

# Photographing in Israel & Palestine: Street Photography, Humanity, and the Art of Curiosity

**What's poppin', people? It's Dante.**

In today's post, I'm sharing photographs I made in **Israel and Palestine between 2017 and 2018** — a time when I was studying abroad at Hebrew University and exploring the world purely through instinct and intuition. The goal with these videos and posts is simple: to take you *behind the scenes*, to analyze compositions, look at contact sheets, and speak candidly about my process — about how the photographs were made, what I was feeling, and what I've learned about humanity through street photography.

 View all the full-resolution images, contact sheets, and behind-the-scenes notes:

 <https://dantesisofo.com>

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## Jerusalem: Where the Journey Began

When I first arrived in Jerusalem, I had no plan. I just showed up — **pure spontaneity**. I remember standing beside my mother at the **Western Wall**, photographing men as they prayed. But the moment that grabbed me wasn't at the wall at all. It was to the **left**, where men were walking in and out of the bathroom — movement, life, rhythm.

That frame taught me something early on:

***The obvious moment is rarely the best moment.***

When photographing, I'm always looking beyond what everyone else is looking at. Photography, to me, is not about chasing “the shot” but about responding intuitively to life's layers — to what's unfolding just beyond expectation.

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## The Road to Jericho

After getting my bearings in Tel Aviv, I felt drawn toward **Jericho**. Something about that name, that road — it called to me. I didn't think twice. I just took the bus.

In Jericho, I entered a **mosque**, curious about the prayer ritual. I wasn't afraid or hesitant. I simply followed my curiosity — that *childlike wonder* that drives everything I do. I joined the men in prayer, observing how they moved, how they bowed. Afterward, a group of brothers invited me into their home. We shared **tea, coffee, and laughter**, and later they took me hiking through the **Wadi Kelp mountain range**.

When their car broke down at the top of the mountain, I hopped out and made a photograph — using the **car as a foreground element** to create depth. The composition came together in layers:

1. **Foreground** — the car
2. **Middle ground** — the men
3. **Background** — the open blue sky

This was the moment I began truly seeing **in layers** — recognizing that depth isn't just visual, it's emotional.

*To photograph is to feel the world's rhythm and respond instinctively.*

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## Discovering the Youth of Palestine

Back in Jericho, the youth became the heart of my photographs. Boys playing soccer, rolling tires, climbing construction sites — their energy was contagious. I didn't stay on the sidelines. I played soccer with them, I beatboxed, I laughed.

When you're human first and photographer second, the camera disappears — and *that's* when the magic happens.

In one frame, I used a **window frame** inside a construction site as a *frame within a frame*. The boy with the tire moved perfectly into place. Foreground, background, separation — everything aligned. But more importantly, it revealed something deeper:

***Photography has nothing to do with photography. It has to do with how you engage with humanity.***

That's the lesson I carry from every scene. My photos are not about "capturing" people — they're about **uplifting** them.

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### **Shufat Refugee Camp: Overcoming Fear Through Courage**

Walking into **Shufat Refugee Camp** in East Jerusalem was intense. High walls, metal detectors, soldiers — fear was natural. But courage isn't the absence of fear; it's walking forward *despite* it.

I kept returning to this spot week after week, determined to photograph the **separation wall**. One day, I saw a boy tossing a baby stroller against the wall — a surreal, almost absurd act. I adjusted my body 45 degrees to reveal the shadow and depth of the scene. That small physical movement changed everything.

***Photography is physical.***

*The only control you have is where you place your body, when you click the shutter, and how you see the world.*

The final image — the shadow, the boy, the stroller, the wall — spoke volumes about resilience, play, and survival within confinement.

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## The Joy of Play and Spontaneity

In Jericho, I found freedom. Kids climbed on metal poles, balanced on cinder blocks, and built worlds out of rubble. I followed them, patient and present, waiting for that one perfect frame where chaos becomes harmony.

And then it happened: a boy climbing a pole, the desert background clean and open, the composition layered and alive.

Those moments — unplanned, playful, spontaneous — are everything.

I don't go out *looking* for photographs.

***The best photos come to those who stay open enough to receive them.***

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## The Rainbow Over Jericho

Then there was the rainbow.

It rained for only **30 seconds** in Jericho — a desert city where it almost never rains. The rainbow lasted **five seconds**. Within that sliver of time, a boy named **Ramsey** threw a stone across a crumbling building. His gesture — the arc of his arm, the stone midair, the rainbow overhead — became my **David vs. Goliath** moment.

Ramsey symbolized the resilience of the Palestinian youth. The rainbow symbolized hope. Together, they formed one of the most meaningful frames of my life.

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## Quiet Moments Amid Chaos

After photographing the energy of weddings and protests, I found peace inside — literally. During a loud Palestinian wedding, I stepped into a side room and saw a man praying while a boy slept quietly on the floor. The contrast between the chaos

outside and the calm within was striking.

Photography is about **balance** — light and shadow, noise and silence, energy and stillness. Sometimes, the quiet frames carry the loudest truths.

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### **Balata Refugee Camp: The Edge of Danger**

In **Balata**, one of the most dangerous refugee camps, I photographed children playing with toy guns on a graveyard. Rocks were flying, chaos everywhere. I hid behind gravestones and still pressed the shutter. It was raw, frightening, and real. Those moments reminded me that street photography isn't glamorous — it's about confronting reality, no matter how uncomfortable.

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### **Returning to Jericho**

I traveled through **Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, Hebron, Jenin, and Ashkelon** — but I always returned to Jericho. Why? Because it felt like home. The people knew me. I brought my **Instax camera**, gifting prints to strangers, hanging them on their walls. That's how you gain access — through generosity and sincerity.

Photography opens doors, literally and metaphorically. One frame shows a mother changing her child inside a home, another shows my friend **Yahya** resting in the shade beside his name scrawled on a barn wall. These moments only existed because I kept showing up — because I gave before I took.

***When you give photographs, you earn trust. When you return, you earn intimacy.***

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## Life in the Mosque and the Everyday Ordinary

I even slept on mosque floors, volunteering, helping, learning. My mornings were simple — sweeping floors, drinking coffee, watering plants. My afternoons were spent photographing with my friends **Ahmed** and **Mohammed**, walking through rivers in the **Wadi Kelp mountain range** under that scorching desert sun.

The photos from those days are minimal — a man smoking, a friend resting — but they carry a deep intimacy. They represent what photography *really* is: **a document of being alive and present.**

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## Lessons From This Journey

- **Curiosity** is the compass. Go without plans. Let life surprise you.
- **Courage** is the engine. Fear is natural — move through it anyway.
- **Playfulness** is the key. Approach people with joy and openness.
- **Patience** is the practice. Work the scene. Wait for alignment.
- **Humanity** is the purpose. Uplift, don't exploit.

Every photograph from this trip is a reflection of how I engaged with the world — not just what I saw, but *how I saw*. The deeper I went into these communities, the more I realized that my job wasn't to "capture" anything — it was to **listen, learn, and bear witness.**

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## Closing Thoughts

I didn't travel to Israel and Palestine to make a statement or tell a story. I went with nothing but my camera and curiosity. Every frame came from **trust, spontaneity, and presence.**

***Photography is not about control. It's about surrender – allowing life to reveal itself before your lens.***

So if there's one thing I want you to take away from these images and reflections, it's this:

**Be curious. Be courageous. Be playful.**

Let life flow toward you, and press the shutter when your heart tells you to.

Peace.

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 **Watch the full video + view contact sheets and images:**

 <https://dantesisofo.com>

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