

Cultural Collateral Damage: The Cancellation of Jordan's Jerash Festival 2006

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Jerash Festival of Arts and Culture ran twenty-five times between 1981 and 2007. The festival had been suspended twice, both times because Israel invaded Lebanon, first in 1982 (the festival's second year), and again in 2006, which would have been the festival's quarter-century anniversary—an event I had traveled to Jordan to witness and research.¹ This essay contextualizes the nonevent of Jerash Festival. I read the *absence* of this cultural event as revealing a *presence* of another kind, that is, of looming forces of international politics, especially Israeli and U.S. military operations, which render powerful repercussions on live entertainment performance, especially in the elaborate setting of festivals, and especially festivals in the Arab world. Borrowing a military euphemism, these effects can be considered “cultural collateral damage,” indirect repercussions of military violence on the cultural sphere. En route to those ideas, I consider Jerash in the context of festivals generally and describe the geopolitical landscape of Jordan, in which festivals, alongside other modes of public expression, do or do not happen.

What Jerash Festival Was

“Festival” is not a monolithic phenomenon, so a brief taxonomy helps to position Jerash amid the variety of types. First is the question of *scale*, in which Jerash would be considered one of the larger, state sponsored affairs in contrast to smaller, local events, as in neighborhood religious celebrations. Another broad distinction lies in the *content*, in what a festival offers. One class of content irrelevant to this paper is the noncultural (for instance, Dubai's Shopping Festival). Festivals that do present culture can be split broadly into mixed genre or single genre (e.g., music, dance, film, or theatre). Both Jordan's Jerash and Lebanon's Baalbakk [or Baalbeck or Baalbek] offer an array of music, dance, and theatre, including traditional or folk performances. Several Arab world festivals are dedicated solely to theatre, and like festivals elsewhere, these further refine their focus by geography or subgenre. At least two specialize in theatre from the Arab or African regions: Syria and Tunisia alternate years presenting the former's Damascus Theatre Festival and the latter's Carthage Theatre Days (*Journées Théâtrales de Carthage*). Israel's

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Acco Festival of Alternative Israeli Theatre, which purports to include Palestinians, frames itself by both place (nation) and sub-genre (alternative theatre).² Two Arab-world theatre festivals limit themselves to contemporary, avant-garde, or experimental work. In Jordan, an independent theatre company, Al-Fawanees (“Lanterns”), hosts the Amman Festival (the most government-independent festival of the region),³ and Egypt has the Cairo Experimental (*Tajribi*) Festival, which has drawn the most English-language coverage.⁴ Other Arab world festivals focus on children’s theatre, music, or dance. Marvin Carlson’s survey names many of these Arab-world varieties.⁵

A third variable involves the *setting*. Such festivals call attention to one specific location. Jerash Festival thus promoted a particular space, a compound of Roman ruins, for reasons I return to below. Lebanon’s Baalbakk and Tunisia’s Carthage Theatre Days are also set amid ruins. Festivals set in and named for large cities (e.g., Damascus) often aim for urban rejuvenation.⁶ Jordan’s recent subsuming of Jerash into a nationwide Jordan Festival marks a shift in the symbolic strategy of setting, with hopes to spread tourism across multiple sites and perhaps to highlight the nation in the map of world culture. A fourth variable speaks to festivals’ orientation to *audience*, as in connoisseur or general public. In geographic terms, a festival can target foreigners, its own country, or its region (a taxonomy Al-Hamarneh and Steiner use to compare the effects of Arab tourism after September 11).⁷ Jerash Festival targeted a mixture of Jordanians, Arabs across the region, and also cultural tourists from abroad (as its bilingual promotion suggests).

Separate festivals can be linked into a global network—not an actual bureaucracy, but a transnational cultural zone, called an “integrated cultural realm” or a “recreational geography,” as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett says of museums.⁸ These far flung events are linked as a festival circuit (by artists), or a map/calendar of festivals (by tourists), or a map of rivals (by organizers). In Arab cultural cartography, Lebanon’s Baalbakk, Tunisia’s Carthage Theatre Days, and Egypt’s Cairo Experimental Festival are the touchstones, the region’s reference points. Jordan’s airline magazine article promoting the 2006 event quoted the Jerash director’s boast that “we cover more artistic fields” than do Baalbakk and Carthage.⁹ In practical terms, this network of festivals makes for easier touring for artists, compared to coordinating separate venues, and it becomes especially useful for Arab performers working in strained situations. Frédéric Maurin recognizes some artists’ dependence on such circuits for two reasons, the first artistic,¹⁰ such as when during Jordan’s theatrically lean 1960s, well before Jerash, some actors commissioned an original play to bring to Syria’s Damascus Theatre Festival.¹¹ Second, Maurin notes the obvious financial benefits of playing festivals, but like others who comment on the circuit he neglects a third benefit, the political advantage; Palestinian artists constrained in self-expression and mobility, for example, can find easier pathways and better exposure by touring foreign festivals (given the clout of the auspices

and the packaged logistics of travel).¹²

Jerash Festival was positioned within this circuit of festivals, or, as a 2006 organizer boasted, “year by year it grew into the most unique and spotlighted festival in the Arab world.”¹³ But what are these phenomena? Although scholarship on festivals is scattered and limited—it has only begun to solidify as a book or conference theme—the existing writings largely reinforce one another’s grounding definitions. Foremost, it takes the form of an “event.” A mini-encyclopedic entry in *Performance Research* says it *is* an event, while Stanley Waterman says that festivals *offer* an event for consumption.¹⁴ Both glosses distinguish it as ephemeral, unlike an ongoing event (a re-enactment museum), a solid commodity, or a recorded performance (though commercial mementos and recordings are often integral to the event). Various commentators characterize the event by its compact assemblage: “a gathering of that which has been scattered” (director Peter Sellars), “condensed packages of associated artistic events” (*Performance Research*), or events in “a concentrated form” (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett).¹⁵ This concentration intensifies the experience of visitor and participant—and magnifies the loss when cancelled. As the term “package” suggests, festivals, unlike riots or a lively neighborhood, are orchestrated and controlled (that is, not spontaneous and anarchic). For some critics, festivals are tamed versions of carnival. Waterman further defines the festival as cyclic (usually annual or biennial).¹⁶ In cancelling Jerash, this dependable regularity, this reinforcement of custom for attendees and workers, was ruptured, perhaps partly explaining why the following year’s festival in 2007 saw low turnout.

The compact, ephemeral event of Jerash Festival spanned several days in late July or early August, every year except for the two interruptions of the cycle (1982 and 2006). The festival occupied a compound of Roman ruins in Jerash, a smaller city an hour northward (or 48 kilometers) from the capital, Amman, a setting that comprised much of its appeal. The ruins are central to the promotion and interpretation of the festival. A perky 1984 report in a Western-oriented Arab magazine highlights the practical features of the site, its scale, and variety:

The sprawling, well-preserved antiquities of the large Roman city with its two theatres, several temples, colonnaded streets, oval piazza, and ample open areas permitted guests to stroll at their leisure through the exhibits, rest among the ruins at will and choose from the 10 different activities taking place simultaneously.

