarily, whether private or public, is appropriation. This act of possession or re-
possession of the daily environment of inhabitants challenges the established social
order identified with the dominate powers. In other words, the temporal occupation of
space during the protest challenges rules, laws and social codes that govern that space.

The bargaining over the form of the protest created a conflict between the Arabs
parties. The younger Arabs insisted that the longer route should be taken. The older
Arabs and the President of the Palestinian Arab Executive in Jerusalem, Musa Kazim
Pasha, favored the short route.22 On October 26th and on the morning of the 27th,
meetings were held in Jaffa, with leaders of the Palestinian Arab executive council
from Jerusalem, to decide which route should be taken. However, no decision was
reached, which increased the uncertainty of the British police, and the disputes became
a by product of the symbolic display of collective purpose and control.

A message was conveyed to the British, warning them not to restrict the activity, and
stating that weapons, bombs, sticks, and stones would be used should an attempt
be made to disperse the demonstration.23 This threat gives credence to Canneti’s
observation that one of the most striking traits of the inner life of a mass is a feeling
of being persecuted, of anger and frustration directed against those it defines as
enemies.24 On the other hand, the Government and police, who failed to understand the
codes of the event, also insisted on maintaining control and order: “We are faced with
a situation we must tackle with grit and determination so as to assert our authority over
those who violate the law, and we must show to all and sundry that we are determined
to preserve law and order by every means in our power, as is our bounden duty.”25

At about 11:30 a.m, midday prayers commenced at the mosque. At noon, after prayer,
people emerged onto the port road and joined the mass of men and women already
assembled there. This confused the police, who assumed that the women were present
“solely for the purpose of embarrassing the police… to act as a buffer between the
mob and the police.”26 The procession set out and was joined by a large number of
people from the adjacent streets. At the junction where the port road enters the Clock
Tower Square, Musa Kazim Pasha, president of the Palestinian Arab Executive,
attempted to turn the procession northwards through the square to the District
Commissioner’s offices - “to make the procession take the short route…”27 However,
according to the report, “extremist” Palestinian Arabs prevented the diversion, and the
procession turned south towards Ajami Road, (i.e. along the line of the long route).
The authorities’ fears were realized. Another unexpected change occurred when, on
reaching Ajami Road, the people turned towards the Square, facing the police. At this
point the British police confronted the intimidating spectacle of the mass descending
the slope into the Square (Figure 5).
The images of the demonstrators marching down the hill towards the Square confirm that they were talking or clustering in groups. Hence, at this juncture, it is difficult to decide whether going down the hill was intended to shorten the route or to actually confront the police. However, it is clear that this change of route was interpreted by the police as a provocation. In the photograph, the mass and the police face each other. There are about 60 policemen on foot, armed with batons, and some 40 unarmed mounted police forming a corridor behind them. Some of the estimated mass of 8,800 were armed with stones and sticks. The photograph shows clearly the formal array of policemen facing the informality of the mass.

The report states that shouting began. There were calls for violence. Some people shouted “Attack them!” The first police action was a call in Arabic for the mass to disperse, which produced no effect. Police Officer Faraday, commanding the police force, ordered a charge with batons, and the foot police rushed at the crowd and forced it back up Ajami Road. The road was clear, and the corners of the two roads running into Clock Tower Square - Port Road and Siksik Street - were also clear. The mass re-formed, and attacked the police with stones, bottles, pieces of iron and wood, etc. The police were ordered to advance again, and the mass retreated, but then returned. The time was 12:15. To understand this hostility between the mass and the police, one must take into account that a crowd, once formed, tends to grow rapidly, with great power and with a determination that is reinforced by an attack from the outside.28
A firing party that had been kept out of sight at police barricades was ordered out into the Square. At the same time, some mounted police came out of Suq El Khudra and Siksik Street, and from Ajami Road. These, through slipping on the asphalt, fell down with their riders and created confusion and chaos. While this was happening, violence and use of firearms on both sides continued, resulting in many wounded and dead.

Protest as Spatial Dialogue

These depictions of the event present the complexity of tensions between the people’s violence and the social order. These complex relations between violence and order have emerged, in part, with the advent of the modern state attempting to decide what violence is legitimate, and what is not. Violence that is not state-inflicted is perceived as a crime, hence the difference between violence that is ordered, and violence that threatens order. Violent political action attempts to maximize relatively insubstantial resources, but it exposes activists to the possible cost of such behaviour (i.e. death, loss of freedom, physical injury). However, protesters seldom aim at reaching the point of violence, but rather rely on the effect of its implicit threat. Protest is thus perceived as a strategy by which groups of people manipulate fear of disorder and violence while, at the same time, protecting themselves from paying the potentially extreme costs of using such a strategy. So, what caused the violence in Jaffa? Could it have been avoided? Are violence and protest always interconnected? At least one of the reasons for the violence was the unexpected use of the space, and the modified form of the procession. Later, when the British approved future demonstrations initiated by the Palestinian Arabs, political violence and protests were not seen as one and the same thing.

