



## Conflicts and Contradictions

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As the Israeli election campaign unfolded and politicians stumbled over themselves to demonstrate their commitment to a unified Jerusalem, it became increasingly clear that the city has become perhaps the central theme in the Israeli "politics of fear." The reasons are evident. As tensions with Arab neighbors decrease in the wake of the Oslo accords, Israeli politicians desperately need a new threat against which to mobilize the public. The issue of Jerusalem fills the gap. The Israeli public overwhelmingly opposes ever dividing Jerusalem again or ceding Israeli control over any part of the city. According

to one recent poll, while 68 percent of the Israeli public (excluding Israeli Arabs) favor further land concessions on the West Bank, 84 percent oppose any Israeli withdrawal from East Jerusalem.<sup>1</sup> In light of this consensus, politicians have calculated that by conjuring up the threat of Jerusalem's re-division—construed as a return to pre-1967 barbed wire fences, snipers, and no man's lands—they can galvanize public support for whichever "strong leader" can portray himself as the city's true defender. The need to manufacture a new rallying point is particularly acute because substantive differences between the major Israeli political parties on matters of "security" have been reduced to the difference of a few percentage points regarding the amount of West Bank land to cede to the Palestinians.

The increasingly hard-line rhetoric on Jerusalem does not bode well for attempts to arrive at a peaceful settlement based on pragmatic compromise. Compromise requires recognition that the city is in fact not unified and that separate Palestinian national institutions have long operated there, and continue to emerge. Indeed many Israeli politicians realize that the reality on the ground belies their own public claims about a unified Jerusalem and that complete Israeli control over all parts of the city is impractical. Yet they dare not voice these opinions publicly. As Danny Rubinstein remarked in a recent editorial, most Israeli politicians recognize that there is "no escape from solving the

problems of Jerusalem's Arabs via negotiations with the PA," but "will not say a word about it."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Ian Lustick has noticed that on the issue of Jerusalem the public rhetoric of politicians differs markedly from the ordinary language of their unofficial and private remarks; in the latter, they often refer to East Jerusalem not as part of a unified Israeli Jerusalem, but as occupied Arab territory.<sup>3</sup> But the political pressure they perceive themselves to be under prevents them from pursuing compromise policies, and even compels them to exacerbate the conflict.

During the recent election campaign, Benjamin Netanyahu portrayed himself as the only leader tough enough to defend Jerusalem. A TV campaign ad of his showed Labor candidate Ehud Barak's face with a grimacing cutout of Yossi Beilin lurking behind it—an allusion to the so-called Beilin-Abu Mazen peace plan that would divide sovereignty in Jerusalem—and warned that a vote for Barak is a vote to divide Jerusalem. Of Barak he said that "if he were elected, he would divide and divide," and that "Beilin says aloud what Barak and his friends think in their hearts."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Danny Rubinstein, "The Political Center of Jerusalem's Arabs," *Ha'aretz*, 26 April 1999.

<sup>3</sup> See Ian S. Lustick, "Reinventing Jerusalem," *Foreign Affairs* 93 (Winter 1993/94), pp. 49-52.

<sup>4</sup> Shahar Ilan, "PM: Barak will divide Jerusalem," *Ha'aretz*, 30 April 1999. Of course at the same time Barak has gone out of his way to affirm that Jerusalem "is our eternal capital - we have no other" and that the city "shall never be divided" (Danna Harman, "Barak vows Jerusalem 'shall never be divided,'" *The Jerusalem Post*, 31 March 1999).

<sup>1</sup> *The Peace Index*, Tel Aviv University, 1999.

