



EDITORIAL

The Israeli Agenda for Jerusalem

Jerusalem is a city of walls. The most obvious, and perhaps most interesting among its walls is the one surrounding the Old City that was rebuilt during the rein of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in the sixteenth century. The newest, and the most crude and ugly, of its walls is that now being constructed by the Israelis to surround the city and close it off from its Palestinian surroundings. Between these two physical walls exist layers of other walls - real, psychological, and symbolic. Such walls are fluid and might easily transform from real to imaginary and visa-versa. The wall that once separated -Israeli-occupied West Jerusalem and Jordanian-held East Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967 is one such wall. Although it was completely removed physically, it remains in existence in the minds of Israelis, Palestinians, and law enforcement agencies, as well as the international community. In many ways, it remains as a political, cultural, social and historical line of demarcation between two national communities: that of Palestinians and that of Israelis. During the last 38 years, this

The wall separating Abu Dis from the heart of Jerusalem. Source: © Adam Nieman (www.adamnieman.co.uk/wall).

particular wall has been the most palpable, despite its immateriality.

Then there are the walls that separate the various communities within the city. They, too, are invisible, though not intangible. For one can see their presence by comparing the streets, the homes, the physical space demarcated by the abundance or lack of such physical characteristics as municipal services. Moreover, despite these walls, and a few others, Israel claims to have united the city!

Admittedly, the goal of uniting the city, once again, is an admirable goal. For that would entail integration - or one would think it would - of the city into one whole, as it was until 1948, as well as the integration of the city with its surrounding communities. But to unite a city means to open it up, to complete it, and to erase the differences between its fragmented parts. The post-1967 presumed unification of the city by Israel clearly fails in that task. If taken over its full duration, the so-called 'reunification' is a clear example of fragmentation, division and colonization. For Jerusalem has been opened up to the Israelis to conquer, while being closed off from the Palestinians. The city that once was the capital of Palestine, whether as the Ottoman district or as a British colony, has been completely severed from the surrounding environment - be it the surrounding towns, villages or cities or the larger region of *Bilad al-Sham* or the Middle East. Jerusalem is no longer connected with Damascus, Cairo, Amman, Beirut, or even Istanbul. While Western tourists, Zionist zealots, and Jews of the world have easy access to Jerusalem, others who live in close vicinity cannot even go shopping there. In this bizarre process of 'reunification', areas that are for the exclusive residence of the Jewish community were established and restrictions on access to religious sites for all non-Jewish communities have been imposed.

Another wall constructed by the Israeli authorities is that of history. The dominant historical narrative about the city promoted in such places like the Jerusalem History Museum at the Citadel near Jaffa Gate or volumes of books (for example those histories by Martin Gilbert) and websites present Jerusalem stripped of its long history as an integral part of Palestine and the Syrian region. The invention of national histories comprised of a limited number of carefully selected memories in order to justify modern politics is not unique to Israel. But the extent to which the historian/narrator/curator goes to forget/omit major periods of the city's history is unparalleled.

A quick tour of the museum at the Citadel confirms my thesis. The visitor is presented with Jerusalem as if it has always been an Israeli city, even centuries before Israel itself ever existed. The pretence that different historical periods are mentioned in the various rooms of the exhibition halls is clearly undermined by the narrative's lone theme of the Jewish community's activities during each era. It does not seem to matter that Jews were part of the kaleidoscope of historic Jerusalem or that Jews were often the minority within the city, nor that during periods of history, Jews belonged to the larger Jerusalemite community. The impression left after a tour

of the museum is that Jews were always there, the city was always about them, and that they were always members of the Israeli nation.

Israel is putting great effort into colonizing the present in the name of a largely invented past, in the process fragmenting the city in the name of unifying it. The recent news of new Jewish acquisition of Greek Orthodox buildings in the area of Jaffa Gate, or the plans to build 200 units for Jewish settlers near Herod's Gate, represent further attempts to construct new walls within the city. In the near future, Palestinian and Armenian Jerusalemites will no doubt feel out of place in their own neighborhood of Jaffa Gate and in the new exclusive colony near Herod's gate. The tight closure of the city from residents of Ramallah, Bethlehem and Jericho will no doubt seem minor when compared to new forms of closure for the Arabs of Jerusalem in these two areas.

