

Editorial

Moving the U.S. Embassy and the Gap between Symbol and Reality

The 1947 partition plan for Palestine envisioned Jerusalem as an international enclave within the proposed Arab state, with open access to citizens of both Arab and Jewish states. However, the plan was never implemented, except as a dubious source of international legitimacy for the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. The city was divided as a result of the first Palestine war in 1948. In 1967, Israel occupied the Arab Eastern section of the city, along with the rest of historical Palestine. It announced the annexation of the city formally in 1981, although it had extended Israeli law over it since day one of the occupation. In the eyes of the international community, the conquest by Israel of the western part of the city in 1948 constituted a violation of the UN partition plan, and the occupation of the eastern section in 1967 was a further violation of the security council resolution passed following the war. In both cases, the world community never legitimized Israel's control of Jerusalem, nor did it recognize the city as the capital of Israel.

In 1995, U.S. presidential candidate Bob Dole, eager to win Jewish and conservative Christian votes, proposed a bill to move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem from Tel Aviv. The bill passed, but the candidate lost the election. Moving the embassy constitutes recognition of Israel's sovereignty over the city and acceptance of its claim to the city as the "eternal and undivided" capital of the state. The law presented all presidents since its passing with a conflict between campaign promises to move the embassy and commitments, insignificant as they may have been, to pursue a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Palestine. Presidents Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Barack Obama opted to postpone the embassy

relocation through renewing a waiver every six months, thus maintaining the status quo.

Donald Trump, too, promised during his campaign to move the embassy to Jerusalem, and appeared to be an issue high on his agenda when he assumed office. The U.S. State Department and intelligence agencies warned against the move, expressing the belief that it might lead to a conflagration in the occupied territories and conflict with countries that support the Palestinian right for statehood. For now, the embassy has not moved, and in May, following in the footsteps of his predecessors, Trump signed a waiver postponing the relocation. But the issue is not over as long as the Trump administration maintains its position.

This issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* discusses the question of moving the embassy from a number of angles, from the history of the issue in the U.S. political arena to the ownership by a number of Palestinian families of the proposed site of a U.S. embassy in Jerusalem. In his contribution, Walid Khalidi discusses the issues pertaining to the possible embassy site, which does not in fact belong to Israel to give or rent. Ahmad Jamil Azem narrates the history of discussions in the United States pertaining to the embassy's relocation to Jerusalem and 'Abd al-Ra'uf Arnaout explores various scenarios that the Trump administration's actions might produce, including in his analysis correspondence between the U.S. administration and the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah regarding the move.

Meanwhile, the move, when and if it takes place, is another reminder that what receives the most attention vis-à-vis Jerusalem is symbolism, not reality. The fact that the city is home to Jerusalemite Palestinian seems completely irrelevant to policy makers in both Israel and the United States. The city and its Palestinian residents continue to be subjected to the harshest policies of exclusion and denied basic rights and services. In this issue, *JQ* draws attention to the extent of the impact of these policies by republishing a report by the Association for Civil Rights in Israel concerning the conditions faced by Palestinians in Jerusalem in 2017 and data obtained from the Israeli Ministry of Interior by the Jerusalem Legal Aid and Human Rights Center.

The often uneven relationship between reality – or as they are often called in the Palestinian context, “facts on the ground” – and symbolism is also explored in essays by Anne Irfan and Noura Alkhalili, co-recipients of the first Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem. Anne Irfan revisits the debate regarding the status of Jerusalem in UN General Assembly Resolution 181, which recommended the partition of Palestine. The resolution proposed that Jerusalem be established as a *corpus separatum* under a special international regime to be administered by the United Nations. Irfan argues that the rhetorical internationalization of the city, repeated in subsequent plans and proposals, undermined the rightful Palestinian claim to the city and opened the way toward its Israelization. Meanwhile, Noura Alkhalili's contribution on the collective decision by Palestinian refugees to repurpose *waqf* properties in Jerusalem illuminates the complex relationship between community survival, national steadfastness, and Islamic principles. Her article shows not only the creativity with which Palestinians meet the disjuncture between reality and symbolism, but also provides examples of the extent to which Israeli land appropriation – undertaken not only by the state, but by activist settlers as well – have curtailed the living space for Palestinians.

It is not only over living Palestinians that the Israeli state attempts to exert its power, but the dead as well. Suhad Daher-Nashif's study tackles the practice of forensic medicine in Palestine from the Ottoman period to the present. Daher-Nashif points out that the body is an agent of resistance in Palestine, not only for the Palestinians, but also for the power that rules them. Palestinian corpses have lives and rites of passages of their own, as they travel through different post-mortem practices and medico-legal structures. Thus, like the living, they are subjects of institutionalized and politicized order.

