Demographic Architecture

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Cover of *Hollow Land* by Eyal Weizman.

Like many colonial cities, Jerusalem has its dark enclaves for its native inhabitants, ruled by the border police, with surprise checkpoints between neighbourhoods. For the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem, unlike the Jewish residents, hardly anything was ever planned but their departure. Within the municipal borders of the city, architects and planners were given the task not only of constructing homes and developing a new "national style" but also of maintaining the "demographic balance," which at the time of occupation in 1967, and within Jerusalem's gerrymandered borders, stood at about three Jewish inhabitants to every Palestinian. The faster growth rate of the Palestinian population was seen by Israel as a "demographic time bomb." In 1993 City Engineer Elinoar Barzacchi echoed an ongoing state policy when she outlined how the municipality intended to deal with this problem:

There is a government decision to maintain the proportion between the Arab and Jewish populations in the city at 28 per cent Arab and 72 per cent Jew. The only way to cope with that ration is through the housing potential.[1]

The policy of maintaining "demographic balance" has informed the underlying logic of almost every master plan prepared for the city's development.

By trying to achieve the demographic and geographic guidelines of the political master plan, the planners and architects of the municipality of Jerusalem and those working for them have effectively taken part in a national policy of forced migration, unofficially referred to in Israeli circles as the "silent transfer," a crime according to international law.[2] The evidence of these crimes is not only to be found in protocols or

in the wording of political master plans, but in the drawings of architects and planners. They can be seen as lines in their plans.[3] Yet remarkably, in spite of all Israel's efforts to keep the 28 per cent Palestinians to 72 percent Jewish ratio, its planning policy is falling short of its target. Out of the 650,000 registered residents of Jerusalem in 2005, about a third were Palestinians. This has obviously increased the frustration that further accelerates Israel's draconian measures.

Whereas demographic policies are clearly outlined in political master plans, which are seen as guidelines only in town-building schemes and local plans – which are statutory documents having the force of law – these intentions are camouflaged within the techno-professional language of planning. Since the government guidelines are in blatant violation of both Israeli and international law, a deliberate discrepancy in language has opened up between political and architectural documents. The illegal policy was implemented by manipulating seemingly mundane planning categories. Maintaining the "demographic balance" through the "housing potential," when Palestinian demographic growth is so much faster, implied the use of one or both of two planning policies: one promoting the construction of housing in Jewish neighbourhoods and the other limiting the expansion of Palestinian ones. While issuing an annual average of 1,500 building permits to Jewish Israelis and constructing 90,000 housing units for Jews in all parts of East Jerusalem since 1967, the municipality has issued an annual average of only 100 building permits to Palestinians in the city, thus creating a Palestinian housing crisis with a shortfall of more than 25,000 housing units.[4] Without the possibility of obtaining planning permissions, many Palestinian families have built homes "illegally" and exposed themselves to the random actions of municipal demolition squads. These demolitions are undertaken mainly in the most disadvantaged Palestinian neighborhoods, where residents cannot afford legal defense.[5]

Other spatial manipulations were similarly undertaken to try to maintain the "demographic balance." The construction of the new Jewish neighbourhood/ settlements were also seen as antidotes to Palestinian urbanization and were planned in such a way to create wedges between Palestinian neighbourhoods and villages, limiting their possible expansion and splintering Palestinian urban contiguity. For example, the neighborhoods of Ramat Eskhol and the French Hill north of the Old City were laid out to form an elongated arc that cuts the Palestinian neighborhood of Shu'fat from the Palestinian Old City and the neighborhood of Sheikh Jarrah, which previously comprised a continuous urban area. Indeed, the location and layout of the new neighborhoods were conceived not only as a utilitarian receptacle for the Jewish population but also as a means of preventing Jerusalem from functioning as a Palestinian city and making it harder to be Palestinian in Jerusalem.

The massive overcrowding in Palestinian neighbourhoods, and the rapid increase in property prices that ensued, ultimately forced many Palestinian families to leave Jerusalem for nearby towns and villages in the West Bank, where housing is considerably cheaper. This was precisely what the government planners intended. By leaving the city, Palestinians also lost the status of "Israeli residency," which

differentiates those Palestinians included within Jerusalem's post-1967 borders from those in the rest of the West Bank, and which, among other things, allowed the former access to state services and healthcare, and freedom to enter and work in Israel. In the past forty years more than 50,000 Palestinians have lost their residency status in this manner. Tens of thousands of others have moved outside the municipal boundaries but have kept an address in the city in order to keep these rights and often travel to work there. One of the factors in the routing of the Separation Wall around Jerusalem was to cut these Palestinians out of the city and close this loophole. The Palestinian residents of Jerusalem now face having to choose which side of the Wall to live on – a crowded and expensive Jerusalem, where they cannot build, or give up the rights they previously had and live in the surrounding towns and villages of the West Bank.[6]

Throughout the years of Israeli domination in Jerusalem, about 40 per cent of the land that would have been available for Palestinians in the occupied part of the city was marked up on municipal plans as an open, public space. This was presented, for legal reasons, as an amenity for the improvement of the quality of life and air of the residents of the Palestinian neighbourhoods, but it effectively framed them within zones into which expansion was forbidden. Whenever the status of these "green areas" was "unfrozen" and earmarked for construction, they were allocated for the expansion of Jewish neighborhoods. This was openly admitted by Mayor Kolleck:

> The primary purpose of defining the Shu'fat Ridge [then still an empty hill in the occupied part to the north of the city next to the Palestinian neighbourhood of Shufat mentioned above] as a green area was to prevent Arab building [there] until the time was ripe to build a new Jewish neighborhood.[7]

Yet another planning strategy used to limit Palestinian residential construction and demographic growth is the pretext of preservation. Professing to protect the traditional rural character of Palestinian villages within the municipal area, and the historic nature of Palestinian neighbourhoods, the municipality insisted that the floor area ration (FAR) – a planning ratio that defines the relation between the size of a plot and the size of the building – is kept low. So, while the building rights in the Jewish neighbourhood of Talpiot-Mizrah permit the construction of buildings of five stories, the adjacent Palestinian neighborhood of Jabal al-Mukaber, buildings may occupy only 25 per cent of the building plot, resulting in a small house within a large plot.[8]

Horizontally limited by the green zones around them, and vertically by a "preservation" policy, the Palestinian neighbourhoods of Jerusalem were transformed into an archipelago of small islands of conjured "authenticity," within an ocean of Jewish construction, their architecture functioning as an object of aesthetic contemplation to be seen from the concrete-built but stone-clad Jewish neighbourhoods. These "preservation zones" surrounded by parks, multiply the principle of the 1918 McLean plan, and reproduce, on the urban scale, the image of the Palestinian "Bantustans" of the West Bank.

Moreover, Palestinian villages and neighbourhoods in Jerusalem very often exhibit anything but the ostensible "oriental authenticity" which they are meant to embody. Contrasting sharply with the Jewish neighbourhoods of Jerusalem's periphery, the Palestinians often do not abide by the Jerusalem stone bylaw and the architectural styles that attempt to give Israel's colonial architecture an image of authenticity. Many buildings are constructed without permits and facing prospective demolition are built cheaply, with their structural walls of raw concrete and cinder blocks left bare. The utilitarian modernist silhouette of their slab construction, supported over the hilly landscape by columns, was influenced by the modernist ethos of early Zionist architecture. Appearing as a local adaptation of modernist villages, they testify to a complete reversal, which the policies of Israeli domination have brought on the building culture of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Endnotes

1   Minutes of meeting of the local Planning and Building Committee, quoted in Elter Felner, *A Policy of Discrimination*, Jerusalem: B'tselem, 1995.

2   The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. (See the complete statute at: http://wwwun.org/icc/statute/romefra.htm.) Article 8.3.b.viii forbids "The transfer, directly or indirectly by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies, or the deportation or transfer of all or part of the population of the occupied territory within or outside this territory."

3   Crimes relating to the organization of the built environment, originating on computer screens and drafting tables, may call for architect/planners for the first time, to be placed on the accused stand at an international tribunal. It is revealing that the Israeli Attorney-General Elyakim Rubinstein urged the Israeli Knesset to retreat from ratifying the ICC lest "every building (in the Occupied Territories) start to be considered a war crime," and Israeli planners, architects, constructors, suppliers or residents in the settlement be indicted. Allen Baker, than the legal advisor to the Foreign Office, put it in bolder terms, "Every person who is involved in decision making regarding the setting of citizens on occupied area may be arrested, from the Prime Minister down to the last citizen."

4   Nathan Marom, *The Planning Deadlock: Planning Policies, Land Regularization, Building Permits and House Demolition in East Jerusalem,* Jerusalem: Bimkom – Planners for Planning Rights and Ir Shalem, 2004 (in Hebrew). A summary of the report was published in English, see Nathan Marom, "The Planning Deadlock: House Demolition in the Palestinian Neighborhoods of East Jerusalem," in Phillip Misselwitz and Tim Rieniets (eds) *City of Collision*, Basel and London: Birkhauser, 2006, pp. 347-52.

5   According to a study undertaken by the architect Nathan Marom, more than 18,000 buildings – half of all Palestinian housing units in East Jerusalem – are "illegally" built. Between 1987 and 2004 about 500 of these homes were demolished. Since the beginning of the second Intifada, the rate of destruction has increased: in 2004 alone, 120 homes were pulled down. See Nathan Naton, *The Planning Deadlock*. Also see Rassem Khamaisi, "Villages under Siege," and Rassem Khamaisi and Rami Nasrallah, "Jerusalem: From Siege to a City's Collapse," in Misselwitz and Rieners (eds) *City of Collision*, esp. p. 123.

6   Rassem Khamais and Rami Nasrallah, *The Jerusalem Urban Fabric: Demography, Infrastructure and Institutions*, Jerusalem: International Peace and Cooperation Center 2003, p. 126. See also the summary of this work in Rassem Khamaisi, "Villages under Siege."

7   Sarah Kaminker, Planning and Housing Issues in East Jerusalem, Jerusalem: Report Prepared for the Society of St. Yves, in Response to High Court Petition 1091/94, p.15. Quoted in Felner, *A Policy of Discrimination.*

8   Nathan Marom, *The Planning Deadlock*.