

Reality of Jerusalem's
Palestinians Today



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Reviewed by Penny Johnson

At the beginning of this useful and thought-provoking report, the author raises the central question of defining Jerusalem, noting that "when a Palestinian or Israeli speaks of 'Jerusalem,' he or she might be referring to at least seven different **physical entities**" (p. 1).

As the reader ponders the data presented from a number of surveys conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (JMCC) from 1995-2000, a related question emerges: who is this endangered species we call a Palestinian "Jerusalemite" and what is the relation between mere geography and lived community? A demographic example of the problem is found in the appendix, when we

discover that the sample in a 1999 JMCC survey of attitudes and opinions of Jerusalemites is, in fact, composed of 60 percent villagers, 11 percent residents of refugee camps, and 30 percent (less than a third) urban-dwellers. "Jerusalem" thus seems leached of its historic identity as a city - indeed a city among cities - and a unitary notion of a "Jerusalemite" is immediately challenged.

Although the report usefully contrasts residents living inside the municipal boundaries with those living outside them, in the 1999 Jerusalem sample (but not in others), problems of definition remain basic; and it is one of the strengths of the study that it allows us to recognize and consider them. On the technical level, the need for Palestinian social scientists and statisticians to discuss a range of research, methodological, and sampling issues is clear - however, as with all issues pertaining to Jerusalem, neither the problem nor the solution is purely technical.

For example, the census data of the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) largely excludes what is called the "J1" area of Jerusalem - in fact, the city core of East Jerusalem. This exclusion is, unsurprisingly, due to political factors: Israel's ban on the Palestinian Authority (PA) operating in Jerusalem. However, PCBS's tendency to present census data without noting (or downplaying) this important exclusion is also broadly political and may lead to some misinterpretation of its findings, particularly when urban populations and households are considered. It is these fragmentations - whether methodological in research or social, communal or geographic on the ground - that are important to

understand in considering the "reality of Jerusalem's Palestinians today" - and, hopefully, to counter.

In one example, when residents of Jerusalem and its environs chose citizenship preferences "[for] today" in 1999, 60-62 percent of respondents living outside the municipal boundaries chose Palestinian citizenship, while only 25 percent of respondents living inside the municipal boundaries made this choice.¹ A third of these respondents, however, chose joint Israeli-Palestinian citizenship (and 22 percent Israeli citizenship), while a significantly lower 18-20 percent of those living outside the municipal boundaries opted for joint citizenship - and under 10 percent Israeli citizenship (p. 76). These differences remained roughly the same when respondents chose their preferred citizenship "if there was peace," with Palestinian citizenship gaining a few percentage points for all groups, and joint citizenship and Israeli citizenship declining by a few points. Thus, while the greatly extended municipal boundaries of Jerusalem after 1967 encompass a mixture of city core, villages-cum-suburbs, and Shu'fat refugee camp, these lines on a map - and the municipal administration that accompanied them - also seem to divide community opinion.

In the other surveys directed at West Bank, Gaza, and Jerusalem respondents, the Jerusalem sample is unfortunately too small (between 64 -72 respondents) to offer any sense of conclusive differences. Distinctions

¹ The report makes a distinction between respondents living in refugee camps and not, which would be interesting except the camp sample is too small (at 25 respondents) to make the comparison valid.

between the West Bank and Gaza, however, can be quite interesting.

For example, in 1999, when asked "When you say 'Jerusalem' which of these do you mean?", 47 percent of Gazans chose the rather bureaucratic, but nationalist, answer "Palestinian Jerusalem governorate," while only 28 percent of West Bankers did so. However, 22 percent of West Bankers chose "East Jerusalem before June 6, 1967," while only 12 percent of Gazans opted for this meaning.

Opinion was somewhat more uniform in choosing "Jerusalem East and West" (before the 1967 expansion), with 30 percent of West Bankers and 22 percent of Gazans making this choice. The small Jerusalem sample was similar in this choice to other West Bankers, but they made a greater choice for the Old City as their meaning of Jerusalem (at 25 percent to 12 percent of other West Bankers) and a lesser choice for East Jerusalem (at only 12 percent) (p. 6).

Utilizing data from various surveys, the report examines a number of key questions - from the impact of closures to the PA's performance in "caring about Jerusalem" to the preferred solutions for Jerusalem - directed at West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem respondents. It also includes a range of questions directed to Jerusalem residents only - including expectations of level of health care under the PA and willingness to switch from Israeli to Palestinian health insurance, quality of Israeli municipal services and attitudes towards working with the municipality, and identification of the main problem facing Jerusalem residents.

Overall, an almost general consensus

emerges about the importance of Jerusalem: with over 95 percent of West Bank and Gaza residents in 1999 objecting to Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel, even if it were the last obstacle to a peace agreement (p. 97); and 59 percent of West Bankers and 68 percent of Gazans in June 2000 calling a Camp David-like "compromise" on Jerusalem "bad and unacceptable" (p. 100). Almost half (46 percent) of West Bank and Gaza residents in 1999 thought Jerusalem was the most important issue facing the Palestinian people today, while settlements were chosen by slightly less than a third (31 percent) and refugees by a low 15 percent (p. 96).

However, when envisioning a preferred solution for Jerusalem or when dealing with real interests on the ground, sharper differences were articulated. Indeed, Jerusalem residents in particular express opinions and choices that seemed somewhat contradictory: although most were in favor of continuing the boycott of Jerusalem municipal elections, a strong 84 percent (and an overwhelming 92 percent of respondents inside municipal boundaries) favored working with the Israeli municipality to try to improve services and daily life (p. 91). A surprisingly high 60 percent of these Jerusalemites rated Israeli municipal services serving the Palestinian population as good, very good, or satisfactory (p. 82).

