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CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

PLENARY IV

Ways forward to preserve the character of the Sacred City

Preserving the City through education and community projects

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Jerusalem: Heritage preservation of the holiest, the fairest and the wretched

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Introduction: preservation amid transformation

Jerusalem, the picturesque city of spices' aromas, the peddlers' voices, the yellow limestone and clear blue skies, has been going through dramatic changes and transformations; some were smooth and peaceful, others were abrupt and brutal. Notwithstanding these changes the Old City of Jerusalem still reads as ideal Roman plan with the orthogonal grid and armature of Roman architecture. The *decumanus*, passes from west (Jaffa gate) to east (Lions' gate), while the colonnaded north-south street splits in two; the *cardo*, which runs from Damascus gate to Zion gate (*Tariq Khan al-Zeit*), the second follows the Tyropoeon (*Tariq al Wad*) to the Dung gate. The nowadays Aqsa Mosque area (called then Quadra or "square") was left outside the colony plan and the temple of Jupiter was erected on it. The main temple, dedicated to the Capitoline triad, the Tricameron, was situated near the forum, the main market place. Facing the Tricameron was the temple of Venus, on the location of today's Holy Sepulchre.

Since mid 19th century, Jerusalem has witnessed not only huge transformations in terms of urban development, which was reflected in the expansions outside the City Walls and the construction of urban mansions and new neighbourhoods, but also the

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² **Riwaq Centre:** Since its establishment in 1991, RIWAQ has recognized the challenging complexities of preserving Palestinian collective memory through projects that document and restore architectural heritage sites across the West Bank and Gaza. Riwaq is distinguished by its focus on rural areas in Palestine, where tens of historic buildings were restored as community and cultural centres, mainly for marginalized groups. Because of the huge demand for restoration and the scarcity of human and financial resources, Riwaq has been prioritising and implementing "The 50-Village Rehabilitation Project" in which rehabilitation and safeguarding of heritage in Palestine function as a tool for socio-economic and political development. Throughout its life span, Riwaq has turned the field of heritage to a medium of thinking urgent and emergent socio-economic-cultural-political concerns. In this paradigm, the heritage becomes the field not only for knowledge production but also the field for change (<https://www.riswaq.org/our-story>).

modernisation of the administration and the living standards as part of the reforms (*Tanzimat*) that swept the Ottoman Empire as a whole. Still, the expansions outside City Walls followed the ancient Roman transportation network: south (Bethlehem and Hebron), north (Nablus) and west (the Mediterranean).

The Colonial Legacy and the Preservation of the City

On December 11, 1917, Marshal General Allenby entered Jerusalem and announced “the end of the crusader wars,” a comment that did not go down well with the elites or the general public of Jerusalem attending the ceremony. The speech implied a regime change and new chief in town. Charles Ashbee became the City of Jerusalem Engineer soon after Allenby’s speech. He also headed ‘The Pro Jerusalem Society’ whose interest was to preserve the antique character of the Old City of Jerusalem. The first decision the Society made was to destroy the 1901 Jaffa Gate clock tower. The tower was constructed at the occasion of Sultan Abdulhamid II silver jubilee—the twenty-fifth anniversary of his rein over the Ottoman Empire. According to the Society, the clock tower did not “respect the antique character of the Ottoman walls.” The tower was built in hybrid architectural form in neo-Baroque style that was foreign to the site. The tower was considered a product of Western technology and form that did not blend well with the classical/oriental imagery of Jerusalem. The incident was a turning point in the attitude towards city preservation and planning.

During the British rule (1917-1947), the British brought with them the systematic planning to Jerusalem's scene, and in less than three decades the City had become a planning laboratory where many schemes were plotted for Jerusalem beginning with W. McLean’s plan 1918, Sir Patrick Geddes’ plan 1919, the town-planning commission’s plan 1921, 1930 plan and concluding with Henry Kendall’s plan 1944. The different schemes focused and defined three main intervention zones: the Old City where architectural traditions and the historic monuments ought to be preserved, the protective zone of open spaces around the City Walls where a 25 to 50 meter-wide green belt ought to be maintained, and the areas designated to residential, business and industrial activities, where the height of buildings was restricted to a maximum of double the width of the road, and their facades ought to be built from local stone.