Yahya Abbad addresses a different kind of politicized order in his examination, and a different rupture between symbolism and reality, in his article on the way an "ideology of national commitment" has shaped the oral histories collected from Palestinians, both with respect to the construction of research projects that collect such oral histories and in the construction of the responses by interviewees. Abbad draws on the oral historiography of Palestinian peasant women of the village of Mughallis, destroyed in 1948 by Israeli forces, to discuss the internal dynamics of class and gender during the 1948 war and its aftermath that he argues have been "suppressed" in Palestinian oral histories. Abbad – himself no stranger to suppression, as his latest novel, *Jarima fi Ramallah* (A Crime in Ramallah), was banned by Palestinian authorities – argues that a different approach to oral history could help bring fragmented Palestinian voices, of women in particular, back from the margins and into center stage to create a more rich and nuanced history of the Nakba.

Devoted to Jerusalem's social history and its present, this issue of *JQ* makes the connection between the past and the present, as well as the city and its geographical context, as a city in Palestine that is not separated from its context, be it social, political, or historical. The symbolic and material Israelization of the city, as well as plans or visions that render it a *corpus separatum*, represent attempts to sever Jerusalem from its socially inhabited past and its present role within Palestinian society. A number of the contributions in this issue highlight the fact that before there was a United Nations and a state of Israel, Jerusalem was a vibrant Palestinian city whose centrality extended to the entire Palestinian community, and beyond.

In an article on the Cradle of Jesus and the Oratory of Mary that draws primarily on medieval accounts of Jerusalem, Nabil Matar highlights the significance of Christian iconography in the Haram al-Sharif to Muslim pilgrimage as well as its multi-religious implication. "Along with the *maqams* of the Israelite prophets," Matar writes, "the cradle of Jesus and the oratory of Mary became devotional sites for pilgrims, Sufis and jurists alike. This inclusiveness of devotion translated into demographic inclusion, too: since Jewish and Christian prophetic histories were part of the Haram . . . then Jews and Christians could not but be part of the Islamic conceptualization of Bayt al-Haram." A shorter piece by Matar on the same subject is included in the catalog for the exhibition "Jerusalem 1000–1400: Every People under Heaven," which displayed the richness and diversity, religious and cultural, of Jerusalem during the medieval period. This exhibition, on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from September 2016 until January 2017, and its catalog are also reviewed by Alex Winder in this issue.

Other visual reminders of Jerusalem's pre-Mandate history can be found in the photo archive of St. Anne Monastery in the Old City, written about here by Jean-Michel de

Tarragon. De Tarragon, who focuses here on the archive's collection of photographs of the Great War in Jerusalem, has been leading the processing of the École Biblique photographic archives in Jerusalem, an extensive project of digitization, classification, and analysis of what is arguably the largest collection of Palestinian photography from the nineteenth century. The nineteenth century, and the massive changes that occurred in Palestine as a result of Ottoman reforms and other global dynamics, is also the subject of Farid al-Salim's *Palestine and the Decline of the Ottoman Empire: Modernization and the Path to Palestinian Statehood*, reviewed here by Ahmed H. Ibrahim.

Ultimately, *Jerusalem Quarterly* seeks to remember and to re-member the Jerusalem that was dismembered in 1948, and to do so in a way that resists the false narrative of unification that emerged fifty years ago, in the wake of the 1967 War and Israel's occupation of the Gaza Strip and West Bank, including East Jerusalem. A truly unified Jerusalem would necessitate international recognition of Palestinian rights in and to the city, rights that would grant Palestinians dignity in both life and death, that is not merely symbolic, but accords fully with reality.

The news from Jerusalem is not always all bad. Hours before this special issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly* went to press, Israeli police and security personnel removed barriers and infrastructure for the "smart" technology slated to replace the metal gates – themselves removed a few days earlier – around the entrances to the al-Aqsa compound, the Haram al-Sharif. Palestinians in Jerusalem had mounted an unprecedented civic resistance to all these impediments to access to the holy site and to the change in the status quo agreement they represent. For two weeks, no Palestinian entered the al-Aqsa compound; each day thousands participated in mass prayers on the street and at the Lion's Gate entrance to the Old City. The toll was high in loss of life, over a thousand injuries, and many detentions. A crisis in Jordan – negotiating the return of Israeli embassy staff and a security guard who had shot and killed a local worker in circumstances that are still unclear – may have given the Israeli government an opportunity to back down, but it was the almost unprecedented mobilization of ordinary Palestinians in Jerusalem that was at the core of the issue. It should not have to be stated, but perhaps it still must be, that Palestinian officials, whether religious or political, are clearly against firearms inside the al-Aqsa compound, as is Palestinian public opinion. But unimpeded access to what is not only Islam's third holiest site, but, as one Palestinian told a reporter, the only "public square" for the beleaguered Palestinians of occupied Jerusalem, is an issue that unifies everyone.

But the news from Jerusalem is never all good. More "amazing" technology may still be in the cards, to increase the already heavy surveillance and harassment of Palestinians in the Old City and elsewhere. And as this issue brings to the fore, another crisis may be brewing with the proposed move of the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem.