The Next Jerusalem: Potential Futures of the Urban Fabric

Francesco Chiodelli

Introduction

Since the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the city of Jerusalem has been the subject of a number of transformations that have radically changed its urban structure. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians have implemented different spatial measures in pursuit of their disparate political aims. However, it is the Israeli authorities who have played the key role in the process of the “political transformation” of the Holy City’s urban fabric, with the occupied territories of East Jerusalem, in particular, being the object of Israeli spatial action. Their aim has been the prevention of any possible attempt to re-divide the city. In fact, the military conquest in 1967 was not by itself sufficient to assure Israel that it had full and permanent control of the “unified” city – actually, the international community never recognized
the 1967 Israeli annexation of the Palestinian territories, and the Palestinians never ceased claiming East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state. So, since June 1967, after the overtly military phase of the conflict, Israeli authorities have implemented an “urban consolidation phase,” with the aim of making the military conquests irreversible precisely by modifying the urban space. Over the years, while there have been no substantial advances in terms of diplomatic agreements between the Israelis and the Palestinians about the status of Jerusalem, the spatial configuration of the city has changed constantly and quite unilaterally. The actions that have been taken over the space have established new “facts on the ground” that are providing a de facto “solution,” heavily biased in Israel’s favor, to the dispute over the city’s sovereignty. Through their occupation of the eastern part of the city with Jewish residential neighborhoods, infrastructure, services and industries, the Israeli authorities have secured increasing control over the whole city.

However, despite the occupation and the intense colonization process, during the seventies, eighties and nineties of the past century, East Jerusalem remained the core of the whole West Bank – not only in symbolic and religious terms, but also in cultural, functional and economic terms. The development of the suburbs outside the municipal boundaries has compensated for the restrictions imposed by the Israeli authorities on Arab urban development within those boundaries. This made the urban area a dynamic and attractive system in which East Jerusalem and the suburbs have worked in a strictly integrated way. It is worth highlighting that, from a political point of view, this has had the consequence of nourishing the Palestinian claim, and hope, for a re-divided city.

In recent years, however, the situation has changed. The construction of the wall has generated a number of urban transformations that, together with the changes related to the new urban plans, foreshadow a very different future for the city.

In this paper I offer some reflections about the likely urban shape of the “new Jerusalem” over the next decades. Of course, these reflections are just hypotheses. They are hypothetical because they are based on an unstable context, where sudden and unpredictable changes are possible. However, they are plausible, because they are related both to the territorial transformations that are currently under way (e.g. the transformations related to the construction of the wall) and to official Israeli planning documents, which have a good chance of being fully implemented.

**Urban Plans**

It is well known that since 1967 the Israeli authorities have been expropriating Palestinian lands (amounting to almost 35 percent of the East Jerusalem area), primarily to build Jewish residential neighborhoods. Nowadays, more than 200,000 Jews, about 40 percent of the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem, live in these neighborhoods.
This policy of Jewish residential expansion in East Jerusalem seems to be destined to continue unceasingly for the next decades. This is clearly indicated in the so-called Jerusalem Master Plan, the recent local outline scheme for the city. The Jerusalem Master Plan is actually a very significant document. It is the first comprehensive plan for the whole city since the beginning of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For the first time a comprehensive and detailed spatial vision of the Jerusalem of the 21st century that the Israeli authorities aim to realize is clearly expressed in an official document.

In total, the master plan allows for more than 37,000 new Jewish residential units within the occupied territories of East Jerusalem. This is in addition to the more than 50,000 Jewish residential units that have been built in the occupied territories of East Jerusalem from 1967 until now. The planned growth process focuses in particular on the southern part of the city. For example, the Gilo and Har Homa neighborhoods are expected to double their number of residential units with, according to the Jerusalem Master Plan, 7,808 and 8,105 new units respectively. From a territorial point of view, these expansions will create urban continuity between Har Homa and Gilo, and also between them and the next Jewish neighborhoods in West Jerusalem. In so doing, the creation of an urban continuum of Arab neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and Bethlehem (near to the south of the municipal border) will be prevented.

One should mention that the Jerusalem Master Plan also allows for the expansion of some Arab neighborhoods. However, the number of these expansions is limited; moreover, in certain cases, as will be explained in detail later, some of these areas will be physically cut off from the city by the wall. This is for instance the case for Al Walaja, where the plan allows one of the most significant expansions intended for the Arab population (consisting of 2,400 new residential units).