To this Jordanian journalist, the backdrop of the ancient ruins fostered sensual and social pleasures:

[A]s a result, the festival took on a permanently bustling yet relaxed atmosphere: thousands of families strolling up and down the colonnaded streets, eating and drinking, enjoying an exhibit, listening to a music group, watching a folkloric performance, chatting with friends or simply sitting down on a fallen second-century Corinthian column capital and enjoying the spectacle of an ancient city ablaze with lights and the sounds of tens of thousands of people making—and enjoying—music and art.¹⁷

The magazine description, a kind of *flâneur*-for-families, seems to have been accurate, though it was probably styled to meet Western expectations of the experience. A few Arab acquaintances remembered from the same era not strolling with their families, but attending single events, such as a concert by a foreign political singer it would otherwise have been hard for them to hear live. The fact that events were ticketed separately (and some priced prohibitively) may have fostered some attendees' orientation to single events. No one who spoke to me (besides the archeologist) invoked the ruins perhaps because, with Roman residue still standing in Amman, Petra, and other places around the country, residents are familiar with ruins—rather, it was the festival's concentrated assemblage of cultural events that would have seemed notable to them.

Yet the ruins did matter: they supplied significance as well as function and pleasure. Queen Noor's foreword to the 1998 program suggests that the Jerash festival continues Roman rites held on the site, as the festival director had done in 1997. They thereby present Jordan as an extension of the supposed cradle of civilization: in the ancient empire, as now, the festival "made its citizens feel that they were truly 'citizens of the world'."¹⁸ This continuity model of ancient-to-recent festivals is echoed in Maurin's preface to an issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* dedicated to festivals.¹⁹ While the continuity hypothesis seems appealing, cultural scholars tend to agree that festivals signal *modernity*, specifically the modern nation-state, even as they feature traditional folk culture, as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett argues for non Arab cases.²⁰ Festivals lend cosmopolitan cachet, or "capital," to the area, even when the site is an ancient ruin, as some Jerash programs' rhetoric seemed to underscore. Through festivals, the state uses the local to connect to the global, or rural heritage to signal the cosmopolitan.

Folklorist Torunn Selberg sees such local-global encounters optimistically as "a space where relations between global, national, regional, and local levels are discussed, negotiated, and, perhaps, redefined" (at least for his case of Norway).²¹ Jerash Festival did juxtapose these strata, involving workers and the mayor at the local level, insisting on a quota of national performers, featuring a "guest country" (for some years), and scheduling regional celebrities as well as lesser known artists from distant continents. Attendees, too, manifested some mix from local

Jerash townspeople, to other residents of Jordan, to other Arab visitors, to distant foreigners—though attendance statistics are elusive. Juxtaposition alone, however, does not fulfill Selberg’s vision of transforming those relations. The magazine quoted above extolled instead the experiences of “families . . . and their friends,” not of strangers interacting; Jerash promotion often foregrounds the opportunity for Jordanian *artists*, not attendees, to meet foreign counterparts. Whether the festival propagates the state’s status as modern or opens space for multi-strata social negotiations, and aside from the question of whether these are good effects, clearly its *potential* to do either is lost when the festival cannot happen.

Jerash Festival expanded and changed character from its early 1980s beginnings to the early 2000s. Originally based in only one amphitheatre, the festival presented mainly “folk” performances, foreign or domestic, or other forms of national heritage. That traditional populism continued, welcoming troupes from Zimbabwe, Slovakia, Palestine, Tunisia, and Poland who usually presented costumed dance to instrumental music.²² Jerash Festival regularly included Caucasian or Circasian folklore (understood as part of Jordan’s culture). An early chairperson articulated a deliberate emphasis on folk art as the best ambassador of foreign culture, since this would be “closer to the heart and tastes of the Jordanian public,”²³ a vision quite distinct from the avant-garde aesthetics that curates folk forms into other festivals.²⁴ The festival director at the same time defined the ethos as “non-elitist and non-specialized.” This ethos did manage to encompass a wide variety:

Chinese acrobats; American bluegrass music; local rock and traditional Arab music; Scottish bagpipers and drummers; Arabic poetry readings and literary discussions; Jordanian productions of local plays; five different Jordanian folklore troupes and the Jordanian armed forces band.²⁵

The festival’s scope makes room for rock music (if home-grown), further reaches of Asia (China), typical hallmarks of foreign culture (Scottish bagpipes), and the unusual genre of military music (which in Jordan relies on bagpipes), while it excluded Western classics, experimental art, and mass-media entertainment. The producers also delegated space for material culture, using the colonnade for handicraft markets (demonstrating as well as selling). Jerash has also long included books, but as the least discussed feature of the festival, it is not clear how these cultural products fit the overall curatorial vision—that is, whether books too were mainly local, Arabic, or traditional.

This vision shifted as ongoing archeological excavation expanded the site,²⁶ creating more room for events, and as the mission changed. After explicitly eschewing “more sophisticated art forms such as symphony orchestras or Shakespearean drama”²⁷ in 1984, the festival later presented both.²⁸ By 1997,

the program had expanded two ways, toward Western high-brow (e.g., baroque orchestras), and commercial pop music and DJ-ing. It was the latter, the slide toward mass-media entertainment, that provoked complaints the festival had declined, a criticism I heard in professional circles. The U.S.-educated director from the late 1990s onward, Jeryes Samawi, who was simultaneously Minister of Culture, internationalized the poetry symposium beyond Arab writers and welcomed the ballet *Swan Lake*, changes he reported with visible pride during our interview and in press coverage.²⁹ Though Samawi designed and curated programming, he like any festival director had to align his vision with the wishes of others, perhaps especially the Queen and Princess who sat on the board; presumably the tide turned at all levels of festival administration. Yet, this backroom decision making and whatever debates it entailed remain obscure. As it incorporated elite and commercial entertainment, the late 1990s slate did not abandon Arab arts—Samawi established a formal celebration of one Arab music instrument each year.³⁰ The domestic emphasis on the earlier vision—“above all, to provide a showcase for Jordanian artists”—was not fully erased, as the organizers upheld a quota of Jordanian participation, but the contour of the festival had been drastically redrawn. Thus, while in the early 1980s the promotional discourse located the festival’s value in honoring *traditional* forms, by 2006 it celebrated a *diverse spectrum* of forms—high, popular, or folk. In the early years the festival defined itself by type of culture, that is, folk in contrast to “elitist or Western arts,”³¹ yet two decades later it defined itself by cultural *event*, that is, broad in contrast to narrow festival programming.

Besides Shakespeare, how did theatre fit into Jerash? Modern drama had some presence in the festival. Even the mid-1980s inventory includes “Jordanian productions of local plays,” and programs from the early 2000s list lesser known Jordanian plays, several of which I note below. The festival also presented better known Arabic playwrights, as when Alfred Faraj’s (Frag) *The Good and the Bad* took the main stage in 1998. Besides these and the many shows aimed at children, however, theatre occupied a smaller proportion than did music, singing, and dance.³² It is hard to fathom, then, why the 2005 festival committee chose as a tagline the metaphorical phrase “Jerash Festival: Theatre to the World.” It may have been some brahmin’s pet idea; it may have been designed to promote theatre as a viable genre within Jordan (which does seem valued in children’s and students’ culture); or to use “theatre” to mean a portal, a window onto world culture for Jordanians; or quite differently, to position Jerash as a major node within the global network of cultural events, a cornucopia of culture for worldwide visitors. Such taglines appear only on recent programs and posters; forewords appeared in earlier programs but then disappeared.

