

The Unmaking of Arab Jerusalem through Settlement Construction

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The power of the state lies in, among other things, its control of the natural resources within a space. Spatial planning is the manifestation of power to control “geography’s resources.” Control of land, water, minerals, access points, and other such “resources” is equivalent to the control of individuals and their communal life. Spatial planning is packed with political, economic, and ideological agendas; it is a space where power, authority, and sovereignty are clearly manifested. Through planning, a process of inclusion and exclusion occurs, thus determining the contours of ethnic, national, and religious boundaries. Additionally, a process of expansion and contraction takes place in which areas of land get developed and expanded while others are neglected and contracted. Through physical development, “facts on the ground” are established and, hence, renegotiating rights to legitimacy and sovereignty

Thus, geography or in this case the socialization of geography – what Henri Lefebvre calls “the production of space” – is a field by which relations of power is disclosed.¹ These power relations vary and could be, for example, economic, political, ethnic, religious, or national. Once humans utilize natural geographic space, the space itself becomes a mapping out of society and the social relations, which are embedded in the plans that construct the living space. This construction of social space is known as spatial planning, and it is “the application of scientific method – however crude – to policy-making.”² Spatial planning can be a dangerous tool in the hands of the establishment, especially in divided societies such as Jerusalem, where one ethnic group has hegemonic rule over the other. What is more dangerous is its subtlety, since planning is often masked as a tool of reform, thus obscuring the institutionalized and normalized power relationship.

This paper looks at planning in terms of its ability to control; accordingly, it examines the state of Israel's planning policies as they relate to East Jerusalem and looks at how those policies have helped the state achieve its demographic goal of creating a Jewish majority through settlement construction in Jerusalem. In order to do this, I examine how built up space is produced. This entails all aspects attributed to "spatial planning." In this paper I use "spatial planning" to refer to an all-encompassing venture that pertains to public spaces, ranging from the formulation of plans and policies to their implementation, and including urban and regional development as well as land utilization and "area zoning." Consequently, I assume some form of relationship between planning and the state; planning as a field has developed in proximity with state apparatuses and to fulfill the needs and vision of those in power.

This intimate relationship between the state and planning is clearly manifested in the Israeli case. Since the formation of the State of Israel, the planning division has played an intricate role in shaping the state as we know it today. Due to its significance, the Planning and Development Office was bestowed all the power it needs to regulate, develop and implement planning procedures and policies. To this day, the Israeli planning system is centralized and encompasses "most of the powers any planner might wish for, in order to implement central-government policy and coordinate the actions of the government and ministries."³

With the occupation of the rest of the Palestinian territories in 1967, the entirety of historic Palestine came under Israeli control, introducing a new variable into Israel's spatial planning. Israel was faced with a dilemma: should it confine itself within its pre-1967 borders or should it expand into the territories occupied in 1967. This dilemma was instantaneously resolved in relation to the eastern part of Jerusalem, where the area and its peripheries were annexed to the Israeli state.

The post-1967 planning strategy of the State of Israel prioritized settlement construction and "the creation of new security belts beyond the 1967 borders; continued socioeconomic consolidation of previously established settlements within those borders; and further expansion of the infrastructure."⁴ East Jerusalem had to be transformed from a predominantly Palestinian Arab city into a hospitable Jewish environment. Thus, the Israeli government pushed for urban development in the eastern side of the city. The whole aim was to create new housing structures for Jews in what was traditionally an all-Palestinian area, increasing the Jewish population while at the same time erasing the Palestinian claim to the city through creating a Jewish majority. Israel acted quickly to link the two sides of the city and strengthen Israeli control over the newly enlarged area. The area of West Jerusalem, which was about 38 square kilometers, swallowed the 6 square kilometers that comprised the Jordanian-administered area of East Jerusalem. In addition, the Israeli government decided to annex 64 square kilometers of vacant land that belonged to 28 villages in the West Bank.

The spatial planning of Jerusalem after 1967 took place in three phases. The first saw the connection of East with West Jerusalem through the construction of Jewish neighborhoods along the seam line and around the Old City walls. Their construction was completed in the early 1970s. Soon after, the plan was to solidify those neighborhoods

through establishing networks and road systems to link them with other areas in central and western Jerusalem.

