

## **Powder Keg Jerusalem**

One of the most vexing problems in determining the future of Jerusalem is the presence of a matrix of control that Israel has laid over East Jerusalem, including the Muslim and Christian Quarters of Jerusalem's Old City. Since the occupation of the West Bank in 1967, Israeli governments have endeavoured steadily and unceasingly to alter the Arab character of East Jerusalem by fostering a critical Jewish mass – territorial as well as demographic – that creates a new geopolitical reality dominated by Israel. That process, called explicitly by the Israeli right as "Judaization", is aimed at assuming control of the East Jerusalem by "de-Arabizing" it at the expense of its Palestinian population and Arab heritage. Successive Israeli governments have employed two mutually reinforcing means to constantly expand and solidify the matrix. The official organs of the state – the Jerusalem municipality, the Ministry of the Interior, the court system, the police and others – work hand-in-hand with such non-official bodies as settler associations that perform functions that the state is unable and unwilling to do, either for legal reasons or because it is "unseemingly." The settlers' associations constitute the long arm of the government; in return they are funded and flourish with governmental backing and sponsorship, with the cooperation of every legal government authority from the municipality to the police. A symbiotic relationship has formed between them to the extent that it is often unclear who is running what: the state the settlers or the settlers the state.

In the wake of the Oslo Accords (1993) and subsequent peace processes, and since the rise to power of President Obama, the settlement project in East Jerusalem and particularly in the Old City took on greater impetus and urgency, spurred by settlers' fears that Jerusalem could be divided as part of an overall peace agreement. The Israeli government and the Jerusalem municipality proceed on the assumption that the international community will eventually enforce a diplomatic arrangement featuring a division of the city. It is also assumed that when that time comes, the deployment of settlements will determine to a large extent the city's boundaries, just as in 1948 Jewish settlements determined Israel's overall borders. As a result, both the state and the municipality are making tremendous efforts to create 'facts on the ground' that rule out any future division of Jerusalem. The settlers' strategy is therefore clear: to create a situation in which future diplomatic agreements to divide the city will be impossible. The website of Ateret Cohanim states this openly: "Determination and collaboration with the authorities have proven the old method of Zionism – it is Jewish settlement that determines the borders of the state!"

The settler project is a well thought-out and dangerous attempt pursued by right-wing Israelis to thwart future peace-plans. Quietly and furtively, Israeli governments –not only right wing parties, but also including the Labour party – are using the settlers to seal any opening through which a peace agreement can be achieved. It is not certain that the settlements will manage to fundamentally alter East Jerusalem's character in the long-term, but it's certain that this is the underlying intention. In Silwan, settlers have succeeded in poking another stick in the wheels of peace. There, in the area they have named David's City, they will soon acquire a critical mass of land and houses, and have created a situation that greatly impedes the return of the land to the Palestinians. Until a decade ago it was customary to say that the hard core of the settlers that must be cracked in Jerusalem is the Old City, but now the area in Silwan and the area surrounding the Old City, known as the Holy Basin, must be included.

## **Control of Space**

The concept 'control of space' consists of a whole system of instructions, regulations, laws, and physical, economic and psychological pressures that are exercised over East Jerusalem's residents. It overshadows the entire space. The method is applied by state mechanisms that create absolute dependence of citizens on government agencies, and that dependence enables control of citizens and the whole space.

Physical control of the land goes hand in hand with psychological control, and each one prepares the ground for the other. A single settlement structure invades the entire surrounding space; its impact is felt over and above that one building due to the security system associated with the structure, spreading a pall for the Palestinian residents. A single house or an entire compound becomes a fortified site in the finest colonial traditions of the nineteenth century- a gated community in the 21st century. Every Jewish site in East Jerusalem requires a security fence, guard-posts with armed security personnel, projectors and often closed circuit cameras, accompanied, of course, by a provocative Israeli flag. In their wake come the police forces that patrol the site and are a constant irritation to Arab residents. The settlement invades the entire Palestinian territory where everyone and every movement is monitored. The mere presence of the settlement is enough to ensure its control over the space. The character of the space changes from a peaceful living space to a conflict zone.

A settlement not only fragments the territory by creating isolated and separated enclaves, causing breaks in the physical surroundings; it also destroys the homogeneity of the community, thereby deepening Jewish control of the land. Thus the settlements disturb the environment. They disrupt the sense of place and interrupt or even reverse 'the sequences of the landscape', the homogeneity and coherence of the Palestinian space, because they work to stamp their authority in the surroundings. The settlers' presence introduces a sense of anxiety and stress in the urban landscape; an urban turbulence, and damage the emotional security of its inhabitants. They break the balance and become a cause of disorientation. These settlements are a recipe for disaster, a time-bomb which, if not defused has a

high probability of causing an appalling explosion. By its very existence, a settlement is antagonizing and harmful to the space it occupies, because it is an extension of "the State", with all the attendant implications for Arab citizens who feel humiliated and under occupation. Those feelings are intensified by the fact that the same state is an all-pervading presence. The settlement becomes what Michel Foucault termed 'key dispositive' in the spatial control and disciplining system, a local version of 'the eye of power' that watches and imposes threats over the entire space. If this is the general feeling towards every settlement, anywhere, it is even more so when the settlement is built on the wreckage of families that lived in those homes until yesterday, and were forcibly evicted followed by the homes' repopulation by settlers, as is the case in the Sheikh Jarrakh neighbourhood .