In 1929, the British Mandate authorities issued the Law of Antiquities, which defined 'antiquities' as structures or sites that were constructed prior to 1700 AD. As such, it ignores the living heritage of Palestine, that is, the standing buildings of the late Ottoman era—the living testimony of continuing traditions and crafts. Preoccupied with biblical narrative and its concrete manifestations, those who drafted the Law did not care much about living heritage.

1948-1993: Preservation and the creation of facts on the ground

The 1948 shuttered the city and made it into two distinctive zones; the west side administered by the newly established state of Israel; the east side administered by the Jordanian regime. During the Jordanian rule 1948-1967, the city expanded mainly in the northern and eastern directions, following the traffic lines connecting the city to Ramallah, Jericho and beyond, following the urban trend that had started during the late Ottoman era and the British rule of the City.

The last five decades of City's history, following the 1967 War and the Israeli annexation of Jerusalem in 1980, have witnessed monstrous and abrupt urban expansions, which do not respect the relatively smooth transitions and transformations of the City's landscapes. Before the end of the 1967 War, the Israeli occupying power bulldozed to ground the Moroccan quarter and al Sharaf neighbourhood to make room to the Wailing Wall plaza and new development of a Jewish neighbourhood that dominates and occupies a great portion of the Old City. This act left an irreversible change on the cityscape.

Time, space and demography were the driving elements of the Israeli occupying power, who has been eager to produce "*facts on the ground*" that favour Jewish majority in the City and its environs. By adopting coercive measures sometimes, and non-coercive ones in some other times, the Israeli authorities have made the Jerusalemites' life in the city hard if at all possible. This has been manifested in the settlement activities within the Old City, the urban development of new Jewish neighbourhoods and settlements as well as in the "soft" and harsh displacement of Palestinian inhabitants from the City following "The Centre of Life Policy" (1996) which demanded that Palestinian Jerusalemites a

proof of residence if they benefit from the Israeli social and healthcare system. This discriminatory policy contributed to the congestions of the Old City and the surrounding neighbourhoods. Hence, the City's cultural landscape has been made into a battlefield and a victim of discriminatory spatial policies, social marginalization and asymmetric development. *The Jewish Jerusalem successive Municipalities have practically turned the City into two involuntarily united and disproportionally developed zones.*

As it stands today, an "invisible" line separates the Jewish neighbourhoods from the Palestinian communities. The Arab neighbourhoods lack adequate services, public spaces, affordable housing and public transport. Direct destruction of homes in the Arab neighbourhood has become an everyday happening for the Palestinian Jerusalemites.

The Era of Oslo Agreement: Preservation between Protection and Development

The City's old fabric also suffers from the discriminatory spatial and planning policies affecting direct and indirect destruction of the ancient landscape, the erecting of new structures and skylines, mal-restoration and mal-presentation of heritage sites, tunnelling activities beneath Arab neighbourhoods and the introduction of complex infrastructure and traffic networks to cope with the needs of the enlarged City. All contributed to the destruction of the historic landscapes of Jerusalem, the museulization of its sites and the radicalization of what once was amalgamation of cultures and their living practices.

The architectural heritage has been the grounds of claims, counter claims and disputes. While the UNESCO reports on the state of preservation of the City, which was inscribed into the world heritage list in danger since almost four decades, show that the City's heritage has suffered tremendous losses as a result of heavy urbanization, tourism, lack of maintenance and the tunnelling activities, less emphasis was given to the steadfastness and resilience of Palestinian communities who have been trying to protect their City by adopting restoration measures or by the mere existence under harsh circumstances.

Apart from the Islamic or Christian endowments (*Waqf*), in the last two decades or so, civil society has been spearheading the efforts to protect the City, the sacred and secular buildings alike. And mainly it is after the Oslo Agreement (1993), that more

attention was paid to heritage, tangible and intangible, as part of the Palestinian nation/state building process.