The Wall

In 2002 the Israeli authorities began the construction of a separation barrier from the Palestinians. To date, the wall has still not been completed. In the Jerusalem area, the barrier measures 142 kilometers, the greater part of which has already been erected. The wall is a highly controversial and much-criticized enterprise. However, I am not going to analyse here the controversy over the existence of the wall itself; I will be concentrating only on the effects of the wall on the urban configuration of the Jerusalem metropolitan area. In fact, in the Jerusalem area, the wall runs along the Green Line for only four kilometers; many portions of it do not even run along the municipal borders, but actually penetrate deep into the West Bank areas around the city. From this point of view, as Ray Dolphin argues, the wall could be interpreted as “the summation of Israel’s policies in Jerusalem since 1967, literally setting in concrete the fruits of decades of annexation and expansion.” In so doing, it has deeply upset the configuration and the functioning of the Jerusalem metropolitan area.
The wall and Jewish areas

As regards Jewish areas the main territorial consequence of the wall is the annexation to Jerusalem of the majority of Israeli settlements around the city. This includes three of the main settlement blocks around the municipal borders: the Ma’ale Adummim block of 40,000 inhabitants; the Giv’at Ze’ev block with 17,000 inhabitants; and the Gush Etzion block of 52,000 inhabitants (see fig. 1). Many of these settlements were already integrated within Jerusalem before the wall’s construction, representing the residential suburbs of the city where a part of Jewish Jerusalem’s population moved looking for cheaper homes nearby. Due to the barrier, these suburban areas will become de facto a part of Jerusalem, with a shift from a situation of functional

Figure 1: The wall in the Jerusalem area. Source: Author’s elaboration
The Next Jerusalem: Potential Futures of the Urban Fabric

contiguity to one of territorial continuity with Jerusalem and the rest of Israel.

A relevant case is the case of the Ma'ale Adummim block. The goal of the Israeli authorities is to transform the settlement into a new urban center in the metropolitan area. In particular, they aim to realize new housing and regionally relevant infrastructure within the so-called E1 expansion area: for instance, the Samaria and Judea Police District Headquarters has already been placed here. This is a large Palestinian area of 1,200 hectares located between Ma'ale Adummim and East Jerusalem (see fig. 1). The development plan for the E1 area had been frozen for a long time; recently, following the Palestinians’ successful bid for recognition at the UN General Assembly, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu ordered the advancement of building plans for some thousands new Jewish residential units to be built here. According to Bimkom and B’Tselem, “Construction in E1 will exacerbate the forced separation between the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The planned residential neighborhoods in E1 will border the built-up area of East Jerusalem in the east, connect with Jewish neighborhoods north of the Old City, and create a physical and functional partition between East Jerusalem and the Palestinian population of the rest of the West Bank, for whom the city is a major metropolitan and religious center.”

Note that in the Ma'ale Adummim area, the wall penetrates deeply into the West Bank: 14 kilometers east of the Green line, and 11 kilometers east of Jerusalem’s municipal borders, enclosing an area of about 61 km².

It is worth underlining that, in addition to these West Bank settlements, the wall also incorporates within Jerusalem some depopulated West Bank areas outside the actual municipal borders. The probable function of these areas is to provide some future expansion zones for the Jewish municipal settlements close by.

The wall and Arab areas

As regards Arab areas the wall has two main territorial consequences. The first is severing the connection between Arab Jerusalem and the Palestinian suburbs and, as a consequence, between Jerusalem and the West Bank. In this regard, Noam Shoval concludes that “There is no doubt that an important objective behind the fence was to deliberately break transportation links and functional contiguity of the Palestinian city with the West Bank.”

As stated earlier, since the 1967 occupation of East Jerusalem many Arab suburbs around the city have grown and flourished, developing economic activities hampered within East Jerusalem by Israeli policies. Many Arab Jerusalemites moved to the Arab suburbs due to East Jerusalem housing problems, such as low availability and high prices, and they commute to Jerusalem daily and retain their Jerusalem resident status. Over the years the Israeli authorities have increased access restrictions to the city from the West Bank, but in spite of these, for decades, East Jerusalem and the Palestinian suburbs have worked as an interrelated urban system. However, with the completion of this segment of the wall, the situation changed radically: the functional relation between these suburbs and the city became de facto quite impossible, with a significant negative impact on both East Jerusalem and the Palestinian suburbs.
particular, because of the wall, the Palestinian suburbs are now suffering economic and demographic collapse, since a great part of their economic vitality depended upon relations with Jerusalem. “Isolated from its customer base, by 2010, Al Ram has witnessed the closure of 730 commercial establishments out of the 1,650 operating in 2006. [...] In Bir Nabala more than fifty percent of businesses have closed, especially in the area located nearest to the Barrier. Abu Dis has experienced similar consequences, with 40 out of 50 shops along the main road between Abu Dis and Ras al’Amud [...] shutting down.”