Space is crucial to the exercise of power, but power also creates a particular kind of space. The settlement creates a cartography of exclusion, organises the space in accordance with structures of power and control, and transforms it from 'a space' into a zone of conflict.. The settlements divide the space into two groups - those who exercise power and those who are subjugated to it.

### **Permanent Temporariness**

The land under occupation receives a special, different status from the kind customary in non-occupied spaces. First, due to the prevailing assumption that the occupation is by definition a temporary situation, likely to end at some stage of the conflict, the land obtains a status of temporariness.

Everything is frozen, anticipating the liberating stage when things will return to normal. The occupier relates to the area as a sort of 'deposit' to be repaid to its legitimate owners when peaceful times return. Equally, the occupied people consider the circumstances in the

territory as an aberrant situation, in which they must organise for survival, rather than for a full life. It is true that the Israeli authorities always declare that the annexation of the Territories is 'eternal', but all the practices and measures applied indicate land in an interim situation, a sort of parentheses in the course of life; the land belongs neither to the occupier nor the occupied. After 42 years of occupation, an abnormal situation of spatial inconsistencies has taken shape. It can be characterised by 'a permanent temporariness', in which the land is neither integrated nor eliminated. In that condition, the state has developed various methods for managing the unwanted and the irremovable, and the proof is visible in every alleyway in East Jerusalem – neglect and deprivation on all sides. If the situation of the conquered land is abnormal, all the more so is the situation of colonised land - where settlers try to assume control in a process of reshaping and redefining the land, and changing its demographic and geographic profile.

### **Conclusion**

The presence of Jewish settlements in east Jerusalem is a classic case example of colonialism. This may be merely emphasizing the obvious, but it is nonetheless essential to underscore, given that in the international sphere an increasing number of people consent with the Jewish presence in east Jerusalem as though it is and should be the norm.

The Jewish settlers in east Jerusalem represent a classic model of colonizers. Colonization in the traditional sense of the concept is implanting a foreign civil population within the midst of an occupied territory. The fact remains that, in accordance with international law, east Jerusalem is an occupied territory, and from that derives the fact that Israeli rule over the city is against the law.

In this case, to insure control of the land, the model of colonization is manifested through the state's encouragement of its citizens to become settlers on the land. Thus, the colonization of east Jerusalem is not different than similar processes as they occurred in Africa, Asia and even the Americas. However, in contrast to other types of colonization models, the impetus behind the colonization of east Jerusalem is not founded on economic or imperial motivations, but rather in ideology and religion. For the local original residents of the city, the consequences of the colonization are no different. Therefore, despite the uniqueness of this case, the Jewish presence in east Jerusalem still represents a classic case of colonialism.

Four decades after the city was "reunited" by the force of the Israeli armed forces, the city remains as divided as ever. The psychological and socio-economic barriers that fracture this city are much higher than the wall that divided the city before 1967 between its western and eastern sections. Israelis and Palestinians have become, throughout this period, citizens of two separate and irreconcilable worlds. An abyss separates them; they reside in the same spatial territory, but as though in two different planets and an undercurrent of hate rages through people's veins. The Israeli annexation project was a thorough failure. This should come as no surprise, given that Israel never really intended to fully integrate the Palestinian section of the city. Israel craved the land but not its residents and for that reason, the state has pursued an ambiguous policy of inclusion of the land, while excluding its population. The Jewish re-encounter with the "old city" engendered a passion for the physical landscape, coupled with a sense of apprehension towards the human landscape. On the one hand Israel found those sites so intimately linked with Jewish history, but on the other hand, there was also the presence of an Arab population.

This reality did not fit within the people's preconceived imagery of the city. Faced with this dichotomy, the government pursued an urban policy aimed at the systematic Israelization of the eastern part of the city, while minimizing the Palestinian presence within the space.

The story of Jerusalem these last 40 years could well be called "40 years of discrimination". For that reason, Jerusalem, more than a city, is powder keg ready to explode at a moments notice.

Note: It should be noted, that this article does not make claims against neighbourhoods shared by Jews and Arabs in East Jerusalem. It is aimed at the presence of these specific Jews, the settlers, because of the political agenda they bring with them, and because of their hostile attitude towards the space and its original residents. Jews are entitled to live in East Jerusalem on condition that they relate to the space and its residents with respect. Heterogeneous spaces are generally positive, but not in this situation: here, instead of dividing the area into two different categories 'them and us', the settlers have divided it into two separate sections of 'them against us'. And so the space becomes a volcano liable to erupt at any moment.

Dr. Meir Margalit  
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*Meir Margalit ist Historiker sowie Mitgründer und Aktivist der israelischen Menschenrechtsorganisation ICAHD Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions. Er wurde in Argentinien geboren und kam 1972 mit einer rechtsgerichteten zionistischen Jugendgruppe nach Israel. Während seines Armeedienstes in den 70er Jahren gründete er im Gazastreifen eine Siedlung. Nachdem er im Jom Kippur Krieg 1973 verwundet worden war, änderte sich während der Rekonvaleszenz seine Haltung und er wandte sich der israelischen Linken zu. Meir Margalit gehört dem Stadtrat von Jerusalem an (1998 bis 2002 für die Meretz Partei) 2008 wurde er wieder gewählt.*