

## Editorial

# Critical Geographies of Jerusalem and Palestine

Few matters engender more attention in Palestine than geography. As an intellectual pursuit, geography has been understood as the study of the features of the Earth's surface. As a practical subject, it is traditionally understood as the material landscape upon which human activity takes place. Like those in other academic fields, geographers produced knowledge – including descriptions, maps, and surveys – in the service of modern colonial projects. And for many people, alas, “geography” merely evokes an unpleasant secondary school subject.

Yet the academic discipline of geography has been experiencing a rebirth as a field of sharp critical inquiry. Spared a rigid emphasis on canonical texts, geography departments in many countries have become hubs of unorthodox thinking, working to rethink the relation of society and space. Especially in areas like visualization (including but not limited to maps) and human-environment relations, geographers and others are pioneering new political, environmental, and economic horizons of analysis. Powered by a heterogeneous understanding of space, scholars working in what has come to be called “critical geography” consider social and environmental relations through coproduction of space and time. In this way, critical geographers understand power to be produced and performed through, rather than on, space.

A critical notion of geography as an uneven field of power has clear implications for understanding of Palestine. Although not necessarily associated with academic geography, I argue that both Edward W. Said and Mahmoud Darwish differently examined Palestine with a critical geographical lens. Said sought to unpend Palestine as a continuous, static space, drawing from Antonio Gramsci's notion that territory is productive of social formations rather simply the their stage. Emerging from

another trajectory, Darwish remade Palestinian time-spaces of displacement and ruin, rejecting the now-predictable geographical frames of thought, present or past. More recently, younger generations of researchers have followed in the traditions of Said and Darwish, producing original examinations of Palestinian spatiality.

In this context, 2015 brought an important surge in critical geography work on, and in, Palestine. The Seventh International Conference on Critical Geography, “Precarious Radicalism on Shifting Grounds: Towards a Politics of Possibility,” was brought to Ramallah in the summer of 2015 by an innovative group of young geographers. The indefatigable organizers brought together participants for five days of sessions on a wide range of topics (the majority without relation to Palestine), evening programs, and field trips.

The impetus for this issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* came from this conference. We sought to bring important insights on Jerusalem and Palestine from critical geography to *JQ* readers. The issue opens with a searing excerpt from Nadera Shalhoub-Kevorkian’s plenary address to the critical geography conference vividly describes the everyday “occupation of the senses” through which the struggle over urban space in Jerusalem is inscribed upon the Palestinian body. The remaining papers examine the spatial politics of Jerusalem and its wider context through themes ranging from representation to planning politics. Several papers address planning in Jerusalem and its impact, from the British Mandate period to the present day. Rana Barakat investigates the material and imaginative planning of modern Jerusalem by British Mandate authorities. Nahed Habiballah explores settlement planning and construction in Jerusalem and its capacity to produce and transform urban spatiality of Jerusalem. Touching on other aspects of how Jerusalem has been imagined, abstracted, and represented, Christine Leuenberger examines how cartographic visualizations of the cities of Berlin and Jerusalem make apparent the underlying assumptions about the division of urban space through physical barriers. Meanwhile, Dorien Vanden Boer illustrates how practices within the tourism industry in Jerusalem create an uneven urban landscape of representation and power of the city.

Finally, a number of the articles here delve in depth into Palestinian experiences of space in and around Jerusalem. Fadwa Allabadi and Tareq Hardan draw our attention to the complex politics of housing and residency in Jerusalem and its impact on the family, a theme that is also explored in the work of Doaa Hammoudeh, Layaly Hamayel, and Lynn Welchman. Ahmad El-Atrash surveys vernacular practices in Jerusalem that are productive of space, calling for attention to these marginalized customs. Ahmad Heneiti’s essay examines the forced relocations of Bedouin communities, most notably ‘Arab al-Jahalin, in the greater Jerusalem area and its implications for Arab residency rights in the city.

It is hoped that this special issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly* emerges as a site for the critical examination of geographical transformations of Palestine and engages within the wider debates happening in critical geography.

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Guest Editor