Not content with mere rhetorical posturing, Netanyahu provoked confrontations to prove his toughness. In early March the Israeli government protested that the Orient House had invited European ambassadors for a "political briefing," warning that this was a violation of the Oslo accords. While the meeting never took place, Israel's warning prompted a letter from the German Ambassador, Theodor Wallau, whose government currently chairs the EU. The letter reiterated the EU's long-standing position that Jerusalem is a "corpus separatum" (separate entity) under international law, within which its diplomats are free to meet whomever they wish. Netanyahu sought to capitalize politically on this European response, casting it as yet another sign that Jerusalem is in danger and that Israel is an isolated, misunderstood, and persecuted country. Likud followed suit, seizing on the letter as an election ploy: top officials expressed outrage, rehearsing the usual slogans about Jerusalem as the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel; and Ariel Sharon, the Israeli Foreign Minister, declared that Israel considers UN Resolution 181 "null and void."<sup>5</sup>

On Israel's Independence Day, Wednesday, April 21<sup>st</sup>, Netanyahu staged another confrontation over a meeting

between Palestinians and foreign diplomats at the Orient House. Although he knows full well that these meetings are customary and have continued under the Labor government since Oslo, he claimed they were a violation of the Oslo Accords. Declaring, "we are simply not willing to suffer this infringement on our sovereignty in Jerusalem," he ordered a closure of those Orient House offices allegedly funded by the PNA, including the Wafa News Agency, the Palestinian Prisoners Club, and the Christian Services Office.<sup>6</sup> Further, in response to meetings a week earlier between Faisal Husseini, members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, and Diplomats, he revoked the "VIP" travel permits of Husseini, Hanan Ashrawi, and Ziad Abu Ziad. Palestinians rightly denounced both moves as a campaign stunt.<sup>7</sup>

Despite Likud's public stance, representatives of the government have been secretly meeting representatives of the Orient House with Netanyahu's approval, according to a recent report.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Thanks to a court challenge by left-wing Israelis, on 11 May 1999 the Israeli High Court issued a temporary injunction that postponed any decision on the closure orders until after the first round of the elections on May 17<sup>th</sup>. Nevertheless, by that point, Netanyahu had managed to drag on the whole confrontation until the eve of the elections, generating enormous local and international publicity.

<sup>7</sup> Amy Klein, "Police shut PA offices in Capital," *The Jerusalem Post*, 5 April 1999, p. 3; Lee Hockstader, "Netanyahu Shuts Palestinian Offices," *Washington Post*, 30 March 1999, p. A14.

<sup>8</sup> Amira Segev, "Netanyahu approved months of secret talks with Husseini at Orient House," *Ha'aretz*, 28 April 1999; Amira Segev and David Makovsky, "Husseini confirms talks on Jerusalem; PM denies," *Ha'aretz*, 29 April 1999.

<sup>5</sup> See Yerah Tal, David Makovsky, and Dov Alon, "Likud to use EU letter on Jerusalem in Campaign," *Ha'aretz*, 12 March 1999; Marius Schattner, "Israel outraged after EU asserts that Jerusalem is not Israeli," *Agence France Presse*, 11 March 1999; and Jeffrey Heller, "Israel Says U. N. Resolution on Jerusalem Void," *Reuters*, 16 March 1999.

Clearly these back channel meetings represent a tacit acknowledgment on the part of the Israeli government that their public rhetoric does not match the practical realities of Jerusalem. But they pursue their uncompromising positions anyway for short-term political gain, regardless of the consequences for a long-term peaceful resolution.

The Israeli government's need for secret consultations with the Orient House stems from the unexpected consequences of its own efforts to judaize the city. The more Israel attempts to develop Jewish parts of the city at the expense of Arab neighborhoods, the more need there is for a shadow Palestinian presence in the neglected Arab areas to provide services and perform municipal functions. This contradiction has produced a situation in which many of the most unyielding supporters of a unified Israeli Jerusalem are also those calling most stridently for more spending on Arab parts of the city. In 1997, at Likud Mayor Ehud Olmert's urging, the Israeli government allocated NIS 130 million for investment in infrastructure in Arab neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup> Speciously liberal in tone, Olmert's call for equalization of services proceeded from a concern to maintain control over Arab neighborhoods. As he himself said, "We have no right to say that the city is unified, because there is no practical application to

corroborate this. Millions of shekels must be spent to bridge the differences in infrastructure and services."<sup>10</sup>

In a special session in Jerusalem City Hall on March 24<sup>th</sup>, the Israeli cabinet announced plans to consolidate Israeli control over the city. Significantly, the proposals involved measures to help not just Jews but Arabs. They called for reducing housing costs in the city so as to attract more low-income Jewish immigrants and to expand borders westward to include more Jews. At the same time, however, they called for a three-year plan to improve the infrastructure of Arab East Jerusalem.<sup>11</sup> Though widely seen as an electioneering event and though the money may never be spent (the cabinet rejected a plan to allocate the funds for East Jerusalem immediately), the meeting, with its seemingly contradictory agenda, pointed up the dilemma facing the Israeli leadership. They realize that their own policy of neglect is causing them to lose East Jerusalem, yet developing the Arab part of the city brings no guarantees of co-opting the Arab population politically, and might even strengthen the Palestinian position on the ground. So they vacillate between a policy of neglect and one of improvement, all the while spending lavishly to bolster the Jewish presence in the vain hope of eliminating the Arab problem altogether.

In a series of articles in *Ha'aretz*—written in the wake of the above meeting

<sup>9</sup> Nadav Shragai, "Cabinet orders 3-year plan to improve East Jerusalem," *Ha'aretz*, 25 March 1999. On Olmert's spending in the city, see "Olmert pledges services for East Jerusalem Again," *Palestine Report*, 26 March 1995 and "Israel on East Jerusalem Spending Spree," *Palestine Report*, 9 February 1996.

<sup>10</sup> "Israel on East Jerusalem Spending Spree," p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> "Israeli Cabinet holds session at Jerusalem Municipality Headquarters," *Al-Quds*, 25 March 1999.

and the release of intelligence reports about the PNA takeover of East Jerusalem—Nadav Shragai eloquently condemned Israel's extensive neglect of Arab neighborhoods.<sup>12</sup> He notes, for instance, how in the early 1980s, when the government announced the expropriation of thousands of dunams of land to build the Pisgat Ze'ev settlement in East Jerusalem, it promised to implement parallel plans for building in the Arab neighborhoods of Shu'afat and Beit Hanina. But as he says, although "the approval went through, 20 years have passed and there is nothing on the ground."<sup>13</sup> His next piece debunks the notion that Teddy Kolleck's Labor government did more to equalize services than its successor did: "in one year of the Netanyahu-Olmert era, investment in East Jerusalem infrastructure totaled over 20 times the amount invested during the years when Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin served as prime minister and Teddy Kolleck was mayor of the city."<sup>14</sup> In sum, his investigative series reads like any number of attacks on Israeli policies by Palestinian organizations or Israeli human rights organizations.

The difference is that his aim is to reproach the government for letting control of Arab neighborhoods slip into the hands of the PNA. As he complains, the PNA

takeover "stems from the tremendous vacuum Israel has created over the past few decades in services and infrastructure in the eastern side of the capital." He details how according to Israeli intelligence reports, the PNA has taken over routine policing functions in the eastern part of the city; how they have assumed control of health services and taken over the Al Mukassad Hospital, transferring NIS 2 million to cover its running costs; how they have extended a health insurance plan to about 3,000 families, an estimated 15,000 people, attracting residents away from the Israeli National Insurance Institute; how through the Orient House they are funding private and Islamic education for poor East Jerusalem residents; how both Al Quds University and the Al Quds Open University operate branches in the city without permission and against the Israeli Higher Education Law; how the PNA is assuming control over the judicial system (including the Sharia court) and the transportation system, licensing passenger-carrying vans; and how through the Palestinian Housing Council the PNA is financing loans and mortgages for people who want to renovate or build homes in East Jerusalem. With respect to these reports, Shragai charges that "Netanyahu knows all the details, but does not lift a finger."<sup>15</sup>

While Palestinians support social services and infrastructure investment for East Jerusalem, they obviously do so for different reasons than Shragai. They do not demand services and investments

<sup>12</sup> See Nadav Shragai, "Vanishing Sovereignty," *Ha'aretz*, 23 March 1999, "PA is expanding presence in Jerusalem," *Ha'aretz*, 24 March 1999, "Cabinets' record shows 20 years of neglect," *Ha'aretz*, 25 March 1999, and "Cabinet orders 3-year plan to improve East Jerusalem," *Ha'aretz*, 25 March 1999.

