

Jerusalem Unbound: Geography, History, and the Future of the Holy City

Michael Dumper

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Jerusalem represents the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The ever-changing events there have perplexed and compelled analysts, political scientists, academics, and activists to devise countless solutions, especially since 1948. Moreover, the last decade has witnessed a substantial change in its demography due to the Separation Wall and the ongoing Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem, both of which violate international law and agreements. The physical barrier is itself a grim reminder of Israel's harsh unilateral and discriminatory measures that seriously impact for the bilateral peace process.

Michael Dumper (professor of Middle East politics, University of Exeter) has written extensively on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this book, he explores and illustrates how, despite the wall (hard border), people on the both sides have managed to create and retain various trans-wall spheres of influence (soft borders) by taking advantage of its porous nature to breach it by various ways. This reality, which renders Jerusalem a "many-bordered" or unbound city, is primarily attributable to its rich, complex, and intersecting religious and political interests that are sought and contested by many actors (p. 5).

The city's physical boundaries, discussed in chapter 1, shifted continuously from 1947 to 2003; the Separation Wall actually runs right through it. According to Dumper, three major events have had long-term ramifications on this conflict: the 1947 UN Partition Plan; the 1949 partition of East and West Jerusalem between Jordan and Israel, respectively; and the ongoing illegal Israeli

occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem since 1967. He asserts that the decade-old wall has greatly affected the Palestinians on every front.

The author seeks to understand why Israel, despite its dominance and colonization of land and property that serves to streamline further Jewish settlement, has not consolidated its hegemonic and chauvinistic presence in the city's eastern part (p. 53). However, his view oversimplifies the unabated ghettoization, discrimination, and close surveillance of Jerusalem's Palestinian inhabitants. Deconstructing this chapter's theme, Dumper argues that hard or physical borders are not eternal and thus are liable to change. In other words, they are permeable and porous.

Chapter 2, a nuanced exploration of the many subtle phenomena of borders, posits that the city can be disaggregated into many levels. He states that the Zionist ideology and Israeli policy of annexing East Jerusalem inadvertently paved the way for Palestinians to establish discrete identity enclaves that, in turn, helped them practice and retain their traditional and cultural identities vis-à-vis such functional and residential delineations as electoral, educational, residential, legal, and charitable foundation administration. Moreover, their continuous presence and resilience reflects that they were there long before the Jewish Israelis. Dumper stresses that these soft borders will have a great impact on the city's future because many contenders view their social, religious, and cultural attachments to it as more than just a question of identity.

Further exploring his "a many-bordered city" thesis in chapter 3, the author highlights the impact of religious sites on Israeli hegemony, politics, and development policies. Explaining that the city contains sites that are holy to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, he explains how these "scattered borders" that are based upon actual control or semiautonomous religious authority over these sites restrict Israeli state control over the city. However, the author argues, this openness has created an atmosphere in which the dominant Jewish community often confronts and ends up conflicting – sometimes violently – with other faith groups. One note here is that these "borders" most likely prevent the state from intervening in any confrontation that entails the consolidation and extension of unabated Zionist settlement.

Dumper states that despite Muslim resistance, radical Zionists continue to interfere in and place strict restrictions on their religious rituals and places, such as at Hebron's al-Ibrahimi Masjid. Such actions are provocative, for the "settlers' chauvinistic and exclusivist visions of the city have become mainstream politics" (p. 131) because, he maintains, many ultra-orthodox Jews now hold key government positions and support the radical Zionist agenda as the vanguard of the Israeli establishment. However, according to Dumper, Is-

rael is not seeking to implement such an agenda as regards Zionist settlement in Jerusalem because it fears international opprobrium.

Chapter 4 delineates the role of international community in the city's affairs, which also blocks the imposition of Israeli sovereignty over the city. Dumper recounts that Jerusalem, with almost no resources, has had to rely on external resources for its survival ever since the medieval era. The involvement of the United Nations, the United States, the European Union, and the Arab and Islamic states and foundations has further affected Tel Aviv's role and illegal occupation of Jerusalem; however, this external involvement has provided an alternative source of funding and other independent organizations for East Jerusalem, which has still not recovered from the Israeli occupation.

Dumper draws an important point here: Despite the Israeli claim that Jerusalem is its capital, "all embassies are located in Tel Aviv as a sign of the international community's refusal to accept the Israeli incorporation of East Jerusalem into Israel" (p. 177). The author concedes that external intervention cannot compel Israel to abandon its hegemony over the East Jerusalem; however, he does remark that it raises the important question of who "owns" East Jerusalem and thus leaves negotiations over the city's future open.

The fifth and final chapter examines the developments in the Israeli-Palestinian political negotiations since 1993, among them Camp David (2000), the Egyptian Red Sea resort (2001), the Geneva Accord (2003), and the Jerusalem Old City Initiative (JOCI-2005). He contends that such proposals have not yielded any positive achievement. In fact, he argues that all such initiatives fail because the main issue is that of sovereignty over the holy city. Neither side wants to lose its grip over what part(s) of the city it now controls.

Given this atmosphere of deadlock, Dumper presents the "binational" or one-state model that has recently appeared and is gaining momentum in academic debate and circles. It features predominately independent territories that are primarily characterized by close cooperation and coordination between the two sides. He asserts that this model is viable and feasible because some agreements between Israeli and Palestine are already in place, among them a single economic zone, a customs union, and water sharing (p. 217). However, citing his less-than-optimistic view as regards any substantial cooperation and serious recognition of each party's mutual rights in the one-state model, he proposes his own innovative concept: the "open city" plan. This, he asserts, will bring about a peaceful resolution of the conflict provided that "Palestinian sovereignty will be recognized in all areas of the 1949 Armistice Lines" (p. 223).

His “open city” concept envisions an “inclusive city incorporating different nationalities and religions” (p. 223), one with an internal border running through the open city zone and combined with highly coordinated security zones on both sides of this “soft” border. Otherwise, the author asserts, the “future stability and prosperity of the city” will become possible only when the Israelis and Palestinians recognize their mutual rights and accommodate each other in this city. For Dumper, territorial divisions can only harm Jerusalem. But his plan also has some limitations. For example, it would turn the holy city into an armed camp, most likely encourage third-party intervention, and force Israel to cede its sovereignty over the city.

Dumper remains optimistic, for he does recognize that some positive developments favorable to the oppressed Palestinians have occurred, that political Zionist growth is in retreat from what it had achieved since 1967, and that the increasing indigenous Palestinian population in both parts of Jerusalem inadvertently reveals Israel’s lack of clarity as to the Israelis’ long-term relationship with the Palestinians. However, American foreign policy reveals that the ongoing illegal occupation and settlements enjoy Washington’s tacit support.

Based on his research project “Conflict in Cities and the Contested State,” Dumper’s book superbly reveals the city’s political dynamics, evinces and illuminates the implicit yet significant role played by the flexible but invisible borders in preventing Israeli hegemony over Jerusalem, and proffers new dimensions for future peace negotiations that will engender a peaceful and prosperous multi-religious city. This is a must-read book for the general public, academics, and analysts.

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