A second consequence of the wall’s construction is the physical exclusion from Jerusalem of some Arab neighborhoods located within the municipal area, namely Kafr Aqab, Samiramis, Al Walaja, Ras Khamis, Dahiyat As Salam, and the Shu‘fat refugee camp (see fig. 1). These are within the municipal borders, but are now on the eastern side of the wall. The future of these neighborhoods and of their 55,000 residents is uncertain. Officially, they are still part of Jerusalem, but the wall has actually cut them off from it. So, they are trapped in a sort of limbo: the Jerusalem municipality is losing all its responsibilities in these areas, such as those related to public services and infrastructure. As a consequence the urban environment and general living conditions are rapidly worsening, while the Palestinian Authority is not permitted any kind of intervention in these neighborhoods because it has no jurisdiction over there areas. “As the municipal boundary remains the officially defined border, these Palestinians retain their status as permanent residents of East Jerusalem and with it the obligation to pay the municipal tax, the arnona. However, basic municipal services such as garbage collection and postal delivery, already inadequate, have deteriorated, given their new reality on the West Bank side of the Barrier. At the same time, these localities remain outside the jurisdiction of the Palestinian Authority, which is not authorized to make up for deficiencies in municipal services. The Israeli police seldom enter municipal areas beyond the Barrier, thus creating a security vacuum, manifested in an increase in lawlessness, crime and drug trafficking.”

Moreover, commuting to Jerusalem – these areas depend on the city for work, education, health and public services – is very long and costly, and also subject to much uncertainty and inconvenience associated with the check-point system at the wall. See for instance the case of Kafr Aqab: “The neighborhoods of Kafr Aqab and Samiramis and the western part of Qalandiya refugee camp [...] will suffer a serious blow by being cut off from the rest of Jerusalem, where many of the residents work and obtain educational, health, welfare, and other services. [...] It is also patently obvious that the obstacle [i.e. the wall] will be detrimental to the urban development of Kafr Aqab [...]. The main land reserves for building, [...] will remain on the other — the “Israeli” — side of the obstacle. [...] As it is, the Jerusalem Municipality encounters problems in providing municipal services to Kafr Aqab. [...] Fewer residents of the village are now employed in Israel, and their salaries have been cut.”

Generally speaking, a large number of Palestinians living in the Jerusalem area are affected by the wall in many different aspects of their lives. According to a
survey, “9.3% of the respondents changed their place of residence as a result of wall construction. [...] 18.8% said that the wall affected [increased] the number of families residing in their dwellings [...] 56.3% of the respondents report limiting their mobility by seeking to avoid crossing the wall [...] 61.4% of the respondents stated that the wall affected their family income; 26.1% stated that the wall affected the number of workers in their families [...] 60.9% stated that the wall had affected their shopping for basic supplies [...] 26.1% of the respondents stated that the wall has affected the location of their health services [...] 17% of the respondents stated that the wall has affected their ability to reach educational services, and 32% stated that the wall has affected the time it takes to reach learning centers.”

The Future of the City

In its recent history, Jerusalem has often been affected by radical transformation in its eastern half as a result of politically motivated actions. However, the territorial changes of the last few years represent a major disruption in the urban history of the city: they probably constitute the most radical urban transformation of the Holy City since 1967.

Over the next few decades, the combined effect of the wall and of Jewish urban expansion will presumably bring about the materialization of a long wished for Israeli dream, expressed for instance in the words of Prime Minister Rabin in 1995: “We envision and want [...] a united Jerusalem, which will include both Ma’ale Adumim and Givat Ze’ev – as the capital of Israel, under Israeli sovereignty [...] changes will include the addition of Gush Etzion, Efrat, Beitar and other communities, most of which are in the area east of what was the ‘Green Line’ prior to the Six-Day War.”

This dream is the creation of a Greater Jewish Jerusalem: the wall delineates its borders (and in doing so defines its territorial extension); and the city plans give substance to this new urban reality. From a territorial point of view, Greater Jerusalem is a predominantly Jewish metropolitan area with a 10 to 15 kilometer radius, in which the different Jewish areas of the city, regardless of their location on the eastern or the western side of the Green Line, are characterized by an almost complete spatial continuity. From a demographic point of view, not only is the Jewish majority in the whole Jerusalem area strengthened, but also a Jewish majority on the portion of the metropolitan area on the eastern side of the Green line will be guaranteed.