To understand the stature of drama in Jordanian culture, it helps to take a brief detour over the landscape of Jordan’s theatrical performances outside the festival. There are certainly glimmerings of theatre. Both its public university campuses,

Yarmouk and Amman, house active theatre departments; that summer I saw the construction sites of new theatres on the Amman campus, and the department chair described large developments in theatre studies there, encouraged by the royal family.³³ The avant-garde Amman Festival happens in the fall, as it did in 2006 (though the Al-Fawanees group leaves a regrettably slim print trail in English).³⁴ Other ostensibly independent but more mainstream organizations, notably the Queen Noor Foundation, run theatre, dance, and visual arts programs for children. Besides receiving foreign visiting shows, occasionally Amman generates its own large productions (buttressed by foreign funding), such as the nineteenth-century German opera *Abu Hassan* that was slated to re-appear at Jerash Festival in 2006. A regional innovation appears annually in the form of “Ramadan theatre,” dinner theatre for Muslims breaking their daytime fast.³⁵

Yet when the hostess of a gathering asked what I had come to study, and I answered “theatre,” she exclaimed with amusement, “here?!” Jordan has not forged a thick performance culture, relative to nearby Syria, Lebanon, or Egypt, as even upbeat reports have to admit. Celebrating UNESCO’s designation of Amman as 2002 “Cultural Capital of the Arab World,” a glossy oil company cultural magazine described Jordan’s “serious” theatre as merely “building for the future,” rather than as currently thriving.³⁶ Ghassan Al-Haddad’s Ph.D. dissertation centers on explaining why Jordan has not developed a thriving theatre, a failure he attributes less to politics (besides a cryptic reference to the first Gulf War) than to Arab misunderstanding of Western drama theory in combination with cultural restraints on women, gender mixing, and emotional display.³⁷ More prominent Arabic theatre scholars diagnose obstacles to Arabic drama more regionally and historically, pointing to the challenges inherent in the language, that is, the forced choice between local or standard idiom.³⁸ A fuller explanation of Jordan’s performance problems, which remains to be articulated in English, would need to integrate an array of factors: its small population of five million; its colonial history, which imposed British social and cultural forms, including film and radio on a nomadic society that had not established its own dramatic theatre culture (though, paradoxically, television regularly airs live plays and so perpetuates a popular dramatic canon); its suppression of communist and socialist movements, which sometimes fostered conditions amenable to theatre; the lack of artists’ unions or a national theatre; the lack of an independent arts council; and perhaps, as elsewhere, the effects of globalized media and corporate sponsorship. Jerash Festival arose as an antidote to this undeniable shortage. An earlier chairperson, Leila Sharaf, quoted in the glossy oil company magazine, invoked this very deficiency to highlight the value of the festival: “[T]he long years of stagnation of arts in Jordan’s modern history, coupled with Jordan’s lack of a strong historical artistic tradition such as existed in Damascus, Cairo or Baghdad, mean we need something to breathe some life into the culture and arts,” that something being Jerash Festival.³⁹

The layout of the festival was a constellation of unequal parts. The event spread across the elaborate compound of ruins, with lights rigged atop columns, crafts sold from stone stalls that had been Roman empire shops, and spectacles appearing in the hippodrome (a plaza encircled by columns). The large amphitheatre called South Theatre, seating thousands, presented the headline shows, like the region's pop singers, ranging from leftist Marcel Khalifeh, octogenarian Wadi Safi, to the light MTV-style of Nancy (all from Lebanon); these charged the highest ticket prices (up to 15JD, roughly \$21, but organizers promised a 12JD cap, \$17, for 2006).⁴⁰ Some interlocutors recalled that, as university students in the late 1980s and early 1990s, they could not afford the celebrity concerts (about \$25). Classical and national folk shows also used the large theatre, though for cheaper tickets. A mid-sized amphitheatre, restored fifteen years after the festival began, staged large but not blockbuster shows, as for example in 2005 a marimba soloist and the Pakistani "Sufi-rock" group, Jounoun (costing around 5JD, or \$7). The Artemis temple (sometimes written "Artimes"), furnished for performance, held three children's plays and a local one-man play, *The Joker*; that same year. As the festival expanded to other sites and the capital, some of the scripted drama was routed to the state theatre in Amman, as were two dramatic monologues of historical figures, the poet Gibran Khalil Bibran (2004), and a sultana, Shajarat Al-Durr (2005). All these venues sat dark after the cancellation in 2006.⁴¹

Although I classified Jerash as one of the large-scale, state-run festivals, in fact it drew little funding directly from the state, and therefore could describe itself as independent, or nongovernmental, a distinction from most Arab-world cultural festivals, which are state sponsored.⁴² Its funding came from an eclectic assortment of contributors: the domestic cement industry, French tourist agencies, and once Coca-Cola, then Pepsi. Yet it might be more accurately considered quasi-governmental. The oft-repeated history roots itself in Queen Noor's collaboration with the nearby state university, Yarmouk, in 1981, soon after the school had established the country's first department of theatre. I heard competing accounts of the origins. Whatever its genesis, Queen Noor headed the festival's first Higher Committee,⁴³ her voice frames earlier brochures, royal portraits decorate programs, and the organizational board has continually included ministers and other royal family members. National television (JRTC) both sponsored and aired the events. The festival's security and transportation were supplied by the military (as a Jordanian activist informed me). Its volunteer guides were recruited from the national university; two Yarmouk alumni who self-identify as leftist remembered the festival as a mainstream, pro-monarchy affair, and students who joined the volunteer staff as naïve or politically conservative. Also, the festival must interact with the national Department of Antiquities, which manages the archeological site year-round, albeit in negotiations archeologists described as tense—a rare sign of internal conflict associated with the government.

Studying Jerash Festival, 2006

My fieldwork project aimed to gauge how Jerash Festival manifested the tensions—local/global, culture/commerce, authority/people—that such “concentrated packages” embody in the context of a particular Arab nation. Although Jerash Festival seemed to lend itself to cultural analysis along several lines of thought, it had not yet been studied (in English). Granted, from business-oriented fields come mentions of techniques like a “Tourism Impact Attitude Scale” measuring “attitude items” of Jerash attendees,⁴⁴ but humanities and critical social science scholars have not discussed the festival, except in inventories of national or Arabic arts. Even the longest English-language monograph on theatre in Jordan, Al-Haddad’s dissertation, does not cover the country’s festivals. In general, Arab-world festivals receive less attention than do either festivals elsewhere or other aspects of Arabic culture, notably the exotic (Islamic performance) or the accessible (translated novels). Besides Marvin Carlson’s panoramic survey of Arab-world festivals, the few performance writings to address them fall in the genre of *review*, as Edward Ziter reports on Syria’s Damascus Festival, distinct from an essay analysis of the entire phenomenon.⁴⁵ One of the thickest analyses of a festival emerges from Middle East studies, in Christopher Stone’s critical history of Lebanon’s Baalbakk festival, which reconstructs the ideological process of the festival committee’s choices, though his larger focus is one music family.⁴⁶ In general, the weak interaction between Middle East studies and performance or theatre studies leaves Arab festivals rather neglected in scholarship, a gap I had hoped my project would help to bridge.

