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## Book Review: Jerusalem: The Spatial Politics of a Divided Metropolis by Anne B. Shlay and Gillad Rosen



*In Jerusalem: The Spatial Politics of a Divided Metropolis, Anne B. Shlay and Gillad Rosen outline the geographic dynamics of contemporary Jerusalem. While the book is occasionally simplistic in some areas of its analysis, Kenny Schmitt praises the authors for navigating complex terrain with skill and clarity to produce an approachable introduction to the spatial politics of the city.*

***Jerusalem: The Spatial Politics of a Divided Metropolis.* Anne B. Shlay and Gillad Rosen. Polity Press. 2015.**

Violence has come to Jerusalem, again. It erupted during the Jewish and Muslim holidays, which virtually coincided this year. Since the beginning of October, at least **44 Palestinians and eight Israelis have lost their lives**. From my home in East Jerusalem, the tension is palpable and the fear is pervasive. How can one move past the shocking headlines to an engaged and thoughtful analysis of the city?

*In Jerusalem: The Spatial Politics of a Divided Metropolis*, Anne B. Shlay and Gillad Rosen have written a book that attempts to

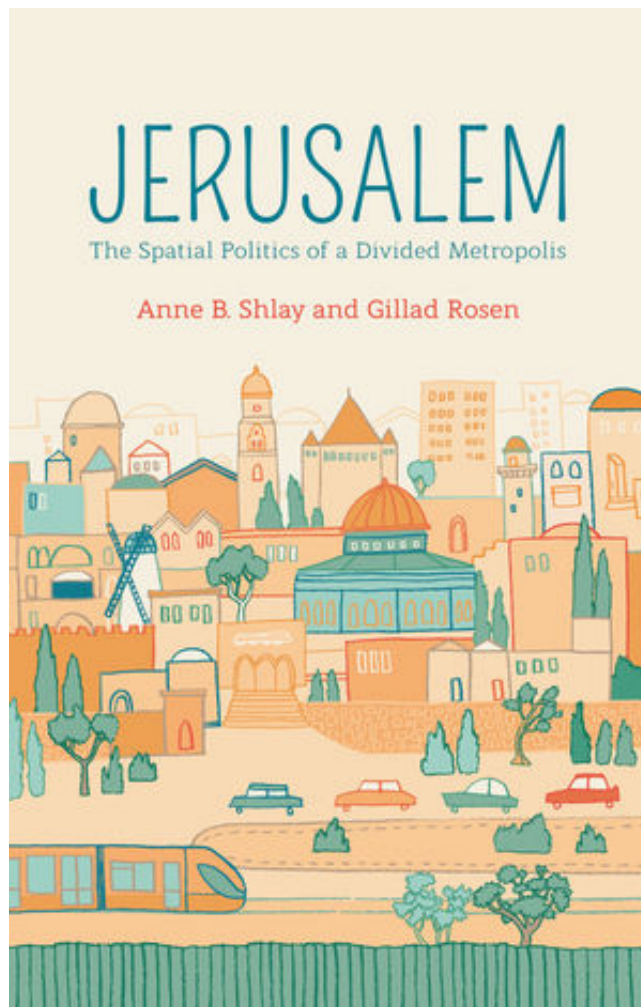


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convey the complexity of the city, whilst remaining accessible to a wide audience. This book is about the politics of space and the 'constellation of competing interests' over it (13). Shlay and Rosen, a sociologist and geographer respectively, explore the various geographic dynamics of Jerusalem and how the conflict plays out in specific locations. Their goal is not to 'inflammate or incite but to analyze and inform' (15). It is a worthy goal. In this review I argue that the authors accomplish it, mostly.



The chapters are well organised and the content is accessible. Chapter titles, such as 'What is Jerusalem?', 'Who is Jerusalem?' and 'The Palestinian Challenge and Resistance in Arab Jerusalem', give the reader clear signposts about the presentation and organisation of the book's content. The narrative flows and readers have a sense of momentum throughout. The concluding chapter is particularly engaging as the authors take readers on a virtual tour of Jerusalem, pointing out key locations and sites of struggle along the way. They navigate complex terrain with skill and clarity.

One point I found astute – and particularly helpful for a wide audience – was that much of the conflict occurs behind closed doors. Masses may be drawn into the spectacle of stabbings and burning tyres; yet, in reality, the bulk of the conflict is played out in policy decisions, budget allocations and the ways that people

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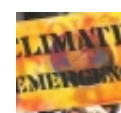
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tell stories about the past. The authors illustrate this point vividly in their discussion of the City of David and Silwan community (5-7, 79, 83-85). As the book highlights this sensitive issue, and others like it, readers are subtly challenged to consider the implications of their own ideologies and narrative histories. Working through this process is essential for anyone wanting to understand the city of Jerusalem.



