



Jerusalem

Jerusalem Today: The Dialectics of Power and Resistance

John Dixon

Daily news reports about Jerusalem focus on major events, provide little sense of historical context, rely on official sources, and give a fragmentary picture of a complex and dynamic historical process. Arguably, therefore, they tend to reinforce an existing scholarly tendency to see Israeli policy as the sole determining factor in Jerusalem's post-1967 development.¹ In view of the drumbeat of negative news stories stressing the Israeli victories in

¹ On this tendency, see Anne Latendresse, *Jerusalem: Palestinian Dynamics, Resistance and Urban Change 1967-1994* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 1995), p. 15.

changing the character of Arab Jerusalem through settlements, zoning, residency revocations, punitive tax and tariff policies, and closure, it is worth reminding ourselves that even Israel's outright victories bear the marks of their origin in a dialectical process of struggle in which Palestinians have played an active and conscious role.

Research into popular movements of all kinds, "history from below," the study of urban movements—these approaches to historical study seek to restore a determining role to the consciousness and agency of peasants, workers, "the people," women, and other marginalized groups in the making of history against those who give primacy either to politicians, rulers, and "great men" or to impersonal technological, economic, environmental, or demographic forces. In so doing, histories of popular movements often have a practical dimension. In trying to understand events as part of a dialectical historical process that shapes and is shaped by human agents, they hope to better understand how to intervene in that process.

From the perspective of this approach, Israeli attempts to achieve a unified Jerusalem since 1967 need to be understood as part of a relational whole, of an historical process involving interdependent struggle and counter struggle. Of relevance to understanding such a process is the concept of hegemony, deriving from the political writings of Antonio Gramsci. Israel's struggle for hegemony over Jerusalem is fought out not just at the military, economic, and political levels, but also at the ideological and

cultural levels within the institutions of civil society. It is waged at the level of electric plants, water systems, roads, housing projects, police stations, and army checkpoints; but also at the level of schools and school textbooks, religious institutions, NGOs, the media, and government propaganda. In sum, Israel rules by force but also aspires to win consent, both locally and internationally. In this contest for power and legitimacy, each side molds and fashions its strategies in response to the other. Moreover, each side is itself caught up in its own unpredictable internal conflicts. The resulting whole is an unstable and contradictory one, in which attempts at social engineering have unforeseen consequences and planning often goes awry.

This article, then, will take stock of the current situation in Jerusalem in a way that tries to appreciate the role of Palestinian agency in shaping recent events.

In *Jerusalem: Palestinian Dynamics, Resistance and Urban Change 1967-1994*, Anne Latendresse has provided a useful overview of the role of Palestinian popular political and social movements in shaping the development of the city since 1967. As she points out, since then, Palestinians have adopted a two-pronged strategy to protect Arab Jerusalem from Israelization: 1) the rejection of Israeli efforts to co-opt Palestinians into the municipal government and 2) the preservation of Palestinian cultural, professional, and social institutions existing before 1967 along with the establishment of new ones.

Palestinians implemented the first strategy immediately upon Israel's unilateral annexation of Arab Jerusalem in

1967 and continue to do so to this day. The recent November municipal elections show the strength of this continuing refusal: only an estimated 3.3 percent of the eligible Arab East Jerusalem voters turned out, making this the lowest participation rate since 1967.² While the Israeli press suggested that the boycott had to do with PNA coercion,³ there is little doubt that ordinary Palestinians willingly followed the PNA position. Of course Palestinians have debated the strategic wisdom of the boycott.⁴ It remains clear, however, that Israel's hegemonic attempts to co-opt Arab Jerusalem into the city's municipal politics have failed, and in this respect their efforts to project a "unified" Jerusalem have been thwarted.