In 2006, funded by a modest grant,⁴⁷ I spent the summer in Jordan, framing my visit with the international Middle East studies conference in Amman at the beginning, and the Jerash Festival at the finale. During fieldwork intended to expose me to theatre, I passed weeks without seeing live performance. The World Congress for Middle Eastern Studies presented other entertainments in several cultural venues, but no theatre (which was scarcely represented in daytime panels as well). For a New Yorker accustomed to relying on print and digital data, like calendars or phone books, I found it challenging to locate information about events in Amman, which more often flows through informal, human channels, for reasons largely related to the economics of staffing and printing rather than to a different orality/text relationship; newspapers and magazines, after all, are abundant and ubiquitous, and the radio is not as favored as in similar countries. On the other hand, my reliance on printed matter for navigation (maps), a reliance not shared by most Jordanians, probably does point to certain differences in print culture. I forwent “Race: The Roman Army and Chariot Experience,” a touristic spectacle of Roman gladiators operated by a European entrepreneur; I missed the itinerant circus that camped for a while on a field alongside the thoroughfare; and I never got hold of the program for municipal events scheduled in Amman’s downtown

Roman theatre. The prolific comic actor Nabil Sawalha, who straddles theatre and television and ventures political criticism on stage, was not then performing; his once home-base theatre sat dusty and closed near what the residents call Rainbow Street (though maps say otherwise).

I did attend what may have been the only locally running play, a low-budget “social comedy” called “O, Good People, for God’s Sake [Give]” (*Lillah ya muhsineen*), meaning roughly “Please, Sir, can you spare a dime.” Staged in a conventional proscenium theatre in downtown Amman, the play followed a family from a life of *Three-Penny-Opera*-style begging to their mishaps running a nightclub, sprinkled with jokes about Jordan’s economy, malapropisms, a satire of oral poetry, a performance-in-a-performance (lip-syncing a pop song), and a buffoonish ethnic role (desert Bedouin) who turns out to be a government spy. The actors seemed on par with comic actors anywhere, far outshining the low-budget sets and a loosely cobbled playscript. Otherwise, awaiting the festival, I absorbed daily life in the capital, observing the broader cultural patterns in streets, markets, and a few arts venues, acclimating myself to the ubiquitous portraits of King Abdullah, visible on every shop wall, and the lack of criticism of him anywhere. I witnessed how World Cup soccer captivated attention, watched on televisions in homes and shops, but also in public plazas, where crowds of men gathered to watch outdoor screenings at the state’s expense because most people could not afford the cable service that monopolized coverage of the games.

In July, the workaday normality of Amman lurched when new violence erupted nearby: the Israeli battle against Hezbollah in Lebanon.⁴⁸ Though Jordan seems to sally forth alongside the ongoing Palestinian occupation and even the Iraq war (both abutting its borders), the relentless images of bombed buildings and civilian casualties in southern Lebanon caused a drastic shift in public mood. Television sets in shops and homes stayed tuned-in to gruesome coverage of the war, as earlier these had unfailingly shown World Cup matches. I heard rumors that officials might cancel Jerash Festival, given the sobriety of the moment. Days before the festival’s start date, the clerk renewing my visa confirmed the rumor. The same clerk, in a sardonic suggestion that I should complain to my government, expressed rather directly the sense many Jordanians harbored more quietly: that U.S. support (by material weapons and political justifications) enabled the Israeli attack on Lebanon, which in turn forced the cancellation of the festival. From a theatre perspective, the U.S. fostered cultural collateral damage, or conditions in which Jerash Festival could not happen. My fieldwork went with it.

Studying Jerash Festival Cancelled

With the festival cancelled, I confronted a basic point about any analysis of a cultural production: *the event has to happen*. Writings about festivals often take for granted that no war, influx of refugees, or mass outcry has stopped the event from

happening, from being attended by me or another tourist. Yet when a cultural event does not happen because it had to be cancelled, something else does happen—an event of a different kind, cultural collateral damage wreaked by violent political forces that loom over the region. This negative is worth analyzing in the context of theatre, albeit not by the methods of conventional dramatic criticism.

How can we think about a nonhappening? There is no corpus of writings about *nonexisting* events or cultural collateral damage. Scholarship on Palestinian theatre recognizes a deliberate and direct policy of violence on culture, but this mode of targeted assault should be distinguished from the more indirect, “collateral” effects I describe here. Writers who encountered cancelling or absence elsewhere mention them as a mere passing moment of fieldwork.⁴⁹ Within the recent anthology on Middle East culture, *Colors of Enchantment*, Deborah Kapchan narrates her disappointment when, funded by a Fulbright fellowship to study Moroccan theatre, she found the main venue closed—not due to violence, but the innocuous purpose of renovation; she then pivoted to another site, engaged another genre, and thus centers her article on the political themes inhering in the very happening of poetry in Morocco.⁵⁰ In Kapchan’s fieldwork, the political lay in the events she ultimately did witness, the practices and events that happened; in my fieldwork, the political lay in the canceling, the nonhappening, of the very event I had come to witness. Instead of interpreting the political connotations in a single show in the festival, or of reading the full gamut of the festival as a signal of the state’s self-image, I read the absence of them as a symbol of political violence. The very complexity of festivals that renders them useful for artists, consumers, and scholars reflects a scale—in terms of physical space, numbers of bodies, and quantities of monies involved—that also renders them sensitive to political events, especially violence, even when it happens far from the site. A large-scale, cyclical event requires conditions that are unfit for war. Festivals require what other parts of the tourism industry require: “political stability, peace, security, and the potential for intercultural dialogue” free from mental or physical obstruction.⁵¹ Military operations also generate other material repercussions, as mass violence interrupts the flows of goods, routes public funds to military and security expenses, and for other reasons strains national finances. Volatility frightens off donors and investors, not only for concerns about profit, but for nuances of political resonances.

To understand the nonevent of Jerash Festival, the first step requires constructing a context, starting with a history. Indeed, the canceling of the 2006 Jerash Festival due to large-scale violence was hardly new. Other festivals have similarly broken their cycles for reasons related to U.S. policy in the Middle East. First, Syria’s Damascus festival paused during the 1990s due to repercussions from the first U.S. Gulf War.⁵² Second, Jerash had been cancelled once before, in 1982, also because of an Israeli siege of Beirut (enabled, as Israeli operations are, by U.S. support). But even two cancellations of Jerash are overshadowed by

the mother of festival cancellations, the long suspension of Lebanon's Baalbakk festival from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s, during and after the country's civil war, (called "civil" though deeply embroiled with Israel's occupation of Palestine as well as interventions by the U.S.). Baalbakk, the first Arab festival set amid Roman ruins, had run for twenty years and enjoyed wide prestige, so its absence resonated powerfully.

