



## What Kind of Cultural Celebration for the Besieged City?

**M**eeting in Oman in November 2006, Arab ministers of culture declared Jerusalem “the capital of Arab culture” for the year 2009. Since that time, the question of how to ‘celebrate’ Jerusalem has been controversial. The decision was most likely made both as a measure to protect Jerusalem from its current isolation from Arab cultural trends, as well as a protest against administrative measures undertaken by Israel to prevent access to the city by Palestinian citizens in the occupied territories. No doubt it also contains a measure of guilt felt by Arab states for the abandonment of the city and its Palestinian inhabitants to their fate. The essay by Amjad Samhan in this issue of JQ dissects the anatomy of this controversy, and focuses on the internal Palestinian repercussions of this event.

One feature of this issue is the search for a proper balance between enhancing Palestinian cultural contributions to the vision of the city, and political focus on its predicament. There was a fear among the

prospective organizers that ideological and bureaucratic features of the celebrations may overshadow the contributions of the literary and artistic community. No doubt there is a need to highlight the link between the repressive political atmosphere that the city witnesses today and the spectrum of cultural activities that is needed to be represented on this occasion. As if to heighten this link, Israeli police recently stormed the premises of Hakawati Theatre where a contest was being held for the winning logo for 'Jerusalem 2009'. Al-Hakawati, as well as several musical and theatrical groups in the city, has been subjected to continued harassment over the last two decades for expressing nationalist sentiments. Yabous, the major organizer of the city's most important Palestinian annual musical festival, has constant altercations in attempting to bring international and Arab performers every year.

It is imperative for this important cultural event to succeed and local groups like Hakawati and Yabous – as well as al-Hoash gallery, Ma'mal Foundation and others should play a primary role in organizing the artistic creative side of the celebrations. But it is also important when addressing the isolation of the city that 'the capital of Arab culture' of 2009 would not turn out to be a year of political lamentation with little activities taken in the city itself.

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With this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Charmaine Seitz will be leaving us to take a new important position at the Jerusalem Media and Communication Centre. Seitz, as Managing Editor of the Journal for the last six years (since November 2002), has left a major imprint on the journal that unites a rare combination of first rate investigative journalism, immense knowledge of the affairs of the city, and high caliber writing skills. In addition to overseeing the production of the quarterly, Charmaine has periodically contributed cultural reviews, political analysis, and substantive scholarly essays on Jerusalem's past and present status. Her tenure at JQ has left an imprint that has marked the journal, and her absence will not be easy to replace. We are happy that she accepted to maintain her relations with the *Journal* by joining JQ's editorial committee with other prestigious academics and writers. We wish her luck in her new career and trust that readers will continue to see her writings in future issues of JQ.

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#### Correction

Correction: Page 51 of JQ 32 portrays the Farradj family, not the Hanania family as written. Jurji and his wife Aniseh and their children are portrayed on the right side of the portrait. In addition, on p. 58, Jurji and his wife are depicted at a wedding. We apologize for the error.