At the same time, 42 percent of Jerusalemites in this sample (and 49 percent inside the municipal boundaries) felt that no institution or individual represented their interests as a Jerusalem Palestinian. All Palestinian institutions received relatively low marks, with the PA the highest at 11 percent (but chosen by only 2 percent of respondents

within the municipal boundaries); the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Orient House at 8 and 7 percent respectively (but chosen by only 4 percent and 2 percent respectively by respondents within the municipal boundaries); and the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) representatives in Jerusalem and the Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce both at a low 2 percent.

Palestinian institutions altogether gained the confidence of 30 percent of respondents, while the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality was the choice of 24 percent. For residents inside the municipal boundaries, the pattern was reversed: 34 percent chose the Jerusalem municipality, while a very low 12 percent chose Palestinian institutions.

The disaffection of Jerusalem Palestinians - and their interest in advocating their interests with the municipality - are taken by the author as indications that Palestinians in Jerusalem are in an "impossible predicament," whereby they have been "doubly abandoned by both the Israeli government and the PA in terms of actual support for remedying problems of daily life" (p. 101).

While this is a reasonable assumption both from data and circumstance, she reads the underlying negative dynamic as the longer-term "political strategy of non-recognition" (p. 69) waged by the PLO and the Palestinian national movement since 1967. The key elements of this strategy in Jerusalem were, and are, the boycott of municipal elections, refusing Israeli passports, freezing other forms of local election (like the Chamber of Commerce), and rejecting formal dealings with Israeli institutions, including the municipality.

Here, she has both identified an important

issue for debate and discussion and accredited it with all ills and no gains: Is it really the case that this strategy alone allowed Israel to "expropriate one-third of privately owned Arab land" (in Jerusalem) or to "create master plans for Arab towns that allow for nearly zero, or in some cases negative growth?" (p. 69). Or conversely, could a better strategy have prevented these negative developments?

These are not rhetorical questions and Rouhana's excellent review of Israeli demographic and planning policies in Jerusalem, utilizing several recent studies, is evidence of the historic and present need for a more sophisticated strategy to counter the potent brew of legalisms, illegality, and sustained political will that characterize Israeli strategy to transform Jerusalem. While Palestinian strategy since 1967 has obviously spurred both nationalist sentiment and national resistance, its frequent failures to address these transformations on the ground - whether settlements or the erosion of Arab Jerusalem - through more detailed, context-specific strategies and tactics is palpable, and reappraisals are welcome.

However, these reappraisals will be most useful if they do not mirror the flaws of reductionism criticized in prevailing strategy. While Jerusalem Palestinians may indeed be "caught in the crossfire," it seems a false symmetry to conclude that: "Neither side, really, had the genuine interests of the Arabs of the city at heart" (p. 101).

The urgency of a reappraisal is perhaps best attested to by the fragmented opinions of Jerusalem Palestinians, and West Bank and Gaza residents as well, when asked the critical question of their preferred option for

Jerusalem in 1999 polls. The diversity of opinion expressed can be read several ways: whether as a healthy diversity of opinions; a warning signal of danger to national unity on Jerusalem; or sheer confusion as respondents contemplate the difference between a choice for "East Jerusalem as capital of the Palestinian state and west Jerusalem [sic] is capital of Israel," and a choice for "Jerusalem is an open city and a capital of two states" - or between "Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine" and "Jerusalem is the unified capital of Palestine." Future questions should perhaps pare down the profusion of choices in the interest of greater clarity.

However, even if confusion may reign to some extent, it is also true that two popular choices opt out of Palestinian secular rule altogether. While almost no respondents chose Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel, "Jerusalem is international," was the preference of 18 percent of all Jerusalem respondents and 25 percent of those living inside municipal boundaries; and "Jerusalem is the capital of the Islamic nation" was the preference of 19 percent of all Jerusalem respondents and a similar 18 percent of those living within municipal boundaries.² West Bank and Gazan respondents, in another 1999 poll, have a much lower preference for internationalizing Jerusalem (at 6 percent of West Bank respondents and 4 percent of Gazans) and a higher preference for Jerusalem as an Islamic capital (at a quarter of West Bank and Gazans).

Jerusalem respondents in general, but particularly those living inside the municipal

boundaries, displayed a greater preference for Jerusalem as an open city (at 18 percent of those inside municipal boundaries) than their West Bank and Gazan counterparts (with only 6 percent of West Bankers and 2 percent of Gazans choosing this option).

The fragmentation of opinion reflects the current fragmentation of solutions, and perhaps the fact that the Palestinian slogan, "an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital," provides a rallying point - but not a strategy - to guide an emerging nation and actual communities in resisting Israeli transformations in the lived realities of Jerusalem today. Scholars and activists alike will find Rouhana's report a useful starting point to consider, and address, these realities.

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From the
Institute of the Jerusalem Studies

The Ownership of the U.S. Embassy Site in Jerusalem

Walid Khalidi

63 pages

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² Figures cited in the text (p. 99) for these options are higher but rely on an August 1999 poll in which only 70 Jerusalem respondents are represented. The Jerusalem poll of October 1999 cited above comprising 474 Jerusalem respondents, is thus more reliable.