Complicating any simple history of cultural collateral damage, we come across the fact that violent conflict has at times given rise to a festival wherein culture emerges as a byproduct—not a victim—of war. For example, Lebanon's civil war left a cultural vacuum in the region, making room and cause for Jerash Festival to come into being.⁵³ Also, in response to Iraq's 1990 invasion of Kuwait, the Egyptian government cancelled events, but defiant artists launched the Free Theatre Festival, arguing that art *should* happen precisely during conflict.⁵⁴ More directly still, Lebanon's other large event, the Beiteddine Festival, supposedly came into being as a response to Lebanon's civil war, founded by a politician as "a call for normality amidst the chaos and madness of war," according to its promotional material.⁵⁵

Beiteddine does not fit the definitions of festival glossed above, since it strings a series of one-off events across several weeks. In summer 2006, therefore, the early segment of the festival happened as planned (Ricky Martin), but the later segments coincided with the Israeli bombings, and so were cancelled (Liza Minnelli and *Stomp!*). Beiteddine's mountain palace entertainment, established as respite from one war, became too vulnerable to another war to happen. Here I turn from historical context to lateral, contemporaneous context, an atlas of nonevents. The Jerash cancellation happened amid a veritable community of cancellations that summer. The region's entire cultural zone fell within the climate of war, even in sites at a safe remove from the battles. Baalbakk was unlucky again for its position inside Israel's bombing range. In North Africa, Tunisia halted its Carthage Theatre Days. Celebrity singers cancelled concerts or suffered criticism in the press for going ahead with them. There is no systematic inventory of these repercussions, though, and it is difficult to assemble written records in English. Another repercussion of mass violence is in fact this loss of cultural history, as collateral damage often smudges its own trail. Beiteddine's promotion, for example, provides precise dates and names for other years, but left enigmatic silence about the 2006 fallout, which I learned about only through a *Washington Post* column.⁵⁶

As in the scholarship on festivals that happen, it seems useful to distinguish between types of festival cancellations. The main division separates the direct from indirect causality. Some of these events, that is, were cancelled for immediate, practical necessity, the threat of harm to bodies and the real destruction of sites. But not all the 2006 cancellations happened for practical or material necessity. Jerash, Carthage, and several pop music concerts sat a safe distance away from

the violence. These cancellations involved choice, if not in the primary conditions, then in the reaction to those conditions. These agents choose a kind of damage (cancelling events), perhaps some self-damage, in response to larger damage. Here my reading of the nonevent becomes more complex; in semiotic literary terms, the symbol is not a transparent vehicle for its referent, not a natural or straightforward reflection, as in, say, a naïve undergraduate's interpretation of drama as literally representing real events. It is not an index of violence, or an index of responses to violence. When cancellation becomes a message, it becomes a mediation, involving selection of some kind of language—even if here the code turns out to be silence. Interpreting that silence requires understanding of Jordan's geopolitics.

Public Political Expression in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

The cancelling of the festival happened in the complicated context of a West-friendly Arab nation. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, a small, dehydrated country, enters U.S. news mainly for being surrounded by neighboring conflicts (Israel/Palestine, Iraq, and Syria), or for having a former monarch, Queen Noor, who was a United States citizen; it itself has hardly seen war. Yet the country is deeply embedded in the troubles at its borders, which have delivered several influxes of Palestinian and Iraqi refugees, besides other interactions driven by trade, political alliances, and the need for foreign water. Ruled by Anglophone royalty, since the 1990s Jordan has operated under an "open-door" neo-liberal economic policy: transnational corporations increasingly pervade domestic commerce, or in pedestrian terms, American fast-food franchises crop up all over. As anywhere else, "liberal" economic policy does not automatically activate liberal social rights—Jordan grants no free speech protection to insults to the monarchs, for instance. (I heard no critical comments about the king, not even from artists, progressives, or intellectuals.) The point deserves mention when pro-globalization arguments hastily conflate liberal economics with social liberalism or free markets with freedom. Jordan also stands out for its government's accommodating agreements with Israel, a departure from the majority of both the Arab League as well as its own population.⁵⁷ The government's acquiescence to U.S. preferences over the desires of its own citizens gives rise to strong tensions internally, from both secular and Islamic corners, tensions that are increasingly contained by state regulation and, consequently, self-censorship.

With the onset of war, however, the Jordanian public demanded a mass, somber reaction, an implicit criticism of the Israeli assault on Lebanon. The mode of reaction, appropriate to the moment, precluded the "festivity" inherent in festival (the Arabic term has an analogous sense of joyous gathering: *muharjaan*). In casual conversation, a Palestinian undergraduate in Jordan commented, "I can't shake my hips to [pop singer] Nancy when Lebanon is being destroyed."⁵⁸ The public, from what I sensed, did not want Jerash Festival to go forward. The specter of Israel

bombarding Lebanon—crystallized in the macabre slaughter of fleeing civilians,⁵⁹ reflected in U.S. rationalizations, and reiterated through all media channels—stoked an apparently communal reaction among Arabs, a readiness to make or interpret charged symbols. The monarchs, parliament, and quasi-governmental Jerash Festival committee were forced to accommodate the widespread mood and cancelled the festival at a sizable economic loss. Meanwhile they had to finesse their responses to avoid disrupting friendly relations with Israel or the U.S. Squeezed into this complicated position, the Jerash Festival website referred to tragedy in Lebanon, and perhaps mentioned Palestine, without mentioning Israel (that webpage has since vanished).⁶⁰ In striking contrast, at Syria's theatre festival, the minister of culture "announced that Syria and all Arabs of the theatre were united in the struggle against Israel and in their support of the Iraqi insurgence."⁶¹

What is the symbolic process of the festival, or its negation? Peter Sellars's description of festivals invokes a carnivalesque quality: "It is a moment in which the world is turned upside down."⁶² Wittingly or not, he invokes a particular sense of carnival advanced by Soviet literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin as "*of* the people" in contrast to culture presented "*for* the people" as in a festival; this carnival channels a countercultural spirit expressed through parody and by upending status-quo categories.⁶³ But what happens when the world already seems upended? When President Bush blamed Syria for Israel's bombing and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called the spectacle of dead Lebanese "birth pangs," from the perspective of those close to the war, the symbolic modes that scholars attribute to carnival—ironic reversal, grotesque exaggeration, travesty, or the absurd—already surrounded them in real world events. Seen from close up, things clearly looked absurd. Carnival can be interpreted either in the romantic sense of subversive public expression,⁶⁴ or more cynically as a regulated pressure-valve that allows the people momentary subversions, like cross-dressing or mocking authority, as it preempts their outright rebellion.⁶⁵ Whichever the interpretation, however, carnival is another large public function sponsored by a larger political body, as are festivals. In Jordan, the gesture of canceling operates at this general level, where carnival is analogous to other large orchestrated gatherings. It works as a kind of inverting *the happening* of carnival, not an inverting *through* carnival, that is, by carnivalesque modes. Rather than people enjoying an event the authorities sponsor for them, the people pressure the authorities to shut it down. In 2001, during the Palestinian uprising, the festival went forth, but public pressure had shaped the festival programming to themes of Arab solidarity,⁶⁶ now not even artistic solidarity seemed appropriate. According to the festival director, as the board made the decision through an emergency meeting (minus Queen Noor) and telephone conversation, it encountered little opposition or debate.⁶⁷ Read optimistically, collective self-silence functions as a kind of voice, and cultural nonexistence can express the desire to exist in a different way. The public in this case crossed national borders in a temporary revival of pan-Arab

nationalism—a sensibility shared across separate Arab nation-states before 1967.

Although in Jordan I witnessed no dissent from this counter-festive silencing, Egypt saw a more complicated reaction to cultural decision making. Egypt's cultural complexity relative to Jordan is predictable, given its larger, older, and more layered cultural infrastructure, including several festivals and an active independent theatre scene. After the war began, the Egyptian Ministry of Culture did run its own state-sponsored event, but tried to cancel another series run by independent (non-governmental) auspices. According to the sardonic journalist Nehad Selahia, the state designated these "weaker independent groups" as "the cheapest sacrificial offering" to the expectations in the region.⁶⁸ Though delayed, the independent artists eventually opened their series, which included a company from Jordan.⁶⁹ To these artists, canceling did not represent collective mourning, but rather state domination and hypocrisy. Even this exception reflects the fact that cultural happenings across the region felt the impact of the war, in that the terms of the debate were informed by the conflict. Selaiha endorsed the artists' canceling-the-cancellation as a productive *reaction to* the war, not as a festivity carried out despite, or oblivious to, or as escape from, the horror.