As for Palestinian institutions in the city, while Palestinians failed in 1967 to preserve an independent East Jerusalem Municipal Government, they did keep Israel from taking over the East Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce, the Jerusalem Electric Corporation, the Moqassed Hospital, and the curriculum of Palestinian schools. They also preserved the independence of a range of professional associations, and, under Jordanian sponsorship, re-established the Supreme

Muslim Council.⁵ These battles involved legal struggle, public appeals at the United Nations and other international forums, and civil disobedience, including strikes. How are these institutions faring today?

The Supreme Muslim Council continues its refusal to recognize Israel's legal authority and maintains its control over Muslim affairs in the city, including Muslim properties and the Shari'a courts. Arab professional associations remain free from Israeli control. Indeed the number of national institutions in the city has increased.⁶ Moreover, while many Palestinians receive some medical services in Jewish hospitals, Arab hospitals still provide a complete range of separate and parallel medical services for Arab Jerusalem.⁷

While the Jerusalem Electric Company has persisted in providing services, Israeli measures have whittled down its independence. As Michael Dumper has shown, in 1980 rapidly increasing demand forced the board to buy much of their electricity from Israel. Having to sell it at the Israeli price, their profit margins were too low for them to reinvest in new infrastructure. Their debt mounted. Eventually, Israel challenged their concession in court, succeeding in taking over the provision of services to Israeli settlements and military bases in the West Bank. Nevertheless, the JEC still retains its concession in the West Bank and in

² Matthew Brubacher and Ingrid Jaradat Gassner, "Palestinians Boycott Israeli Municipal Elections in Jerusalem," *News From Within* 13.11 (1998): 6-7.

³ For an example, see Elli Wohlgeleinter, "Arab Candidates in Jerusalem Hampered by PA Boycott," *The Jerusalem Post*, 11 November 1998.

⁴ See Brubacher and Gassner for the recent pre-election debates among Palestinians over whether to continue the boycott.

⁵ Michael Romann and Alex Weingrod, *Living Together Separately: Arabs and Jews in Contemporary Jerusalem* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton UP, 1991), p. 156 and p. 151.

⁶ Romann and Weingrod, p. 156.

⁷ Romann and Weingrod, pp. 153-155.

Arab East Jerusalem and constitutes a potential base on which to build a future independent infrastructure for Palestinians in the region.⁸

Israelis have also targeted the Orient House, in recent years frequently calling for it to be closed down on the grounds that it is in reality serving as the PNA government office in Jerusalem or attempting to serve as a "shadow municipality" for Palestinian Jerusalemites. Nevertheless, the Orient House continues to intervene extensively to protect Arab Jerusalem, conducting research on Palestinian land ownership, monitoring settlement activity and human rights violations, organizing protests, and issuing statements and appeals, locally and internationally.⁹

In rejecting Israeli control over the school curriculum, Palestinians have dealt perhaps their most significant counter-hegemonic blow to a "unified" Israeli Jerusalem. Schools are a key sphere for achieving hegemony through the inculcation of state ideology. Yet Palestinians have rebuffed every Israeli attempt to impose an Israeli curriculum in East Jerusalem. In June 1997 Israel once again tried, announcing that it would soon be taking over the curriculum and the administration of the *Tawjihi* exam.¹⁰ First, it postponed the take-over, and then a year

later, after a sustained outcry, decided to drop its plans indefinitely.¹¹

By comparison, Palestinians have less successfully resisted Israel's ongoing strangulation of the Arab economy. Since March 1993 Israel has closed Jerusalem to residents of the West Bank under the pretext of security.¹² The real aim has been to sever economic ties between Arab Jerusalem and the West Bank and to divide the West Bank itself into isolated Northern and Southern regions. To this end Israel has also banned the sale of certain West Bank products in the city.¹³ The closure has meant an enormous loss of business. It has also forced 80 percent of Palestinian NGOs to move to areas outside the checkpoints to be accessible to staff and clients.¹⁴ In spite of this artificially engineered economic downturn, Israel still levies its *arnona* tax, a tax whose level is unfairly based on the far greater turnover levels of Israeli merchants in West Jerusalem. As a result, over 230 stores in the Old City alone have had to close. The Jerusalem Chamber of Commerce has written numerous petitions and organized several commercial strikes against this tax over the last several years.¹⁵ To revive

⁸ See Michael Dumper, *The Politics of Jerusalem* (New York: Columbia, 1997), p. 152-159.