<sup>13</sup> See "Cabinets' record shows 20 years of neglect."

<sup>14</sup> "Cabinet orders 3-year plan."

<sup>15</sup> "Vanishing Sovereignty."

because they want to unify the city under Israeli rule, but because they are concerned to improve the quality of Arab life. Yet in pushing to improve their own quality of life, they inadvertently promote the former goal of securing Israeli hegemony. In fighting to bring about equalization of social services and to retain their permanent residency status so as to keep Israeli social and health insurance, they are unintentionally pushing for policies that bolster the very Israeli rule over the city that they wish to end. A classic version of this contradiction is the struggle of workers under capitalism to improve their condition, which works to reform and thereby strengthen the system that exploits them. By raising wages, improving working conditions, creating a social safety net, and bolstering overall levels of consumer spending, worker-instigated reforms help protect the system from the kind of open class conflict and severe economic crises that might threaten its existence. In the debate over whether Palestinians should participate in municipal elections, Palestinians must similarly decide whether pursuing their own interests through Israeli political channels is worth the cost of lending legitimacy to Israeli rule.

A central problem Israelis face in maintaining hegemony over the city is how to advance the Jewish presence while keeping up the appearance of benign and impartial rule. The former aim keeps obstructing the latter. A case in point is Israel's policy of revoking the permanent residency status of Arab Jerusalemites, a policy accelerated since the end of 1995 as a way to reduce the Arab population prior

to the final status negotiations. In recent months, numerous stories in the Israeli and foreign press have turned an unwelcome spotlight on the egregious consequences of this policy. First, in early March the Israeli Interior Ministry was pressured into releasing figures on Jerusalem ID-card confiscation for 1998. The report showed that 788 Palestinian Jerusalemites were stripped of their residency in 1998, with more than half the cases—441—coming in the last five months of the year. Stories focusing on the human consequences of the policy also raised public consciousness. They detailed how families whose IDs had been revoked were denied medical treatment for seriously ill children and infants; and how medical treatment for children was delayed pending lengthy investigation into the residency of their parents, putting the health of the children at risk.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, thanks to a petition by various Israeli and International human rights organizations,<sup>17</sup> the Israeli High Court finally issued a ruling on the Interior Ministry's residency policy on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1998, in which it called for the State Attorney's Office to review the files of all residents of East Jerusalem who lost their permanent residency status in 1989 and 1991. The ruling aims to ascertain whether the Ministry did in fact change its policy

<sup>16</sup> See Moshe Reinfeld, "Court hears allegations of health care being refused to East Jerusalem Babies," *Ha'aretz*, 12 April 1999, A3; and Gideon Levy, "The Last C," *Ha'aretz Magazine*, 22 January 1999, p. 8.

<sup>17</sup> The petition was originally submitted on 6 April 1988 by Moked - Center for the Defense of the Individual, The Association for Civil Rights in Israel, Physicians for Human Rights, Defense for Children International, and the Alternative Information Center.

without warning in 1995, as the petitioners have claimed.

Ironically, in their zeal to push Palestinians out of the city, the political parties behind the policy (Likud and Shas) have done more harm than good to their own cause. Bad publicity has already pressured the Interior Ministry into publicly backtracking: it announced on April 10<sup>th</sup> that it would no longer cancel the right to health insurance of Palestinians who return to the city after having allegedly moved their "center of life" to nearby West Bank communities.<sup>18</sup>

Moreover, these stories themselves often include coverage of broader aspects of Israel's policies in Jerusalem, raising the level of public skepticism regarding Israel's claims to disinterested and benevolent rule over the city.