How then did people in Jordan express their political responses? Perhaps not as an American might expect. Some Jordanians, pitying my loss of fieldwork, arranged for a personal tour of the ruins, a compensation prize. The site was quiet; nothing marked the cancellation except a half-constructed restaurant tucked in the side of an amphitheatre. For a moment I wondered why the canceling of the festival did not become a synecdoche of outrage, why the site of the would-have-been festival did not serve as a symbol of mourning and protest (with, say, placards associating the Roman empire with U.S. imperialism). Most obviously, the ruins sit by a minor town too far from the capital for impromptu collective action. Also, Jordan's Roman ruins hardly matter to local concerns beyond their functions in tourism, as decoration on money, or as a place to lean while smoking a cigarette. Perhaps the Jerash Festival as a whole matters less to the public than organizers or outsiders believe. But no other sites or symbols were adopted to express outrage over the war, for a more forceful reason: Jordanians are now banned from demonstrating in public. In the 1990s, Jordanians had manifested dissent over policies related to the U.S. and Israel, especially those related to Israel's occupation of Palestine and U.S. interference in the Middle East, both political and economic.⁷⁰ When the government does grant permits for demonstrations, their routes are steered to symbolically irrelevant spaces.⁷¹ And at some level, the government permits these outcries over *foreign* affairs in order to preempt rebellion over *domestic* problems,⁷² something like the more cynical gloss of the carnival as a pressure-valve. Even such constrained expressions diminished when, following the second Palestinian *intifada*, the ascent of the new king, and the events of September 11th, the Jordanian parliament and palace "imposed comprehensive bans on public

demonstrations, arrested activists opposed to normalization with Israel, and issued two new temporary laws that signified the government's unwillingness to tolerate organized public dissent or make any compromises with the political opposition."⁷³ As a scholar of Jordanian protests puts it, "The most basic political freedoms have fallen as casualties while the government pursues the objective of close relations with the US." Though favored by the U.S. mainstream press, Jordan, the Arab country whose recent "crackdowns on free expression have been most dramatic," is "far less liberal than its reputation" in the West suggests.⁷⁴ Indeed, that summer the authorities blocked a union demonstration against the war.

With political public outcry so squelched, the summer of 2006 saw few instances of live mass expression, or conscientious gathering, not counting shopping or the half-block "Luna" amusement park. Before the Israeli bombing, Italy's final victory over France in the World Cup provoked a boisterous effusion of loud sidewalk crowds, honking cars, and undulating Italian flags⁷⁵—the only spontaneous, wild, street-side outcry I witnessed in those two months. Perhaps, as companions suggested, the outcry sublimated political frustration in relation to Iraq or other geopolitics, but, if so, it was a male-only sublimation, and one that revealed nary a hint of Middle East affairs. I also witnessed two orderly outdoor gatherings: the inauguration of Amman's first public park (with Jordanian poetry readings and a French photography exhibit); and the "Global Village," an open-air fairgrounds of separate nations' "pavilions" (temporary shops for a country's typical export commodities), screened by a ticket booth and metal detector. But sports, a city park, and an outdoor market were not occasions for direct political expression.

As the bombing continued, a middle-class crowd did manage to assemble in response to the war. They did not march by the parliament or demonstrate before the U.S. or Israeli embassies, where crowds would have been prohibited,⁷⁶ but instead gathered outside the darkened Lebanese embassy, set on a hilltop in an elite neighborhood. They did not gather during a weekday, but at the end of Jordan's work week (Thursday) and at night. The genre of political performance was a vigil or memorial, with quiet hints of a rally. If there was no protest at the festival, nor was there festivity in the protest (as in theatricalized demonstrations familiar within U.S. activism).⁷⁷ Attendees stood holding the ecumenical symbol of mourning, candles; they chanted and sang as a group, or chatted on the side. Young women sold t-shirts printed with graphics and slogans about Lebanon. But for a few explicit chants and placards, the protest expressed sympathy more than antipathy; or it could be understood as covert protest only by insiders able to read the coded allusions and subtexts in their choice of song (as my Arab companion could do). Later in mid-August, according to a Jordanian blog,⁷⁸ authorities sponsored "Peace Arts," a cultural event through which people could channel their reactions to not only Lebanon, but also Iraq and Palestine, stipulating that they do so peacefully.

Public and outdoors, in the recently opened King Hussein Park, the event was obviously colored by the “decorum” Kirshenblatt-Gimblett sees as squelching public cultural events.⁷⁹

The most visible political performance I witnessed during my stay was a march of university students inside their gated campus, where such displays remain legal. These marchers expressed political outrage in familiar student-protest idioms, though reformulated through Islamic codes: the phalanx of women following the cadre of men, modest dress all around, a raised index finger indicating one, that is, Allah (not “workers of the world”), and chants that invoked the war together with religion (not “the people, united, . . .”). Arriving at the edge of campus, the marchers faced off against the city police, who stood poised on the other side of the tall campus gates. The young Muslims presented the boldest anti-authoritarian attitude I saw displayed in Jordan, albeit one driven by another authoritarianism. Paradoxically, the force behind this exercise in free speech is conservative Islam—the political theology decried by neoliberal Americans who purport to want open, democratic, civil society across the Middle East. What Western pundits often fail to realize, though, is that the movement is modern: the surge of Islamic theologies is not a medieval continuity, but rather a direct effect of Reagan-era U.S. and Israeli funding of Muslim groups (against communism), and a direct response to the interferences of the U.S. and Israel in the region.⁸⁰ While modern, these theocratic movements, like Israeli bombings, have not been conducive to Arabic theatre or cultural festivals.

Jerash Festival 2006 might have presented images disturbing to religious conservatives, such as a coed public gathering in a “bustling yet relaxed atmosphere.”⁸¹ It would have made room, that is, for the phenomena Western pundits interpret as signs of open society modernity. As illustrated by my experience of attending a nonexistent festival in Jordan, U.S. actions engender the very conditions that choke the free, democratic civil society its policies claim to cultivate, the conditions that would foster cultural festivals, theatre, and free cultural expression—happenings that in turn foster civil society. The double edge of U.S. policy is uncannily manifest in the writings of a single journalist, Judith Miller, who for decades covered the Middle East for *The New York Times*. In 1985, early in the Lebanese civil war, Miller praised the Jerash Festival for “defying Arab sectarianism and regional strife”;⁸² almost two decades later, she used her columns and ostensible expertise to promote the U.S. invasion of Iraq.

Admittedly, Jerash Festival was not a panacea for Jordanian culture. Like other state-sponsored “public relations” festivals, it likely benefited elites and tourists more than local culture or economies.⁸³ Even with those limitations, though, the twenty-four cycles of compact, orchestrated culture at Jerash did contribute doses of cultural activity to Jordan, where, as even its own promotion admits, there is not a rich landscape of performing culture. When the authorities diluted it into

a sprawling national affair, the decision disgruntled local artists.⁸⁴ Like other large festivals, it created spaces of potential for interaction, making meaning, and perhaps small-scale resistance. It would have brought more performance to Jordan, circulated cash among local merchants, hired tech crews, allowed Jordan performers to present their work and witness other work, televised programs to reach a broader audience, and left a record of Arab-world artistic activity. These became part of that war's cultural collateral damage.