⁹ Sami F. Musallam, *The Struggle for Jerusalem: A Programme of Action for Peace* (Jerusalem: PASSIA, 1996), p. 51-62.

¹⁰ "Israeli takeover of Jerusalem Schools Averted-for now," *Palestine Report*, 13 June 1997, p. 3.

¹¹ *Jerusalem Times*, 19 June 1998, p. 2.

¹² This includes the 40,000 Palestinians who live in the villages surrounding Jerusalem but who do not have Jerusalem area residency rights

¹³ Joharah Baker, "Do Not Enter: West Bank Products Banned in Israel," *Palestine Report*, 9 October

¹⁴ Martina Rieker, "Resume 1997: The Year that Was," *Jerusalem Quarterly File*, 1 (Jerusalem, 1997), p. 10.

¹⁵ Mousa Qous, "East Jerusalem Silenced by Anti-tax Strike," *Palestine Report*, 4 July 1997, p. 3. And for more recent events, "Jerusalem: Israeli Authorities Intensify Tax Campaign," *Al-Ayyam*, 23 October 1998.

shopping in the city, they have also sponsored an annual shopping festival. Because of the continuing closure, however, the success of this year's two-week shopping festival (from July 12th to the 24th) depended on Palestinians from within the "green line," meaning it had little positive effect.

As for investment, through its expropriation of East Jerusalem land and its establishment of "Green Areas," Israel discourages potential Arab investors and holds up or prevents business projects. In addition, there is the threat that Israel may invoke the Absentee Property Law to take land from investors from countries still legally at war with Israel.¹⁶ Nevertheless, programs to encourage investment have pressed forward. The Orient House hosted a day-long program on investment opportunities for expatriate Palestinians on Friday, July 25th. And in February 1998, the Jerusalem Calling Festival in the Gulf Emirate of Sharjah (in cooperation with the Geneva-based Welfare Association) raised over \$27 million for programs aimed at improving the quality of life in the Arab part of the city.¹⁷

By systematically redirecting tourism away from East Jerusalem to Israeli businesses in West Jerusalem since 1967, Israel has dealt a major blow to the Arab economy in Jerusalem.¹⁸ In response, the PNA has recently launched a program to

develop tourism from the Arab world and to ensure that this business is conducted via Palestinian agents. Meanwhile, Israeli developers are pushing the so-called "Holy Land" project through the planning pipeline as an attempt to siphon off tourist revenue from visitors to Jerusalem and Bethlehem in the year 2000.¹⁹ This has steeled the resolve of Palestinians to push forward with their own Bethlehem 2000 program to keep tourists in Palestinian areas.

Palestinians are also fighting for the right to build on their properties and to retain their land. During the fall of 1997 there was a stepped-up Israeli campaign of housing demolitions, used as a form of collective punishment in the wake of the suicide bombings in Jerusalem in July and September and as a way of setting an example to other Palestinians that building "illegally" is not worth the risk. Resistance, however, continues. Not only does illegal building persist, but every demolition spurs Palestinian legal defenses and protests. Recent examples of the latter include the Orient House's camp on Mount Scopus for those who had lost their homes and their Jerusalem IDs, and the tents pitched by the Coalition Against House Demolition, a joint Palestinian/Israeli campaign, near the settlement of Beit El outside Ramallah.²⁰

Palestinian Jerusalemites are not only prevented from erecting new homes but

¹⁶ Manal Jamal, "Jerusalem Ripe for Foreign and Local Investment," *Palestine Report*, 4 October 1996, p. 16-17.

¹⁷ *Jerusalem Times*, 27 February 1998, p. 2 and 6 March 1998, p. 2.