On the other hand, regarding the Arab metropolis, these transformations are potentially deadly. They constitute a kind of “spatial amputation” of the Arab city: East Jerusalem is wrenched from its historical relational space, the Palestinian suburbs and the entire West Bank too, and trapped within an alien Jewish space. Atrophy seems to be its probable destiny. Moreover, the implementation of the planned Jewish expansions will reduce Arab Jerusalem to three enclaves: a northern enclave, consisting of Beit Hanina and Shu‘fat); a central enclave, the largest, consisting of Sheikh Jarrah and Al-‘Isawiya to the north and by Sur Bahir and Umm Tuba at the
southern end; and a southern enclave, Beit Safafa. The Arab expansions allowed by the Jerusalem Master Plan do not seem to change this situation in any structural way: they will improve the housing situation in some Arab neighborhoods, but those will remain isolated islands within a mainly Jewish space, with which they can only have a relationship of dependence. As Rami Nasrallah argues, “while the symbolic importance of Jerusalem formed an obstacle to reaching a bilateral solution in the past, the new reality imposed by Israel in the form of the wall and the annexation of Greater Jerusalem, is a new physical barrier to the peaceful existence of two states.”

Figure 2. The “next Jerusalem.” Source: Author’s elaboration

“Greater Jerusalem”
Main Arab areas
Main Jewish areas

0 1 2 3 4 5 Km
Francesco Chiodelli is currently research fellow at Gran Sasso Science Institute, L’Aquila, Italy, and lecturer at the Faculty of Architecture of the Politecnico di Milano. His research focuses mainly on planning theory and urban conflicts, with particular attention to the spatial dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to questions of liberty, pluralism and tolerance in public and private spaces. His most recent monograph on Jerusalem is Gerusalemme contesa. Dimensioni urbane di un conflitto (Roma: Carocci, 2012).

Endnotes


3 As Ehud Olmert said during the political campaign for Jerusalem’s 1993 mayoral elections, the transformations of the urban fabric influence deeply any peace process: “Although I can’t make political decisions on the issue of Jerusalem – these are the responsibility of the national government – I can make things happen on the ground, like building along the old border and creating continuity of Jewish settlement in East Jerusalem. My decisions on these issues will influence the options available to the government for a political solution for Jerusalem,” quoted in a Foundation for Middle East Peace report “Jerusalem’s New Mayor Adopts Begin-Shamir Settlement Policies,” Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories 4 (1994), 3.


6 See B’Tselem, A Policy of Discrimination: Land Expropriation, Planning and Building (Jerusalem: B’Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, 1995), www.btselem.org/Download/, accessed March 18, 2012. It is worth noting that the reason given for a great deal of this expropriation has been the “public need” to build public housing. However, the Israeli-built public housing in East Jerusalem has always been solely intended for Jews and never for Arabs. See Eyal Weizman, Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation (London and New York: Verso, 2007).


9 The project to develop a local outline scheme for Jerusalem was begun in 2000 by former Mayor Ehud Olmert. The road to the approval of the plan, however, has been long and bumpy. Only in autumn 2010 was the final version of the plan submitted for public comment. To date the plan has yet to receive final approval; nonetheless, even without


13 On paper, the building capacity proposed by the master plan for Arabs is quantitatively considerable: more than 32,000 new units against about 38,000 existing units (in 2004). Nevertheless, it is quite likely that these proposals will remain just paper proposals because of the many legislative and procedural constraints concerning the realization of new buildings in Arab districts. See Francesco Chiodelli, “The Jerusalem Master Plan.”


18 In 2009 the construction of the wall around Ma’ale Adummim was stopped due to budgetary concerns, so less than 10 of 42 planned kilometers of the wall have been already built; however, “it appears that the state hasn’t given up its intention to build it. Indeed, the Israeli authorities continue to initiate steps that would allow the barrier to be completed, once the necessary budget is available.” (Bimkom and B’Tselem, The Hidden Agenda, 43).
The Next Jerusalem: Potential Futures of the Urban Fabric


26 Rami Nasrallah, “The Jerusalem Separation Wall.”

27 UN OCHA oPt, East Jerusalem. Key Humanitarian Concerns, 69.

28 Kobi Michael and Amnon Ramon, A Fence around Jerusalem: The Construction of the Security Fence around Jerusalem (Jerusalem: The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 2004), 77-78.


31 Address to the Knesset by Prime Minister Rabin, 5th October, 1995. Available at: www.mfa.gov.il.