



## EDITORIAL

### Challenging Borders

An order signed by the Israeli Minister of Interior closing the Palestine National Theatre in Jerusalem was tacked on the theatre's door by a squadron of surly policemen on the opening and closing night of the June 2009 Palestine Festival of Literature. For those fearing the death of the book, it was perhaps good news that the “culture of power,” in the name of the Minister of Interior, feared the “power of culture,” in the likes of Henning Mankell, author of the immensely popular Swedish crime novels featuring another surly policeman, Inspector Kurt Wallander, Michael Palin, whose career spans Monty Python to numerous travel series and books, Claire Messud, acclaimed novelist (*The Last Life, The Emperor's Children*), and conference organizer, novelist and essayist Ahdaf Soueif, among many other notable writers. After all, an opening panel on, “intimacy and distance” sounded particularly subversive.

Court order on the door of The National Theatre in East Jerusalem. *Source:* <http://www.palfest.org>.

But police orders do not mark “The End” for this particular tale. Instead, East Jerusalem witnessed two peculiar, and significant, migrations. On the opening night, the French Cultural Center opened its doors and its garden to participants and audience; on closing night, a ragged parade of eager listeners moved from the theatre to the garden of the British Council, where British Consul-General David Makepeace welcomed them for an evening of writers, reading works that inspired them and music from the Basel Zayad group. Only the piano remained behind in the abandoned theatre.

The British and French gardens could be considered another – and more positive – form of the border zones explored in this issue of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*. For an evening, these zones offered border crossings and the mobility and exchange that Israel’s system of spatial segregation and exclusion has forbidden, whether in the words of the police orders or the stone of walls and the wire of checkpoints. Interestingly, the “law” cited by the Minister of the Interior was Article 3A of Israeli law implementing the 1995 Interim Accords (the Oslo agreements), rather amusingly given in the order’s poor Arabic as the “Middle Agreement” (*ittifaqiyya el wasat*) rather than the Interim Agreement (*al-ittifaqiyya al-intiqaliyya*).

That article, in its rather ‘creative’ Israeli interpretation, bans Palestinian Authority activity in Jerusalem. The fact that the Festival had no link to the Authority and was in fact sponsored by the British Council, UNESCO, and the Qattan Foundation had no bearing. What did is that the Israeli authorities deemed the festival as part of “Jerusalem, Capital of Arab Culture,” that has seen the Israeli police ban activities in Jerusalem ranging from clowns and balloons to community meetings. In an informative report from the “battlefield,” Varsen Aghabekian, the Executive Director of al-Quds Capital of Arab Culture, gives *JQ* readers the inside story of the problems and successes to date. *JQ* Advisory Board member Nazmi Jubeh will continue the discussions on the al-Quds initiative in the next issue of *JQ* with a special contribution exploring the restraints on cultural life in Jerusalem.

Both the imaginative responses to the police closure of the Festival and the many restraints on other activities in Jerusalem raise a question that has emerged as central for the authors in this issue of *Jerusalem Quarterly*: can human agency, creativity or what Sylvaine Bulle simply calls plain human “decency” subvert or transform the ever-expanding regime of what Eyal Weizman calls “the architecture of occupation?” How do we understand everyday tactics and longer-term strategies of those who live behind the Wall in excluded Jerusalem neighborhoods? Is it adaptation or resistance, or both? While Eyal Weizman outlines the sustained and implacable Israeli plans and policies to make Palestinian areas in Jerusalem into an “archipelago of small islands,” Salim Tamari raises the important question of whether this “laboratory of the extreme” can remain uncontaminated by Palestinian actions and agency. Tamari also notes, however, the crucial issue of the erosion of Palestinian leadership in these post-Oslo environments, an issue taken up by other authors in this issue.

Sylvaine Bulle in her work on Shu’fat refugee camp and Nasser Abourahme and Sandi Hilal in their reflections on Dheisheh describe strategies that subvert spatial

restrictions, called by Abourahme and Hilal “self-urbanization” and what Bulle terms everyday practices of investing in domestic spaces. There are significant differences: in Dheisheh, camp improvement and expansion beyond its borders is led by a political and community leadership represented in an active popular committee; in Shu’fat, initiatives are individual or family-based. Tina Sherwell, a critic of the visual arts, contributes a perspective informed by both her critical eye and her lived experience as a resident of Shu’fat camp who daily crosses “borders” to take children to school in Jerusalem or go to work in Ramallah.

A powerful example of Palestinians left on their own to confront and subvert borders is given by Suad Amiry in an excerpt from her new book, *Murad, Murad*. Amiry takes us on a night journey with Murad, a Palestinian “illegal” worker determined to cross the “border” from the West Bank into Israel at all costs. While Murad takes his journey with other worker companions, he lives in a world without public support if whether from his government, other Palestinian institutions, or the multiple international actors in Palestine today. In a heartening counter, Omar Barghouti examines the international campaign against the Jerusalem Light Rail and its construction on occupied territory – and reports some signal successes. The question of whether this success can be expanded to combat other illegal Israeli government activities is particularly apt in light of recent revelations of yet another “secret plan” by the Jerusalem Development Authority to fragment Palestinian neighborhoods. As Akiva Eldar reported in *Ha’aretz* (10 May 2009), the secret weapons employed by “the government and settler organizations” working to surround the Old City, include nine national parks, most with a Biblical theme. The next issue of *JQ*, guest edited by Michael Dumper, will be dedicated to the issue of “Divided Cities.”

Contributions by Richard Cahill and Yair Wallach add historical depth to our investigation of border zones. Cahill’s fascinating exploration of the role of former “Black and Tans,” a British police unit formed to suppress the Irish rebellion, who policed Palestine during the Mandate vividly describes a form of “frontier” or cowboy (in)justice, in which techniques of torture and repression used in Ireland come to the Palestinian “frontier.” And Yair Wallach’s evokes not only the diversity of the past but alternative futures in Jerusalem in his meditation on an Ottoman-era train station.

Finally in this issue, two informal spies report on the border zone of Atarot, and journeys from Ramallah to Jerusalem on Bus 18 are vividly recalled at two very different times by artist Vladimir Tamari and film-maker Joan Mandell.

*Penny Johnson, Associate Editor of JQ, edited this issue of the Quarterly.*