¹⁸ See Dumper, *The Politics of Jerusalem*, pp. 224-227.

¹⁹ Rochelle Furstenberg and Leslie Susser, "Future Shock," *The Jerusalem Report*, 9 November 1998, p. 17-18; and "Frankly Speaking...", interview with Sarah Kaminker, Israeli Municipal planner, *Palestine Report*, 7 August 1998, p. 11

²⁰ *Jerusalem Times*, 17 July 1998.

also confronted with a continuous effort to buy up their property through various fraudulent and underhanded means. This war involves small, hard-won victories, but victories nonetheless. The Palestinian Society for the Protection of Human Rights and the Environment (LAW) took the settler group Elad to court over their purchase of land in the Jerusalem Quarter of Silwan. The lawyer hired by LAW successfully argued that the sale was based on fraudulent sales documents.²¹

The PNA plays its part in this struggle over land. In the summer of 1997, in the wake of high-profile land sales to Jewish groups in the Old City, the PNA issued a decree imposing the death penalty on any one selling land to Israelis or serving to broker such deals. They are also working to collect data on land dealers who work with Jewish groups. Moreover, as a countermeasure, the PNA and Palestinian business people have been buying up property in East Jerusalem and forming Palestinian investment companies for land purchases and business investments in the Arab parts of the city.²²

Some battles concern Israeli land grabs outside the municipal borders of Jerusalem. Israel's so-called E-1 plan involves a

massive expansion and development of the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim. The plan will cut off Palestinians in the North from Palestinians in Jerusalem and the South. It will also enable Israel to achieve their goal of a "Greater Jerusalem" without having to formally annex more land in areas of high Arab population. Palestinian farmers in the villages facing land confiscation, the Bedouin of the Jahalin tribe, Palestinian legal defense organizations, and Israeli Peace groups all have mobilized against this plan.²³ The Israeli courts are attempting to confiscate the land in the name of "public benefit."²⁴ Meanwhile, the Jerusalem Legal Aid Center is challenging the moves all the way to the Israeli High Court, so far without success.²⁵

Israeli efforts to re-take formerly Jewish properties in East Jerusalem, especially in Silwan, have unwittingly spurred the formulation of a new Palestinian strategy of resistance in anticipation of the final status negotiations. In attempting to reclaim properties in Arab Jerusalem on the basis of their having been owned by Jews before Israel was established, Jewish settlers have involuntarily pointed up the double standard applied by the Israeli courts. Clearly, Israel cannot consistently demand the restoration of pre-1948 Jewish property in East Jerusalem while outlawing

²¹ *Jerusalem Times*, 30 May 1997, p. 2.

²² Examples include the Al-Quds Investment and Reconstruction Company, which raises capital to buy real estate and invest in property development in East Jerusalem (*Jerusalem Times*, 16 May 1997, p. 10); the Beit Mal Al-Quds investment company set up by the Jerusalem Committee headed by Morocco's King Hassan; and finally, the Jerusalem Development and Investment company set up in Amman (*Palestine Report*, 22 August 1997, p. 14).

²³ Martina Rieker, "Resume 1997: The Year that Was," *Jerusalem Quarterly File*, 1 (1998), p. 10-11.

²⁴ In this case the "public benefit" means that 18,000 settlers will possess 15,000 acres and 50,000 Palestinians, 1,750 acres.