By highlighting this single flow of causality, I do not mean to suggest that the repercussions of violence and economic inequity unfold simply, to predictable and monolithic effects; nor that all Arabs in the region share one identical reaction; and certainly not that *all* obstacles to theatre in the Arab world originate in U.S. and Israeli actions. But many of the oft-invoked problems, like state censorship or the intensification of Islam, can be seen as entwined with these powerful forces, if one pans out from the view that isolates Arab problems from international politics or modern history, and if one considers the larger conditions required for cultural production. By treating a *non* event as an event, I hope to shift the critical gaze to causes besides the usual suspects (the lack of indigenous theatre, the proscriptions of Islam, government corruption, censorship, and Arab gender conventions). These variables get exposure in academic writing, journalism, and political discourse, and even in Arabic drama itself.⁸⁵ In the larger view, international military conflict, in conjunction with global economics, wreaks cultural collateral damage, especially in the Arab Middle East, and especially for such large scale events as festivals.

Notes

¹ I am indebted to Dr. Maysoun Annahar and Miranda Tel for providing contacts, and to Dr. Aseel Sawalha for numerous contributions across all phases of this essay.

² The Acco Festival of Alternative Israeli Theatre. 10 October 2007 <www.accofestival.co.il>.

³ Al-Fawanees Theatre Group. 5 May 2007 <www.alfawanees.com>; Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre. 5 May 2007 <http://www.cdf-eg.org/English/exp_theater/index_e.htm>.

⁴ Acco Theatre. 30 May 2008. <<http://www.acco-tc.com/site/content.php?actions=show&id=1261&b=1>>.

⁵ Marvin Carlson, "Theatre Festivals in the Arab World," *Festivals*, spec. issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13.4 (2003): 42-7. See also specific country profiles in *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*. Vol. 4, ed. Don Rubin (London: Routledge, 1994).

⁶ Stanley Waterman, "Carnivals for Elites? The Cultural Politics of Arts Festivals," *Progress in Human Geography* 22.1 (1998): 56.

⁷ Ala Al-Hamarneh and Christian Steiner. "Islamic Tourism: Rethinking the Strategies of Tourism Development in the Arab World after September 11, 2001," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 24.1 (2004): 175. 1 June 2008. <<http://www.cssaame.com/issues/24/hamarneh-steiner.pdf>>.

⁸ A.P., "Festivals," *Performance Research*, 11.3 (2006): 56; Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1998) 32.

⁹ Eddie Taylor, "Silver Lining," *Royal Wings* [Royal Jordanian Airline magazine] Summer 2006: 20.

¹⁰ Frédéric Maurin, "Still and Again: Whither Festivals?" *Festivals*, spec. issue of *Contemporary Theatre Review* 13. 4 (2003): 6.

¹¹ Zein Ghanma and Nader Omran, "Jordan." *World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre*.

Vol. 4, 128.

¹² The Al-Kasaba Theatre Company's *Stories from Under Occupation* tallies appearances in more than a dozen festivals over a six year period; even in 2006 they were able to participate in Jordan's fall event, Amman Theatre Days. Al-Kasaba Theatre Company, 20 October 2007. <www.alkasaba.org>.

¹³ Lubna Far quoted in Mahmoud Habboush and Grace Peacock, "Jerash Festival to begin July 26," *Jordan Times* 10 July 2006, Jordan U.S. Embassy website archive. 20 May 2008. <www.jordanembassyus.org/07102006003.htm>.

¹⁴ A.P., "Festivals" 56; Waterman, "Carnivals" 55.

¹⁵ Sellars quoted in Maurin, "Still and Again" 7; A.P., "Festivals" 56; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 59.

¹⁶ Waterman, "Carnivals" 56.

¹⁷ Rami G. Khouri, "A Festival at Jerash," *Aramco World Magazine* Jan/Feb 1984: 37.

¹⁸ Her Majesty Queen Noor, Foreword. *Jerash Festival Souvenir Book 1998*. Amman: Jerash Festival of Arts and Culture, 1998, n.p. The program presents all content in both English and Arabic.

¹⁹ Maurin, "Still and Again" 5.

²⁰ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 9, 65.

²¹ Torunn Selberg, "Festivals as Celebrations of Place in Modern Society: Two Examples from Norway," *Folklore* 117 (December 2006): 298.

²² For a critical analysis of other modes of folk presentation, see Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 59-78.

²³ Deputy Chairperson Leila Sharaf quoted in Khouri, "A Festival at Jerash" 37.

²⁴ See Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's analysis of avant-garde multiculturalism in the 1990 Los Angeles festival, 203-48.

²⁵ Dr. Mazen Armouti, paraphrased in Khouri, "A Festival at Jerash" 37.

²⁶ Though excavation began in the 1920s, by 2006 merely a quarter of the buried ruins had been revealed. Omar Nakrash, Archeologist at Jerash, personal interview, 2 August 2006.

²⁷ Khouri, "A Festival at Jerash" 37.

²⁸ Instances of Shakespeare include: a British *Twelfth Night* (1994); the same company's *Midsummer Night's Dream* alongside a U.S. *Much Ado About Nothing* (1997); a British *Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1999); a Jordanian student *Much Ado* (2005); and an Iraqi *Othello* (2004). Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts, Festival Programs. Amman, Jordan: Ministry of Culture, 1994, 1997, 2004, and 2005; Rana Awwad, "Jerash Comes to Life" *Jordan Times* 22 July 1999 Jordan Embassy website archives, 15 May 2008 <www.jordanembassyus.org/072299002.htm>.

²⁹ H.E. Jeryes Samawi, Secretary General, Minister of Culture, Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and General Director, Jerash Festival, personal interview, 8 August 2006.

³⁰ In 2002, Jerash celebrated the Arab-lute, the oud; the flute was slated for 2006.

³¹ Judith Miller, "Throngs Enliven Spectacle in Jordan." *The New York Times*: 13, 23 July 1985, 2 June 2008.

³² Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts, Festival Programs (Amman, Jordan: Ministry of Culture, 1998, 2005).

³³ Dr. Omar Nakrash, Deputy Dean, Faculty of Arts and Design, Chairman of Theatre Arts, University of Jordan, personal interview, 2 August 2006. Simultaneous translation by Dr. Aseel Sawalha.

³⁴ Al-Fawanees Theatre Group website.

³⁵ Nabil Sawalha, personal interview, 6 August 2006.

³⁶ Lee Adair Lawrence, "Amman's Year of the Arts," *Saudi Aramco World* Nov/Dec 2002, 12 September 2007 <www.saudiaramcoworld.com/issue/200206>.

³⁷ Ghassan Al-Haddad, "Theatrical Developments in Jordan: Past, Present, and Future," Ph.D. Diss. Southern Illinois University/Carbondale, 2004.

³⁸ These accounts are echoed across comprehensive Arabic theatre histories, one of which is M.M Badawi, "Introduction" in *Early Arabic Drama* (Cambridge U P, 1988) 1-6; for a synopsis of the linguistic tension see Elsaid Badawi, "Arabic Theatre and Language," Vol. 4, *The World Encyclopedia of Contemporary Theatre* 19-24.

³⁹ Quoted in Khouri, "A Festival" 40.

