

Editorial

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On 29 November, 2012, the United Nations General Assembly recognized Palestine as a non-member state. The recognition comes at a crucial time, following an Israeli war on Gaza that ended with a truce just a few days earlier. No doubt there is a great symbolic significance in this recognition, coming on the anniversary of the 1947 Partition Plan – perhaps sixty-five years too late! Debates about the merits of the recognition and what, if any, practical results it might yield will no doubt continue in the coming months. Israel's response was immediate, coming in the form of the announcement that it would significantly expand the construction of settler homes in Jerusalem, particularly in the "E-1" area between East Jerusalem and the settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim. The two seemingly confrontational moves by the Palestinian and Israeli leaders differ in that the first is symbolic while the second has material consequences. While the symbolic step might, or might not, bring about some change, there is no doubt that the actual response will have disastrous consequences for any possibility of an Israeli disengagement from the occupied territories. Not that Israeli settler activity is anything new in Jerusalem or elsewhere in the West Bank, but the scope and the timing of the last move clearly illustrate the Israeli vision for the future of Palestine and of Jerusalem in particular. An increase in the number of Jews in Jerusalem, in conjunction with a decrease in Palestinian numbers – achieved through various Israeli policies of revoking residency rights and closing the city to the rest of the residents of the West Bank – will contribute significantly not only to the demographic battle Israel is waging, but to altering the character of the physical place we call Jerusalem, and further severing it from the rest of the West Bank. The

unusually sharp protests from European countries, particularly Germany, France and Britain, probably reflect their fears that Israel's relentless settlement expansion around Jerusalem threatens the tattered remnants of the two-state project.

Since Israel first took control of the western part of the city in 1948, and continuing through the occupation of the rest of Jerusalem in 1967, a policy of transforming the very landscape of the city has been in effect. This important city, once an open and multi-ethnic locality with a long and venerable history intimately linking it to the three religions of Palestine, has been steadily transformed into what is thought of as a Jewish city. Archeological work as well as building permits and architectural landscaping, including street naming, have been consistently utilized to generate an image of the city as historically significant due exclusively, they would have us believe, to its connection with Judaism. This Judaization of Jerusalem is intentional. The dominant Zionist imagination currently attempts to dictate what it means to be Jewish, taking Europe as its starting point, and the Zionist historical narrative as its goal. The result, as already seen in the Jewish quarter of the Old City, means the exclusion of non-Jews from any area taken over, and the rebuilding and refurbishing of streets and buildings along lines that are more fitting to Hollywood historical movies than to the reality of the city over the centuries. How else can one explain an Ottoman building like the Citadel becoming a multi-media museum of the "history" of Jerusalem that does not seriously take into account long periods of Ottoman and Arab history of the city itself? How else explain the absurdity of a house in Jerusalem seized from its Arab owners, like that of the Baramkis (see JQ 51) fortified as if it were a bunker, then transformed into the Museum of Co-existence? Or the historical Muslim cemetery of Mamilla being turned into a Museum of Tolerance?

Disregarding significant periods of the history of the city is possible only when one is blinded by an ideological discourse that fails to see the presence and the history of the Other in the city. This theme appears in this issue of JQ in the study by Stephen Bennett of how imagination in the case of Zionism and Jerusalem replaced reality and was a forerunner to colonialism. Had those museums and narratives not willfully ignored local historical sources about life and war in this diverse city, then perhaps a more inclusive history of the city would have emerged. This rich store is mined in this issue by Salim Tamari's analysis of the historical photography of Khalil Raad from the period of the Great War, and by Mona Halaby's essay on the transformation of the world view of Palestinian writer and intellectual Adel Jabre.

The Zionists are not the only party to blame for this skewed historiography. They were shown the way by the collective European imagination on Jerusalem, and helped along by the Mandatory authorities during the decades of British rule in Palestine. Historical imagination is constructed and then popularized before it can become a real force in history. The divided education system supported by the British in Palestine, was one where Jews attended schools that taught in Hebrew and followed a Zionist

curriculum, while Palestinians studied at public or missionary schools that taught in Arabic and followed a British curriculum with a hint of Arabism. Suzanne Schneider's contribution in this issue highlights the British role in the emergence of this divided system of education in Palestine. Similarly, the prelude to transforming the landscape is illustrated in a study by Rona Sela of the photographic and other intelligence-gathering activities conducted by the Haganah before 1948 targeting the villages that would be depopulated during the Palestinian Nakba.

Finally we make two diversions from our exclusive focus on Jerusalem by including a study of the life and work of Palestinian writer Emile Habibi (1922-1996) by Siraj Assi, and another by Leila Salloum Elias on Syrians aboard the *Titanic*. The first looks at the development of Habibi as a Palestinian writer in Israel, while the second reminds us that Palestine's history cannot be separated from the larger context of regional and global history.