²⁵ Rose-Marie Barbeau, "Ma'aleh Adumim Challenge moves to High Court," *Palestine Report*, 17 April 1998, p. 4.

the restoration of pre-1948 Palestinian property in West Jerusalem. Inspired by the force of this argument, the Arab Studies Society, a department of the Orient House, has launched a massive effort to recover and register Palestinian property claims in West Jerusalem.²⁶

Perhaps no dynamic is closer to the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in Jerusalem than that of population growth and the various measures taken by Israel to achieve demographic predominance. A major aim of Israeli policy in Jerusalem has long been to counteract the one-third higher birth rate of the Palestinian population and maintain the often-stated goal of a 72 percent Jewish majority in the city. As many people have pointed out, despite thirty years of concerted Israeli effort at the cost of billions of dollars, the Israeli government has failed to achieve this goal.²⁷ Moreover, many of the measures they have taken to stem the growth of the Palestinian population have had unexpected consequences. For instance, as Daniel Seidemann has pointed out,²⁸ the Likud government's more rigid

enforcement of residency laws has backfired. Fearing the loss of their permanent residency cards, thousands of Palestinians have flooded back into the city. By contrast, no more than 500 or so Palestinians have lost their IDs.

Furthermore, while Israel has successfully secured a slim majority of Jews in East Jerusalem through its massive settlement programs, the settlers have largely come from Jerusalem itself, producing a relative decline of the Jewish population in West Jerusalem.²⁹ Meanwhile, secular, liberal Jews have been migrating away from the city for the more secular climate and the better high-tech jobs and suburban housing to be found in Tel-Aviv and Haifa. Consequently, since the 1970s Jerusalem has witnessed an overall slow-down of population growth, with more Jews leaving the city than settling there.³⁰

The Israeli political agenda has led to other unforeseen complications. Jewish Jerusalem is top-heavy with housing and lacks an adequate economic base to provide jobs for all the residents who have been encouraged to settle there for demographic purposes (thus the efforts of the Jerusalem Development Authority

²⁶ "PA studies land deeds in West Jerusalem," *Ha'aretz*, 24 September 1998. The right to make these claims is bolstered by the consistent refusal of Palestinians over the last fifty years to accept any Israeli offers of compensation for their property in West Jerusalem or for their land expropriated in East Jerusalem. In making this refusal, they have adhered to the principle that Israeli expropriations are illegal under international law (see Romann and Weingrod, *Living Together Separately*, p. 57).

²⁷ In 1967 Jews made up 74 percent of the population within the current borders. Recent figures put the current Jewish population at 70 percent.

²⁸ See Graham Usher's interview of Daniel Seidemann in *Jerusalem Quarterly File*, 1 (1998), p. 34-35.

²⁹ Romann and Weingrod, *Living Together Separately*, p. 59.

³⁰ See Lee Hockstader, *Washington Post*, Sunday, 16 August 1998; Charmaine Seitz, *Palestine Report* 20 March 1998, p. 8; Nadav Shragai, "Arab Increase Thrice that of Jerusalem Jews," *Ha'aretz*, 11 June 1998 and "Jerusalem Becoming a Lower Middle Class City," *Ha'aretz*, 7 December 1998.

since the 1980s to develop high-tech industry in Jerusalem).³¹ This fact, combined with the growing municipal expense of the increasing ultra-orthodox population, has caused the city to run a \$120 million annual deficit, although it receives hefty subsidies from the national government.³² As the numbers of the ultra-orthodox population grow, they gain increasing influence over city politics and claim a disproportionate share of public resources for their community (the results of the recent November 1998 municipal elections demonstrate their growing political influence).³³ Despite the heavy Israeli spending on the city, "Jerusalem is one of the poorest cities in Israel, with 27 percent of its residents living below the poverty line, compared with 17 percent in the country as a whole, 36 percent in Bnei Brak and 14 percent in Tel Aviv."³⁴

To rectify the unanticipated consequences of its own policies, the Israeli government finds itself always having to devise yet further planning schemes. For instance, in the 1970s, its policy of preventing Palestinians from building within the municipal borders

unintentionally sparked massive Arab development outside the city limits. The plans for the so-called "outer-ring" settlements emerged as a defensive response aimed at encircling and restricting the newly built-up Arab areas.³⁵ To take a more recent example, this June the Israeli government approved the so-called "Municipal Umbrella" plan discussed by Muna Hamzeh-Muhaisen below, a response to the failure of their demographic policies. It would extend Jerusalem's municipal boundaries to include several small suburban municipalities to the west, and build some 80,000 apartments and houses there for Jews over the next two decades. It would also incorporate some 30,000 settlers living outside the current municipal borders into the Jerusalem Municipality.³⁶

