

Editorial

Open Museums, Closed Barriers

Khaled Jarrar's remarkable documentary, *The Infiltrators*, records, without comment, the travails of West Bank Palestinians as they struggle to climb the Wall on makeshift ladders, each other's shoulders or with a good shove from a comrade. In one scene, several overweight middle-aged men assemble, and with poignant humor, assist each other in getting over the Wall so that they can go to Friday prayers at al-Aqsa. As this issue goes to press, Jerusalem remains a city cut off from its environment. Israel persists with its policy of denying West Bank and Gaza Strip Palestinians access with checkpoints and high walls, insulating the city from neighboring Arab communities. The policy of ethnically cleansing the city of its own Palestinian residents also continues by denying them basic services and building permits, as well as the all too frequent withdrawal of their residency rights in the city by the occupation's Ministry of the Interior.

Palestinian Jerusalemites have learned, through bitter experience, that there are no innocent Israeli bureaucratic measures. Thus, when those who renewed their blue Jerusalem identity cards this summer noted an expiration date after ten years, as well as a new status category of "permanent resident," they alerted their fellow Jerusalemites and a new wave of fear and anxiety swept through the Palestinian community. As more information emerged, it became clear that the new procedures apply to all holders of identity cards, but this, unfortunately, did not remove all cause for concern. As *Ha'aretz* journalist Amira Hass observed, Palestinian residents in Jerusalem have "every reason in the world" to assume that "the Israeli authorities are planning to exploit every opening and pretext to continue with their consistent policy, which is not secret: to expel as many Palestinian Jerusalemites as possible from their city and homeland." We

can also assume that the renewal of an identity card for an Israeli Jew will remain a routine measure, while Palestinian Jerusalemites will continue to have to cart loads of documents to prove that they live in the city, pay taxes, and are in good standing in the eyes of the authorities. While we do not yet know what obstacle will be placed in the path of renewal, it is clear that this offers yet another opportunity to deny the right of non-Jewish residents to belong to the city.

Ironically, this comes at a time when the so-called peace negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority have resumed. Exactly what is being discussed in those negotiations is not clear to us, but the measures taken by Israel leave no doubt that it has no intention of ever relinquishing control over the city. The past months, particularly during the Jewish holidays, have witnessed an escalation in organized Israeli Jewish activity – including attempts to pray – at al-Aqsa, accompanied by right-wing Knesset members and the inevitable police or army escort. This is coupled with reports that suggest that Israel is considering measures by which al-Haram al-Sharif will be divided between Jews and Muslims, in a fashion similar to the division imposed at Hebron’s Ibrahimī mosque. In Hebron, Muslims are allowed to pray in certain sections of the mosque and only on certain days and at restricted times. The *adhan*, or call to prayer, is often banned and tension always runs high. The massacre in Hebron in 1994, when the settler Baruch Goldstein killed twenty-nine worshipers and wounded another 125 during prayer time, was only one of the ramifications of Israel’s policy of taking over holy sites. In 1967, Israel razed an entire neighborhood in the Old City to make room for Jewish worshipers at the Wailing Wall, and it controls Rachel’s Tomb in Bethlehem. The two places are now completely off limits to Palestinian worshipers.

There is no doubt that Israel is doing all it can to escalate the situation and to Judaize sites holy to all the Abrahamic religions. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s speech at the United Nations General Assembly in late September confirms our fears. The bulk of his speech represented an attempt to villainize Iran with very little mention of the Palestinians or attempts to tackle the root issues in the conflict. To him, the problem in the region is Iran, not Israel or its occupation of the Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem.

On the other side, the Palestinian Authority is doing little or nothing to counter Israeli action on the ground. The PA has not even issued a serious statement regarding the latest Israeli measures in Jerusalem, and insists on continuing its secret negotiations. It is high time for a resolute Palestinian position coupled with international pressure to force Israel to halt all activities that aim at transforming the city. If the current negotiations fail, which is the most likely outcome in light of Israel’s intransigence, the city and the entire Palestinian cause will face a bleak future.

While this issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* does not directly address the current situation, it continues to examine the turbulent history of the city since the emergence of Zionism. One focus in this issue is the idea of the city as a museum, and the fate and framing of museums in and around the city. Beatrice St. Laurent, with Himmet Taşkömür, writes about the creation of the first museum of antiquities in Jerusalem during the late Ottoman period, called *Müze-i Hümayun* in Turkish, or Imperial Museum (1901-1917). After the

arrival of the British in Palestine towards the end of WWI, the contents of the museum were transferred by the British mandatory authorities to the newly established Palestine Museum of Antiquities (1921-1930), later the Palestine Archaeological Museum, hence falling into the hands of Israel after its creation in 1948.

Mahmoud Hawari writes about the history of the Citadel or Qal‘a of Jerusalem, located just inside of the Jaffa Gate of the Old City. He points out that for about a millennium the Citadel was closely linked to Jerusalem’s history, and played a significant role in the political, economic and social life of the city. Since 1967, he argues, the citadel has been expropriated by the Israeli authorities to serve ideological and political purposes. Renamed the “Tower of David,” it hosts a museum of the history of Jerusalem that narrates a skewed, inaccurate and incomplete version of the city’s history and the citadel itself, claiming both as an exclusively Jewish heritage.

Rania Murra and Toine van Teeffelen introduce readers to a different kind of museum, one that tells real life stories attached to the separation wall that Israel erected around the city, specifically in the areas of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. The Bethlehem region to the south of Jerusalem is also the focus of the study by Ahmad el-Atrash. Bethlehem, el-Atrash demonstrates, has a long history in which it was always connected with Jerusalem, physically and otherwise, as they are both considered holy cities. But the Israeli policy of severing it from Jerusalem, ongoing since the 1967 occupation, and more so after the building of the infamous wall, is creating the unprecedented rupture and terrible conditions negatively afflicting Bethlehem. El-Atrash’s study shows Israeli practices attempting to turn Bethlehem into a museum of exclusion.

The development of museums and archaeology in Palestine are intimately connected, not just in the sense that archaeology is about unearthing artifacts for exhibition, but in the sense of search for links between the past and the present. In this issue, Donald Whitcomb surveys the career of the pioneering Palestinian archaeologist Dimitri Baramki who excavated the Palestinian past in the British mandatory period and the decade that followed. Baramki was a major figure in discovering the Umayyad Hisham’s Palace in Jericho, one of Palestine’s archaeological jewels.

Historian Roger Heacock highlights the European imagination and policies regarding the city. Heacock’s wide-ranging analysis of historical and contemporary European policies towards Jerusalem shows how to European countries, Jerusalem was always an internal issue, rather than one of foreign policy. The city’s location in the European *imaginaire* was as a place central to Europe and its predominantly Christian heritage. Nonetheless, such attachments combined with past colonial ambitions to control the city, have not produced a strong unified position towards Israel’s policies of defacing the city and the attempts to ethnically and religiously cleanse it.

We also remember two outstanding colleagues whose lives were cut short while we were working on this issue: Graham Usher, a friend and contributor to JQ, and Ilan Halevi, a fighter in the cause of justice for Palestine and editor of our sister journal *Revue d’Études Palestiniennes*.