In spite of the Israeli authorities' restrictions on restoration of heritage, including the impossibility of issuing of restoration permits, the prohibition of restoration materials and equipment entry, the firm control of access of skilled and non-skilled labourers, and the ban of entry of restoration experts, local communities managed to prioritise restoration and preservation of historic sites in the City as part of their political commitment to the safeguarding of Jerusalem, their political and sacred capital.

When it comes to restoration, one of the great challenges has been how to strike a balance between protection and development—between authenticity and renewal. The demographic battle made every space in the Old City into an attractive battlefield. While the Israeli authorities and settlers organizations have been trying to encroach into the Arab neighbourhoods, the Jerusalemites have been restoring houses, businesses, public and sacred spaces to contribute to the steadfastness of the Palestinians in their hometown. The rehabilitation and renewal of historic buildings have been driven and connected to the demographic calculations and the capacity of spaces to host the Palestinian inhabitants and their activities. As such, *new arrangements and spatial divisions within traditional courtyards as well as the adaptive reuse of sacred places or shrines as residential houses ought to be seen as a pragmatic take into the spatial arrangements of Jerusalem infused by the political struggles and national claims.* The restorers find themselves in a double bind, in one hand they want to protect the City's authentic setting, and on the other, they want to accommodate the needs of suffering community. These two cannot necessarily be bridged without compromising the City's historic character.

The Separation Wall and the confinement of the city

Another key challenge for the City's state of preservation is the Separation Wall, which was constructed in the first few years of the third millennium. The Separation Wall segregated and divided communities from their businesses, from their relatives and from their sacred and secular practices. The territorial fragmentation of Jerusalem and the

separation of the City from its rural surroundings made the city into an isolated enclave that needs to stand on its own and to struggle on its own. Again, civil society has been far more progressive and dynamic than official bodies and institutions and has been challenging the fragmentation and isolation policies. The Jerusalem Life Jacket project, initiated by Riwaq centre in 2017, is one example of the civil society attempts to reverse the colonial conditions and to recreate a unity between the centre and periphery. The project contributes to the wellbeing of the communities in respective areas as well as to the recreation of a culture of interdependency that anchors communities in their space.

In 2017, and in Riwaq's attempt to accelerate restoration, maximize the benefits of local communities, and combat the colonial processes, the "cluster" approach was adopted towards heritage work in Palestine. Instead of focusing on individual villages or towns, Riwaq proposes the clustering of several villages and towns to tackle them as one entity. While doing so, Riwaq acknowledges the significance of each village while recognizing the potential interdependency of these locales on each other in the interests of all communities. This approach does not constitute surrender to the fragmentation of Palestine into small easily controlled enclaves. Rather, it is intended to ensure that no one is left isolated and no space is insignificant. It starts from the premise that all locales are equally important in any socio-economic-political-cultural project in Palestine. It also poses the question of what might happen if we dismantle borders and reconnect villages with each other and villages with towns across Palestine. In so doing, "clustering" becomes a concept, a vision, or a potential and medium for experimentation in the very contested and problematic field of space. The Jerusalem Life Jacket has been the first pilot of this approach, and while trying to revive and rehabilitate villages of rural Jerusalem, it also aims to perceive Jerusalem as part of broader landscape and therefore challenging the on-the-ground fragmentation and isolation policies.

Conclusion: preservation as a political question

In Jerusalem, the preservation question is quintessentially a political one. The Palestinian restorers, owners, and decision makers within Jerusalem communities don't have the luxury of detachment and the possibility of approaching the historic buildings in a rather technical manner that takes into consideration the authenticity of edifices and the spirit

of the haunted and non-haunted structures. While the Israeli authorities treat the Jerusalemites as a demographic threat, the restorers see such Israeli perception as a threat to any possibility of detachment and objective thinking of heritage and space. Hence, we, as restorers or community activists, cannot but to rethink space and heritage in a way that it challenges the colonial conditions and reinstate the possibility of existence, resilience and steadfastness of communities in their space. The preservation in the Old City of Jerusalem and the rural surroundings show Palestinians as active actors in the reshaping of the Cityscape as well as the reshaping of their future. The successes and failures of such attempts are conditioned by the broader political circumstances that need to be unpacked and unmasked.