Image Credit: Jerusalem, The Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif (Aleksander Miler)

In the chapter 'Who is Jerusalem?', the authors discuss the various populations of the city at length. This is very helpful, and written to a level appropriate for a wide audience. Jewish residents are analysed geographically, politically and religiously. Explanations are helpful. The authors also discuss Palestinians in the city. Here, the analysis is primarily geographical. When Palestinian religion and politics are mentioned, the discussion is too simplistic. The Palestinian community of Jerusalem is much more complex and varied than the authors lead their readers to believe. For one, they fail to mention the Islamic Movement in Israel led by Sheykh Raid Salah. This group has explicit religious and political agendas for the city, which directly shape spatial politics at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, among other locales. As Israel has marginalised traditional Palestinian political parties, the Islamic movement has arguably filled the gap. Their role in the city must be understood – even in a mass market publication.

Another shortfall of the book is the neglect of Jerusalem localities behind the barrier/fence/wall [sic]. Readers are given basic

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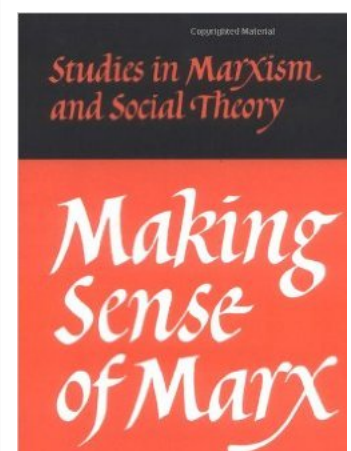
information and informed that 'a significant portion' of the population live behind the barrier/fence/wall (74-79). But without numbers, readers are left wondering just how 'significant' that portion is. **Estimates from 2012 put the number around 90,000** (see also **Candace Graff**). With a total Arab population of approximately 300,000, this means around 25% of Arab Jerusalemites live behind the barrier/fence/wall. This is astounding! The communities of Qafr 'Aqab, Shuafat Camp, Ras Khamis, Ras al-Shahada and Dahiyat al-Salam are all behind the barrier/fence/wall. They are the most densely populated and impoverished locations in the city, lacking basic infrastructure and municipality services. They have virtually no city planning or law enforcement. Beyond this, the residents of Shuafat Camp are doubly displaced refugees, which makes a difficult living situation more complicated (the refugees in Shuafat camp were expelled from their homes in 1948 and relocated to the Old City of Jerusalem. In 1967, at the completion of the Six-Day War, they were displaced a second time to the Shuafat Refugee camp). Since the barrier/fence/wall was built, the population in these communities has skyrocketed. Beyond this, residents of these communities make up a significant portion of the wage labour force in West Jerusalem (see also **Nir Hasson**). It comes as little surprise that much of the violence plaguing Jerusalem today originates from behind this wall. How can a book on the spatial politics of the city only mention these communities in passing?

Initially, I was troubled by the authors' claim that East Jerusalem is an 'Israeli construction [...] an artifact of Israeli power and political domination' (139). This seemed to qualify, minimise and negate Palestinian claims to the city. However, upon grasping their concept of 'Arab Jerusalem', my concerns were assuaged. Arab Jerusalem is not just the status quo boundaries established by the Oslo process; it is the very essence of what Palestinians consider their city to be: the East Jerusalem of today and the West Jerusalem of memory and history. Arab Jerusalem directly challenges the dominant Israeli discourse. The authors are correct in explaining that resistance to Israeli dominance occurs on the ground level among Arab Jerusalemites. What they have

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missed, however, is the role of the international community in challenging this dominance as well. One concrete expression of this is the US refusal to relocate its embassy to Jerusalem. Another is the international funding that supports Arab Jerusalem from a great number of nations and international organisations. These demonstrate that Israel's dominance of Jerusalem is not as 'common sense' as the authors would suggest (142).

Despite these criticisms, I believe that Shlay and Rosen have crafted an approachable and provocative introduction to the spatial politics of the city of Jerusalem. They have navigated a complex and contentious terrain skillfully. The reader who wants to push beyond headlines will find themselves highly engaged by this book.

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**Kenny Schmitt** is a PhD Candidate at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies, Exeter University. His research examines Muslim religious practices in Jerusalem and how they are influenced and transformed by ongoing conflict in the city. He has nine years of experience in the Middle East, four of those based full-time in East Jerusalem. He is fluent in Modern Standard Arabic and Palestinian dialect.

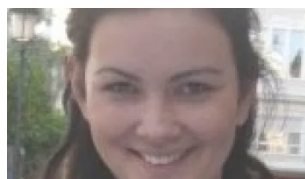


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