The second phase of planning was devoted to increasing the presence of the Jewish residents in the eastern part of the city. This stage started in the early 1970s and “was a direct response to the 1969 Rogers Plan and a later UN Resolution calling for Israeli withdrawal from East Jerusalem.”⁷⁵ In order to create facts on the ground, which would hinder any possibility of withdrawal from the areas annexed by Israel, the government authorized the construction of five settlement blocs: Ramot, Neve Ya’aqov, and Pisgat Ze’ev to the north; and Gilo and East Talpiot to the south. In addition to restructuring the demographics of Jerusalem, these settlements were to provide military and strategic values. Not only do they serve as points of surveillance and observation of the Palestinian residents, but the settlement blocs are situated along the main traffic axis of major Palestinian cities and have thus disrupted the natural growth and expansion of those cities. Most importantly, the settlement blocs separated Palestinian cities from Jerusalem. The settlements also sit within dense Palestinian communities with the aim of breaking and scattering Palestinian areas, thus facilitating control over them. As Michael Dumper has written, “These second stage constructions typify the ‘fortress Jerusalem’ architecture most associated with post-‘67 Israeli planning.”⁷⁶

The third phase in planning involved implanting new small settlements on elevated areas and close to strategic roads all around metropolitan Jerusalem. This enterprise is consistent with the different planning schemes within Israel proper which were inspired by Ariel Sharon. Sharon was one of the masterminds to envision a new Israel with borders extending into the heart of the Palestinian West Bank and Gaza. Through spatial planning, he was able to “establish the entire skeleton for the geography of occupation, present it as an ineradicable fact on the ground and later allow it to evolve and consolidate.”⁷⁷ Sharon was interested in creating new settlements and outposts even if they were small in size because for him dotting the map with settlements meant that land became the property of the Israeli state; it was only a matter of time before those small gatherings would eventually bloom into full-fledged communities and be connected to Israel’s “mainland.”⁷⁸

This third phase of settlement construction was intended to break any Palestinian conglomeration and at the same time utilize those settlements as observatories to guard the Palestinian population. The key settlements in this phase are Ma’ale Adumim, which is situated on a hill and overlooks Jericho road and the Jordanian territory to the east. Other major settlements are Efrat and Givon to the north, which again are situated on strategic elevated points.

Planning and settlement construction in the heart of the Palestinian territories have served two goals: first, to disrupt the movement of the Palestinian community; and second, to serve as a means of control and surveillance. These planning schemes in the annexed Palestinian areas resulted in a three rings of Jewish settlements with an inner group in the core, a municipal ring encircling the center of East Jerusalem from its suburbs, and a metropolitan area that extends to the borders of villages and towns in the West Bank.

The inner ring comprises the densely populated areas of the city center of East Jerusalem and includes the Old City, Silwan, Shaykh Jarrah, the Mount of Olives (al-Tur),

Wadi Jawz, Ras al-‘Amud, and Jabal al-Mukabbir.⁹ This settler community is small and comprises of around 2,000 residents who are committed to a Zionist militant ideology. The municipal ring is the second ring of settlements that surrounds the inner ring with large Jewish settlements which houses about 200,000 Israeli Jewish residents. There are twelve settlements encircling the heart of the city and lie within the separation wall. “These settlements fragment East Jerusalem even further and break up, in particular, the north-south contiguity in the remnants of Palestinian-owned land in the city.”¹⁰ The final ring is the metropolitan ring, which lies outside the municipal borders but have been intricately connected with the city through a sophisticated “network of roads and tunnels bypassing Palestinian areas and Israeli checkpoints and offering fast and easy access to the center of the city.”¹¹ This ring has provided the means to disconnect East Jerusalem from its West Bank hinterland. The separation wall has been diverted to encircle these metropolitan settlements as well as to appropriate Palestinian land.

The Jerusalem basic law of 1980 has reiterated that Jerusalem is one and united and is the capital of the State of Israel. Furthermore, the law states that the annexed “expanded” borders of the city are unequivocally under Israel’s jurisdiction and under no circumstances shall the area of Jerusalem be placed under any kind of foreign rule.¹² Hence, since 1967, the government of Israel has adopted several plans to ensure the “Judaization” of East Jerusalem and its environs. The first plan to be presented to the government concerning East Jerusalem and the West Bank was the Allon Plan of 1967. The plan proposed that Israel annex 40 percent of occupied Palestinian land for the sake of security and return what remains to the Jordanians in exchange for peace. Allon admitted that this plan provided “maximum security and maximum territory for Israel with a minimum number of Arabs.”¹³ The plan proposed to implant Jewish settlements on the annexed land, especially in areas along the Jordan Valley, which would serve as a security belt as well as expanding the territory of the state.

The plan provided a blueprint of Israel’s settlement map. Not only did the plan propose to annex a strip of land of about 20 kilometers in width along the Jordan Valley, it also recommended a transport corridor through Jerusalem that connects this area with the coastal plains. The two disconnected areas to the north and south of the corridor, the plan foresaw, would become a Palestinian self-governed area confederated with the Kingdom of Jordan. The plan also recommended the annexation of the Etzion block southwest of Jerusalem and East Jerusalem. Even though the plan was not officially endorsed, it was implemented in the first decade of occupation by the Labor administration.