⁴⁰ In 2006 the exchange rate of the U.S. dollar to the Jordanian dinar (JD) was .7. I use that rate to estimate ticket prices across all years, corroborating my memory through an online currency calculator (Greenwich Mean Time, 30 August 2008 <<http://www.greenwichmeantime.com/time-zone/asia/jordan/currency.html>>). We can envision the average Jordanians as living on less than \$5,000 a year, based on the problematic calculations of gross domestic product and purchasing power, as reported by the C.I.A. U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook 2008*. 30 May 2008 <<https://www.cia>

gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/jo.html#Econ>.

⁴¹ All information about programming and prices is culled from respective Jerash Festival programs.

⁴² Carlson "Theatre Festivals" 42.

⁴³ Noor, officially titled Her Majesty Queen Noor al Hussein, née Lisa Najeeb Halaby, was a born-and-raised U.S. citizen of partial Arab descent, who became the fourth and final wife of the prior king of Jordan. She is not the mother of the current king, Abdullah II, yet she remains publicly visible and active especially in cultural matters; hence, her portrait appears in all Jerash Festival programs. Controversies color the monarchal succession and ongoing royal relations.

⁴⁴ I.E. Schneider and S.J. Backman, "Cross-cultural Equivalence of Festival Motivations: A Study in Jordan," *Festival Management and Event Tourism* 4 (1996): 139-44.

⁴⁵ Edward Ziter, "Damascus Theatre Festival," *Theatre Journal* 59.3 (2007): 488-91.

⁴⁶ Christopher Stone, *Popular Culture and Nationalism in Lebanon: The Fairouz and Rahbani Nation* (New York: Routledge, 2007). Especially Chapter One, "Baalbeck and the Rahbanis: Folklore, Ancient History and Nationalism."

⁴⁷ The Cohn-Lortel International Theatre-Going Award, Theatre Department, Graduate Center, City University of New York. (\$1,000).

⁴⁸ It is impossible to advance an account of Arab-Israeli conflicts acceptable to all sides, but an arguably reliable, nonpartisan source might be the U.S.-based nongovernmental organization Human Rights Watch. <www.hrw.org/campaigns/israel_lebanon>.

⁴⁹ On theatre conditions in Palestine, see Hala Kh. Nassar, "Stories from Under Occupation," *Theatre Journal* 58:1 (2006): 15-37; and Susan Slymowics, "'To Put One's Finger in the Bleeding Wound': Palestinian Theatre under Israeli Censorship," *The Drama Review (TDR)* 35:2 (1991): 18-38.

⁵⁰ Deborah Kapchan, "Performing Depth: Translating Moroccan Culture in Modern Verse," *Colors of Enchantment: Theatre, Dance, Music, and the Visual Arts of the Middle East*, ed. Sherifa Zuhur (Cairo: American U of Cairo P, 2001) 125-41.

⁵¹ Al-Hamarneh and Steiner, "Islamic Tourism" 174.

⁵² Ziter, "Damascus" 488.

⁵³ Dr. Aseel Sawalha pointed out this response to Baalbakk's closing.

⁵⁴ Nehad Selaiha, "Must the Show Go On?" *Al-Ahram Weekly* 17-23 August 2006, 15 October 2007. <<http://weekly.ahram.org.eg>>. 808.

⁵⁵ Beiteddine Festival. 10 October 2007 <www.beiteddine.com>.

⁵⁶ Ciezadlo, "Beirut Diary," *The Washington Post* 23 July 2006, 15 October 2007. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/07/21/AR2006072101370.html>>.

⁵⁷ Jillian Schwedler, "More Than a Mob: The Dynamics of Political Demonstrations in Jordan," *Middle East Report* 226 (Spring 2003): 19-21. 15 May 2008.

⁵⁸ The conversation took place when I accompanied a family on a tourist daytrip in Jordan. Dr. Sawalha translated her cousin's comment.

⁵⁹ The assault that most appalled the public was the nighttime bombing of a building in Qana that killed 54 or more civilians, mainly women and children, who had taken shelter there. *Human Rights Watch News*. 30 July 2006, 30 August 2008. <<http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2006/07/30/lebanol3881.htm>>.

⁶⁰ Jerash Festival of Culture and Arts. 30 July 2006. <www.jerashfestival.com.jo>. [Now defunct]. I heard complaints that the first press release failed to mention the assault on Palestine, but the festival director denied that in our interview.

⁶¹ Ziter, "Damascus" 488.

⁶² Quoted in Maurin, "Still and Again" 7.

⁶³ For a succinct account of Bakhtin's interpretation of carnival, see Jeremy Hawthorn, "Carnival," *A Glossary of Contemporary Literary Theory*. 4th ed. (London: Arnold, 2000) 37.

⁶⁴ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, *Destination Culture* 77.

⁶⁵ Waterman, "Carnival" 60.

⁶⁶ Taylor, "Silver Lining" 21. Taylor, perhaps paraphrasing Director Samawi, also notes that financial constraints limited organizers to program local work.

⁶⁷ Samawi, personal interview.

⁶⁸ Selaiha, "Must the Show Go On."

⁶⁹ Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre website.

⁷⁰ See Schwedler, "More than a Mob" 19-23; and Scott Greenwood, "Jordan, the Al-Aqsa Intifada and America's War on Terror," *Middle East Policy*. 10.3 (2003): 90-111.

⁷¹ For an account of marches detoured from charged sites, see Jillian Schwedler and Sam Fayyaz,

“Disciplining Dissent: Policing Public Space in Jordan,” forthcoming in *Formations of Coercion: Political Prisons and Policing in the Middle East and North Africa*, eds. Laleh Khalili and Jillian Schwedler (New York: Columbia U P and Hurst Publishers, 2009). Manuscript copy provided by author.

⁷² Schwedler, “More than a Mob” 23.

⁷³ Greenwood, “Jordan.”

⁷⁴ Schwedler, “More than a Mob” 23, 18-9.

⁷⁵ Despite the North African Arab identity of France’s star player Zidane, many Jordanians rooted for Italy.

⁷⁶ Schwedler and Fayyaz, “Disciplining Dissent” 2-3.

⁷⁷ E.g., the performative protest of Bread & Puppet Theatre, ACT-UP (AIDS protest), or Reverend Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping.

⁷⁸ Lina Ejeilat, “Into the Wind.” Web Log. 16 August 2006, 20 October 2007. <http://linasturmoil.blogspot.com/2006_08_01_archive.html>.

⁷⁹ Kirshenblatt-Gimblett *Destination Culture* 77.

⁸⁰ For a vision of recent fundamentalist Islam as a modern movement (opposing the postmodern), see Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism, Globalism* (New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁸¹ Khouri, “A Festival” 37.

⁸² Miller, “Throngs.”

⁸³ Waterman, “Carnivals” 64.

⁸⁴ Mohammad Ghazal, “Event to Melt into Wider Festivity,” *The Jordan Times* 24 April 2008, 15 May 2008 <www.jordantimes.com>. Promises have since appeared that some kind of Jerash Festival will continue, but its status remains uncertain as of late 2008.

⁸⁵ Examples of Arabic plays criticizing problems in their own societies include Syria’s Walid Ikhlesi, *The Straight Path* (censorship), and Sa’dallah Wannous, *Late Night Entertainment* [or *Soirée*] with Abu Khalil Al-Qabbani (fundamentalism); Palestine’s Balalin Company, *Darkness* (sexism); and Egypt’s ‘Ali Salim, *You’re the One Who Killed the Beast* (corruption).

