

**PAL PAPERS**

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**Who's Jerusalem?**

RLS interviewed Albert Aghazarian, a Palestinian historian of Armenian descent, specialized in Jerusalem. Following his graduate studies in Georgetown University, he worked as lecturer of history and cultural studies. He served 24 years as head of the Public Relations department in Birzeit University. In 1991, he headed the Palestinian press center during the *MADRID PEACE CONFERENCE*.

**RLS:** Donald Trump announced his intention to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and to move the American embassy to officiate this, while he was still running in the presidential elections. How do you evaluate this step now and what do you think is the aim and interest of Trump to issue this recognition now?

**A. Aghazarian:** Trump's declaration is sort of bringing an illicit relationship that was in the closet for decades into the public sphere, and seeking recognition of its existence in public. He doesn't understand the symbolisms of this conflict, which is filled with myths and mythologies - and one of the greatest myths is that Jerusalem is a united city – his declaration works as if you impose marriage over two partners without asking for their approval. Since the 1970s there is a standing policy in Israel that non-Jews, and note the term "non-Jews" because it indicates an insistence to ignore the identity of the other by Israelis, - should never exceed 30% of the so-called united

city while the Jews, should become a majority in the occupied eastern part.

**RLS:** Back in 1995, The American congress passed a law echoing Israel's interest in the city with ultimate majority, which formally recognized the city as Israel's capital and called for the U.S. Embassy to be moved there from Tel Aviv by 1999. Yet, President Clinton at the time considered that: "... the *Embassy Act Law* could hinder the peace process. I will not let this happen and will use the legislation's waiver authority to avoid damage to the peace process." Do you think that Trumps decision would hinder the political process and form a turn in the US administration declared policies?

**A. Aghazarian:** I think this declaration is not in favour of the Americans, they don't have any interest in it. Actually, they have shot themselves in the foot. They brought something that was ongoing smoothly from underneath the table and put it directly in plain sight. No one was talking about Jerusalem but now it is wide open. In the

Middle East we know that there are things on the table and there are things under the table. In this case what was under the table has been placed on the table and has been signed openly!! Through the last 30 years there has always been some deliberate political ambiguity. Now there is no more ambiguity, everything is clear on the ground.

**RLS:** Some considered that the PLO was forced into this political process, one that was dominated by Israeli - American interests and in their favour, regardless of the Palestinian people interest and aspirations. Do you think this latest move represents a good opportunity to move away from the Israel-USA domination over the political process? And how would that affect the continuation of the political process?

**A. Aghazarian:** The Israelis have a series of long standing policies since the early 70s, among which is the so called "united city", in which, the non-Jews are not recognized. In Madrid, we were recognized as the Palestinian-Jordanian delegation, we were not allowed to run alone, then at Oslo negotiations, with all its flaws yet it had something very important; for the first time the word *Palestinian* was used officially. But then the Zionists found this to be problematic so they came back to the old argument of denial; there is no partner. The Israelis try all the time to pose their conditions and force their interest, I saw this coming in Madrid, and so I withdraw.

I do not think that the possibilities ahead of us are clear or smooth. What I can think of is either that the current apartheid system

continues as it is going, the second, which is very likely, is a new Nakba or Nakba's. The third possibility is to start saying one person, one vote in historical Palestine. And the good news is that for the first time since 1948 mandatory Palestine is united, physically. You know some people don't have access to the historic geographic area; it's true that the Gazans can't come to the West Bank and West Bankers can't go to Gaza but it's united under one racist regime. Eventually I can see, slowly but surely, the awareness that Israeli Arab representatives within the green line are standing up for their side. The good thing that came out of Trump's move is that he put the focus back on the original and underlying issue, which is Zionism as an ideology with all its trends.

**RLS:** Do you think that the two-state solution is still achievable? And what are the options for the PA & PLO now?

**A. Aghazarian:** The two-state solution is finished. A one-state solution could be possible, but I know that the intentions are not healthy from the Zionist side. Fear is the moving force of Zionists, and if you build policy on fear you either are aggressive or you chicken out.

There is a word I learned in school: dramatic irony, for me it dramatically illustrates the situation now. The Americans have a practice used to manipulate the boundaries of an electoral constituency so as to favour one party or class, it's called gerrymandering. The Israelis have been practicing this at large, when they said that the majority of the population of East Jerusalem are Jews, they excluded maybe

10 suburban areas of Jerusalem that are heavily populated by Palestinians like Ram and Kufr 'Aqab.

While the Palestinians are in a very difficult position, they have to take historic decisions now. The problem is that the PA has at least 200,000 people who work for them. The security forces alone are over 66,000 people; forget about the teachers, medical personals, etc. These people are forced to be on their knees to get their salaries, due to the loans and the increasing burdens on them.

**RLS:** Some analysts estimate that Palestinians consider Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, as the end of their hopes and aspirations to have Jerusalem as the capital of the supposed Palestinian state to come, and that it will bring their diplomatic efforts to an ambiguous destiny. How do you think this will affect Palestinians in Jerusalem specifically? And what are the new measures or plans announced by the Israelis in East Jerusalem?

**A. Aghazarian:** The Israeli measures and plans for Jerusalem are not new; rather it is a continuation of old policies started as early as 1967. When Zionism started at the turn of the last century, there was no love between the religious Jewish establishment and Zionists. Then there was a State to run after 1948, Ben-Gurion negotiated with the religious to exclude them from serving in the army, to have their own education system, reserving Saturday from being "desecrated" in the religious neighbourhoods, etc. so that they could reach an agreement with the Zionist

movement. And that is what happened. Between 1948 and 1967 a very strange relationship begun that moved the religious establishment from being anti-Zionists, to non-Zionists and after 67 to being super-Zionist!! The ruling establishment in Israel is insisting on denying even within the area it controls, that there are Israeli Arabs who are the main problem for them in developing their plan for the city. Their policy toward all non-Jews in Israel and particularly in Jerusalem is asymmetrical treatment and containment.

One of Franz Fanon's principles is that conquered people eventually adopt the value system of the conqueror, which is true. I think deep inside many Israelis, they want to become Germans and many Palestinians want to become Israeli's!! If you have something missing you want to replace it by emulating your oppressor. It's one of the saddest things. And the worst thing that could happen is when you adopt the value system of your oppressors. This is a déjà vu and a very common thing in the history of people. Palestinians in Jerusalem are not different.

**RLS:** The role of civil society, political parties and even INGOs was remarkable in the Palestinian community through its recent history. What do you think the PA, civil society organizations and INGOS should or could do now? And what kind of role they would have?

**A. Aghazarian:** I believe this is mission impossible for them. A mission impossible, because they are in a trap. Very simply, the PA has salaries to pay. They have an infrastructure that they put in place of more

than 200,000 people and the NGOs aren't removed from this system either, including Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. These are mercenaries of development and reconstruction. It's a global system. It is a system that developed where there are no really effective political parties, like we used to have in the past. What we have now are mercenaries of development, they all have to play the game, including myself, to earn a living.

To finalize, I think they presently have a good opportunity to get out of this trap, if they can grab it but it will be very difficult.

The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (RLS) is one of the major institutions of political education in the Federal Republic of Germany. RLS serves as a forum for debate and critical thinking about political alternatives, as well as a research center for progressive social development. It is closely affiliated to the German Left Party (DIE LINKE). The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Regional Office Palestine has supported partners in Palestine since 2000, and established the Regional Office in Ramallah in 2008. Today, the office is in charge of project cooperation with partners in the West Bank, in East Jerusalem, and in the Gaza Strip as well as in Jordan.

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