

**Johannes Becker: Emplacement in Jerusalem's Old City. Life stories and everyday life in a dense urban space. Bielefeld: transcript, 2017.**

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## **Summary**

The Old City of Jerusalem is a highly charged symbol for different religions and for the Middle East conflict. At the same time, it is a dense space in which more than 40,000 inhabitants live on less than one square kilometre. During my empirical research, it soon became obvious that living in the Old City and in places within the Old City is a very relevant issue for its inhabitants. Therefore, my research question focused on how and where inhabitants of the Old City emplace themselves in their life courses and how and where they are being emplaced. I also enquired how emplacement may become important as a collective belonging. I conducted 35 biographical-narrative interviews (Fritz Schütze) with Palestinians and Christian monks which I analysed by applying biographical case reconstructions (Gabriele Rosenthal). Additionally, I undertook participant observations and I also looked at historical processes of change and at academic discourses as well as Palestinian discourses about the Old City.

Following Edward Casey and Doreen Massey, I define 'place' as processual and changeable. I consider places as the primary, 'close' and obvious level of experience in which 'time and space' collapse. Those who experience are themselves through their bodies part of places and co-constitute them through their social interactions. Places thus become narratable, e.g. in the life stories of the members who constitute them. Therefore, the term 'emplacement' has become important for me because it has a spatial and processual component. Borrowing from Norbert Elias I furthermore differentiate between places and 'we-places'. I use the latter term to identify places which are constituted by their members in a way that enables a we-feeling to develop which is then inscribed in these places.

Current living conditions in Jerusalem's Old City are determined by overcrowding, density and often poverty. Additionally, the everyday life of Palestinians is severely influenced by the Israeli occupation policy. A majority of the Palestinian inhabitants are members of families which migrated to Jerusalem from Hebron and its surroundings. In the inner-Palestinian discourse the Old City is treated as a conservative and/or criminal space. Its inhabitants occupy a slight outsider position in the figuration with established Jerusalemite Palestinians who live outside of the Old City.

To narrow the very diverse space of the Old City for my research, I formed three heuristic research spaces on the basis of contrastive comparisons (as suggested by Grounded Theory). Formed after a primary period of data collection and analysis, I then collected further data in these research spaces. I at first analytically reconstructed individual biographies and emplacements and only then tackled the questions which emplacements are the dominant ones in the three research spaces, which places are thus constituted and if the research spaces continued

to be relevant at all. The research spaces I formed put aspects into the centre which are not often discussed in the academic literature about Jerusalem: small groupings as well as spaces and places which are hardly formally organised and which have fuzzy borders. The first research space is a small neighbourhood (below the level of the formally more institutionalised Palestinian *ḥārāt*), which was named by its inhabitants to define their spatial belonging. The second research space is constituted by Palestinians who live in the remnants of former Palestinian neighbourhoods in today's enlarged Jewish Quarter which was administratively defined by Israel. These neighbourhoods were for the greater part destroyed in the decade after the Israeli conquest in 1967. The third research space is formed by several hundred monks who live in the Old City and whom their orders placed there.

Based on my analyses I was able to reconstruct emplacements in *house and family*, in the *neighbourhood*, in a *symbolic Jerusalem*, by *temporal detachment* and by *moving out*. On the one hand, certain emplacements are more prominent in individual research spaces because they are supported by their structure (such as emplacement in house and family in the enlarged Jewish Quarter due to the political and legal structures there, or neighbourhood-emplacement in the 'small' neighbourhood which was also the only research space that formed a *we-place*). But on the other hand, the reconstruction of emplacements introduced above as well as the reconstructed courses of emplacements in life histories (which highlight differing dynamics of their confinement and extension) show that there are differing emplacements of inhabitants of these research spaces despite the prevalence of dominant emplacements. This means that neither the dominant emplacements nor the four ethno-religious quarters as they are typically defined in the Western/Israeli discourse or the traditional Arab neighbourhoods (*ḥārāt*) determine the emplacements of the inhabitants. Rather, their emplacements are diverse and changeable during biographical courses. By reconstructing emplacements on the basis of single biographies as well as on the level of research spaces I was thus able to describe processes of community formation as well as individual attempts to withdraw from these.