This plan stirred immediate protests from both Palestinians and Israelis, for very different reasons of course. The Palestinian response was chiefly on the national political level, with PNA officials denouncing it as prejudicing the final status of Jerusalem and therefore contrary to the Oslo accords. At the same time, Israeli suburbanites denounced the plan as an infringement on the freedom of their own municipalities. The recent announcement of plans for extensive high-rise construction around Jerusalem prompted similar internal Israeli protest from

³¹ Dumper, *The Politics of Jerusalem*, p. 221-222.

³² Hockstader, *Washington Post*, Sunday, 16 August 1998.

³³ See Elli Wohlgernter, "Shas Gains in Jerusalem at Bigger Parties' Expense," *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 November 1998; and Shahar Ilan, "Most J'lem Haredim Pay No Municipal Taxes," *Ha'aretz*, 8 January 1999. According to the article, a new study by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies shows that "the ultra-Orthodox, who constitute 28 percent of the city's Jewish population, pay only about 9 percent of the city's tax intake from Jews."

³⁴ Nadav Shragai, *Ha'aretz*, 11 June 1998.

³⁵ Romann and Weingrod, *Living Together Separately*, pp. 58-59.

³⁶ "A Growing 'Greater Jerusalem,'" Charmaine Seitz, *Palestine Report*, 26 June 1998, p. 1, 3, and 5.

environmental and neighborhood groups.³⁷

To some observers the PNA needs to do more than issue declarations denouncing such Israeli plans. This review of recent practices of resistance in Jerusalem has shown that in fact they are doing a good deal more. Nevertheless, there seems to be a growing consensus that the diverse practices of resistance outlined here need to be unified under a single, coherent strategy. In her study, Latendresse argues that the Palestinian commitment to linking the struggle in East Jerusalem to the broader national struggle has impaired the development of a specific, intersectoral strategy for East Jerusalem and meant that most programs of action have been sectoral. As this review suggests, that continues to be the case, except that more and more people are coming to share her assessment. The Palestinian Legislative Council recently called upon the Executive Authority "to reorganize national activities in Jerusalem in all financial, political, and organizational fields so they may be more effective."³⁸ In a recent analytical piece in the *Jerusalem Times*, Said Ghazali observed that "Palestinians currently lack a strategic master plan. Construction of new houses in the Old City is limited, and the millions of dollars collected abroad is not

efficiently used."³⁹ Further analysis of the sort we have ventured here might explore what institutional structures in Palestinian society have blocked the development of such a unified, intersectoral strategy in the city. In particular, we might ask why there has not been a more unified opposition to the policy of closure, which is having such a broad and destructive impact on Palestinians. Such understanding of the shortcomings of current strategies must inform future efforts to preserve Arab Jerusalem. In developing such strategies, however, Palestinians should not invest Israel with omnipotence. As we have seen, the best-laid schemes of Israeli social engineering often go awry. Nor should we underestimate the role that Palestinians themselves have played in shaping the city. They have left a long record of active intervention, from whose failures and successes they can learn for the future.

³⁷ Rochelle Furstenberg and Leslie Susser, "Future Shock," *The Jerusalem Report*, 9 November 1998; Ziva Sternhell, "Jerusalem City Planners Pick High-rises over History," *Ha'aretz*, 25 October 1998, p. 6; and Mohammed 'Abbed Rabbo, "Towering over Jerusalem," *Palestine Report*, 31 July 1998, p. 7.

³⁸ *Palestine Report*, 10 July 1998.

³⁹ "Jerusalem Expansion Plan: PLC calls for 'Confrontation,'" *Jerusalem Times*, 26 June 1998, p. 1 and 3.