A final unintended consequence is that the tighter residency policy has spurred far more Palestinians to return to the city than have lost their IDs. According to Faisal Husseini, the PLO executive committee member in charge of the Jerusalem file, ID confiscation and house demolition have actually caused thousands of Palestinians living outside the city to return in the past few years. He notes that in 1995 there were between 180,000 to 190,000 Palestinians in the city while in 1998 there were approximately 215,000.<sup>19</sup>

The recent settlement drive in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood has had a similar unintended effect in raising public

consciousness. The dispute focuses on several houses that were once part of a Jewish neighborhood adjacent to the gravesite of Shimon Hatzaddik (Simon the Righteous), including a house supposedly used as a synagogue prior to 1948. Since 1948 Arab tenants have rented the houses. Beginning last October the buildings were occupied by members of the Meyashvei Zion ("Settlers of Zion") movement, after the original owners, the Sephardic Community Committee, gave them and the right-wing MK Benny Elon (Moledet) power of attorney to settle in the area.<sup>20</sup> The settlers have justified their activities as a return to homes previously owned by Jews and therefore rightfully theirs. This principle of course applies equally well to pre-1948 Arab homes in West Jerusalem. Indeed the parallel is so obvious that many of the articles covering the story in the Israeli press have called attention to it and even asked the settlers involved whether they think it is a valid comparison.<sup>21</sup> Though of course they deny that it is,<sup>22</sup> the very raising of the issue in such a public forum is a victory for Palestinians.

<sup>20</sup> See Nadav Shragai, "Moledet takes over East J'lem Synagogue," *Ha'aretz*, 16 October 1998; and Zaki Abu Al-Halaweh, "Settlers move into Sheikh Jarrah," *Jerusalem Times*, 23 October 1998.

<sup>21</sup> See Nadav Shragai, "In an Old Quarter, New Tensions Arise," 26 April 1999; and Danny Rubinstein, "Why Arabs fear Likud's Campaign," *Ha'aretz*, 3 May 1999.

<sup>22</sup> One of the settlers "does not see the possibility that the Arabs of Talbieh and Baka, now Jewish neighborhoods, would also return to their homes, as a symmetrical case. 'This is the Jewish state, which was established as a home for the Jewish people, so that the Jews will come back to it,' she says ('In an old quarter, new tensions arise')."

<sup>18</sup> Amira Hass, "Jerusalem Arabs to get more rights," *Ha'aretz*, 11 April 1999.

<sup>19</sup> "Backfired," *Palestine Report*, 16 April 1999.

Right-wing Israeli politicians support these settler movements for political reasons even in cases such as the Sheikh Jarrah settlement where the settlement has no strategic value and where the settler provocations may harm Israel's ostensible interests by de-railing the peace process or sparking international protests. While politicians suppose they can exploit the settlers, past episodes suggest that the settlers often end up exploiting the politicians. The recent hard-line rhetoric concerning Jerusalem may likewise set in motion forces that it cannot control. Behind the demagoguery is condescension towards ordinary people that assumes they cannot arrive at informed opinions or rational compromise or act on decent moral impulses. A recent study has shown that in fact people on both sides are more open to compromise than many politicians imagine.<sup>23</sup> In view of the way current demagoguery is inflaming passions and provoking confrontations, there is more need than ever to construct an alternative discourse about the city, a discourse that, instead of whipping up fear, gives voice to the sentiments of ordinary people on both sides in favor of compromise and helps them articulate arguments in support of their position.

<sup>23</sup> See Jerome M. Segal, *Is Jerusalem Negotiable?* Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, Final Status Publications Series Number 1, July 1997. University of Maryland, 1997, p. 27.

مجلة

## الدراسات الفلسطينية

العلاقة الأردنية - الفلسطينية

بعد رحيل الملك حسين

أنيس فوزي قاسم

المستقبل الديموغرافي

لمنطقة فلسطين/إسرائيل

يوسف كرباح

### المف

المهاجرون الروس في إسرائيل،

التكوين الاجتماعي والتوجهات السياسية

إسرائيل ويهود الشتات،

الولايات المتحدة

نصير عاروري

زكريا تامر،

خمس قصص

ربيع  
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توزع من قبل مؤسسة الأيام في رام الله