Other plans included Moshe Dayan’s Plan, drawn up when he was Israel’s defense minister (1967–1974), which proposed that Israel install army camps on all mountain crests in order to place them under Israeli control. Another plan, mentioned above, was the Sharon plan. Spatial planning under Sharon acquired a military angle, meaning that Israeli government planning was imposed on the Palestinian territories captured in 1967 so as to change the Palestinian space to suit the Israeli political and military agendas. Sharon, who was minister of agriculture in the first Likud government (1979–1981), emphasized the need to annex lands that were vital to Israel’s security, excluding only areas of the West Bank that were densely populated by Palestinians. Furthermore, Sharon

recommended building Jewish settlements as a means of annexation. The plan was not officially adopted by the government, but it had a strong resonance. The Ministry of Housing, which had control over the Israel Lands Administration, provided the means and authority to establish settlements on the ground.

Sharon went further, suggesting a new form of settlement construction that was not only horizontal, but vertical in character. He suggested that in order to protect the heart of Israel, settlements should be constructed not only along the Jordan Valley but also on the ridges of the West Bank, creating a strategic depth. According to Sharon's plan, areas of the West Bank were to be annexed for the purpose of erasing the Green Line and connecting those new settlements with Israel proper (within the pre-1948 borders).

Settlements also became a tool for surveillance. Since it is the role of the state to protect its citizens and since the Jewish settlers are citizens of the state, Israel had to provide military control to monitor the Palestinians and safeguard the settler community.¹⁴ The role of settlements in surveillance and control is apparent through a response to a Palestinian petition against settlement construction. In this response, Justice Vitkon ruled: "there can be no question that the presence in the administered territory of settlements – even 'civilians' – of the administering power makes a significant contribution to the security situation in that territory, and facilitating the army's performance of its function."¹⁵

Most of the planning schemes relating to Jerusalem are haphazard in the sense that they did not identify a certain geographic location for settlement building, but reflected the state's philosophy and the aspirations of top governmental echelons to Judaize Palestinian land and disperse Jewish settlements. In 1994, the idea of Jerusalem as a metropolitan area was consolidated through the 1994 Master Plan, prepared for the government by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies. Although the plan was not legally put to force, it was used as a blueprint for settlement expansion. Some of the settlements constructed as a result of the plan were in the jurisdiction of the municipality of Jerusalem while others were established outside of the jurisdiction of the municipality but within the metropolitan area of the city. The annexed part that contributed in the enlargement of Jerusalem and turned it into a metropolitan area consisted of 70,000 dunams of land, of which 91 percent belonged to villages in the West Bank, while the remaining 9 percent had fallen within Jordanian-ruled Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem 2000 Masterplan is the first plan to deal with the entire metropolitan area of Jerusalem. The 2000 plan was completed in 2004 and formally submitted in 2009. It is both extensive and approved by the government. The 2000 Masterplan is controversial, since it sets the grounds for discrimination between the Palestinian and Jewish population in the city through highlighting areas of construction and development for Jews at the expense of Palestinians. "Many Israeli and Palestinian organizations have challenged the plan, arguing it discriminates against the Jerusalem Palestinian population in various ways including taking Arab land (e.g. the City of David (Gan Ha Melech), Sheikh Jarrah, and areas adjacent to Bethlehem including Har Homa)."¹⁶ The Master Plans have resulted in twelve remote and homogeneous Jewish settlements scattered within the Palestinian areas that were annexed by the state of Israel. The whole purpose was to disperse Jewish settlement throughout strategic parts of the "metropolitan area" of Jerusalem. This has

become a means of hindrance in the lives of the Palestinian population especially after the Oslo accords and the deadlock in peace talks.

The construction of settlements has erected an organic barrier between the Palestinian periphery and metropolitan Jerusalem. The metropolitan area of Jerusalem expanded even further through this web of settlements, while an intricate network of roads and transport erases the distance between the core and the periphery while at the same time dividing, isolating, and increasing the distance between Palestinian neighborhoods. The number of Jewish settlers living in the metropolitan area of Jerusalem comprises of about three-quarters of all Israeli settlers living in the West Bank and it is for this reason that the Jerusalem settlements have been declared by many as an obstacle to peace. Meanwhile, the outline of the Jewish settlements surrounding Jerusalem is still in its working stages, as plans are produced and executed unremittingly to accommodate the settler society that inhabits those spaces.

The Jerusalem metropolitan area is the biggest urban center in all of Israel and has the largest concentration of Jewish settlements, with 26 Jewish settlements housing more than 277,000 settlers. The infiltration of Jewish settlements into East Jerusalem and the annexed areas has had severe repercussions on the Palestinian community not only because of the physical presence of the settlements but also as a result of the state policies that accompany them. The Jewish settlements disrupt the flow of Palestinian neighborhoods and isolate East Jerusalem from its West Bank hinterland. Manipulating the urban space for the purpose of connecting West Jerusalem with the settlements has resulted in the dissection of the Palestinian community and the creation of disrupted enclaves that are hard to access. Alienating the Palestinian community from its surroundings has been yet another element used by the state of Israel to confine and restrict the number of Palestinians living in the city. Through land confiscation and urban planning, the lived space of the Palestinian Jerusalemites has become cantonized, constricted, and dissected thus making it nearly impossible for the community to grow and flourish.

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Endnotes

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