Furthermore, this march, generated by grievances against a particular policy, aimed at strengthening the shared narrative of the community, by forming a spatial “dialogue” between citizens and other citizens. This dialogue, between the regime, which is not a participant, and citizens, who are physically and politically present, offers a unique social phenomenon that informs us about the relationship between civil action and space. So, when discussing protests as bargaining processes, we need to ask, where does the action take place? Is it in a formal or informal space? How does the space represent the relationships between the citizen and the state, and how do these relationships affect codes of behaviour? In the case of the Jaffa protest, as opposed to those that take place in formal civic spaces planned for that purpose, we can say it was initiated as a ‘counter-hegemony space’ protest, without the aim of using the specific setting of a plaza to restrict mass movement or form a “closed crowd.” This does not imply that buildings played no role in the event discussed. On the contrary, they were reference points (e.g. the mosque), but it was urbanity that came into play, as is often the case with processions that encourage an “open crowd,” with no limits whatsoever on its growth. Thus, the remark made by a reporter after the protest,
that one of the problems in Palestine is that there is no Hyde Park, Union Square, or plaza to serve as the traditional forum for passive expression of views, again misinterprets the codes of protest and their symbolic form. In other words, Jaffa’s public space use (i.e. the mosque, the bazaar) differs from the use of the traditional public spaces of the European or the British city (i.e. squares, parks), which impose a formal regulated array of a procession in front of government offices. The procession as a social phenomenon is as unique overlap of urban setting and cultural codes of collective behaviour embedded in a state-citizenship context. This overlap changes from one protest to another, from one socio-cultural setting to another. Moreover, as noted, the procession serves both as a mechanism for forming an imagined community through resistance, and as a device for negotiating with the government. The British misunderstanding of this duality resulted in a broken process of negotiation.32

Another problem was that the British did not realize that space in political gatherings is a struggle over meaning. This conception, and in particular anthropological theories, addresses the act of protest as a particular type of ceremony in which the urban space functions as a public forum for voicing disagreements.33 The spatial form of protest has pragmatic and symbolic meanings embedded in cultural codes that were disregarded by the authorities. The path from the mosque, through the residential areas, past the spectators, along the avenue, all suggested reclaiming the community’s everyday space. In other words, the aim of the procession-taking place in the daily sphere of the Palestinian community was also to re-acknowledge the community sphere with its institutional buildings and residential areas, as alternative to the spatial order imposed by the government with their formal institutions located in the Square. This act of appropriating daily space during protests is a way of voicing collective grievances as the expression and embodiment of oppositional consciousness in a system of domination. Oppositional consciousness fosters a sense of efficacy and promotes the belief that acting collectivity can bring about change.

Finally, political processions are not divorced from the regime’s political power; on the contrary, they are embedded in patterns of control. Thus, the power of the state to permit and limit the tactics of citizens is not an anachronistic issue but is still relevant today when addressing the relationships between regimes, whether democratic or not, and contentious politics. Tracing and analyzing the path of a particular political march provides insight regarding the opportunities and limitations of citizens for open debate, dissent, and resistance as well as the way space is used as a strategic tool in the design of dissent. In the case presented, the Clock Tower Square in Jaffa of 1933 was the place where politics was made concrete for the Palestinian Arab community – a place that, since its occupation by the Israeli force during the 1948 War has been partially destroyed and significantly neglected. However, since 2005, the square has undergone major restorations that have given the place a spotless new face, which have veiled its conflicted history and its significant civic role and relationship to the absent Palestinian Arab community in the city.
Endnotes


3 Ibid, p.207.


5 The rapid influx of Jews in Palestine in the years to come was also a response to widespread persecution in central Europe.

6 In the British documents Palestinian Arabs are named as Arabs, to avoid confusion I used the terms Palestinian Arab community and Palestinian Jewish community throughout the paper.

7 On the 9th of October, Mr. Hall, the officer administrating the Government, sent for Musa Kazim Pasha, pointing out to him that no political procession had been allowed since the disturbances of 1929 and that the government would not allow a procession in Jerusalem, and advised him to have the resolution of the Executive cancelled. The administrator also stated that Pasha’s group should apply through the legal channels for holding a protest. Palestine Gazette, dated 16th November, 1933, Faraday Collection, Box 2, File 2(1), Middle-East Center Archive, St. Anthony College, Oxford (MECA). p.90.

8 Ibid., p.92.


10 Most documents are to be found in the Faraday collection in the Middle-East Center Archive, St. Anthony College, Oxford (MECA). John Faraday (1899-1986), was born in California to British parents. He joined the British police force in 1923 and was posted to Palestine in 1924. He participated in the events discussed.

11 *Illustrated London News*, November 11th 1933; *Falastin* (Arabic), November 12th 1933; *Iton Meuchad* (Hebrew) November 4th 1933, Faraday Collection, Box 2, File 1 (MECA).

12 The British government had acquired mandatory control over Palestine at the end of World War I with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire (1920-1948).

13 This development outside the city wall is characteristic of modern urbanization of medieval cities worldwide. For further discussion on Jaffa urbanization see Kark (1990).

14 On the formal decision in 8.4.21, see: *Yediot Iriat Tel Aviv*, Tel Aviv Historical Archive, 1921.

15 For further readings about protests in Tel Aviv prior and after the establishment of Israel see, Tali Hatuka, Rachel Kallus, “The Architecture of Repeated Rituals” *Journal of Architectural Education*, volume 61 no. 4, 2008 (pp.85-94).

16 The original date was October 20th but this was apparently altered to the 27th because of the Jaffa lawn tennis tournament, fixed for the 20th, for one of the leaders was very interested in the tournament (Palestine Gazette, 1933, p.93).

17 Ibid.

18 As Canetti says, “The destruction of representational images is the destruction of a hierarchy which is no longer recognized. It is a violation of generally established and universally visible and valid distances.” Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power* (Viking Press: New York, 1962, p.19).

19 Ibid, p.16.

20 Palestine Gazette, 1933, p.94.


22 Palestine Gazette, 1933, p.95.

23 District Police Headquarters, Police Dispositions for Friday 27th October 1933, 25th October, 1933 *Faraday Collection* Box 1, file 1, (MECA).

24 Canetti, 1962, p.23.

25 District Police Headquarters, 1933.

26 Ibid.
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