

Jerusalem under Continuous Settler Colonialism (1967–Present)

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Abstract

Since the occupation and illegal annexation of East Jerusalem in 1967, Israel has been working on transforming Jerusalem from a multireligious, multicultural city into a “reunified” Jewish city under exclusive Israeli control and sovereignty. The different political, economic, legal and demographic control measures undertaken by Israel to fulfil its goal fall within its larger settler-colonial project, which is aimed at displacing the Palestinian population to expand Jewish domination over the city. This paper identifies the different logics underpinning Israel’s settler-colonial project in Jerusalem. It then discusses Israel’s master plans for Jerusalem, which represent a critical stage of settler colonialism. Finally, it examines the impact of Israel’s policies on the lives of Palestinians in Jerusalem.

This paper defines Israel’s policies in Jerusalem, as in the rest of Palestine, as part of a settler-colonial project, challenging the common depiction of the Israeli-Palestinian “conflict” as an ethnic or a religious one.¹ Settler colonialism is “a form of colonisation, marked by ongoing efforts to displace the local population and expropriate their land in order to establish or expand a society dominated by settlers”.² Israel’s settler-colonial project in Jerusalem is grounded in its vision of the city as a “unified”, “undivided” Jewish city. Its policies, since 1967, have thus been aimed at the Judaisation of Jerusalem, that is, ensuring and expanding Jewish control and monopoly over the land, its economy, politics, history and even terminology, while evicting and dispossessing Palestinians. This settler-colonial project is underpinned by different, highly interlinked logics.³

(I) The Logics Underpinning the Settler-Colonial Enterprise

“The Logic of Elimination”⁴

¹ Andy Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid: Palestine/ Israel and South Africa after 1994* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2017); John Collins, *Global Palestine* (London: Hurst and Company, 2012); Nadim Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury, “Settler-colonial Citizenship: Conceptualizing the Relationship between Israel and its Palestinian Citizens,” *Settler Colonial Studies* 5, no. 3 (March 2015).

² Clarno, *Neoliberal Apartheid*, 5.

³ The paper draws on Collins’s analysis (*Global Palestine*) of the different logics of settler colonialism in Palestine and applies them to the case study of Jerusalem.

⁴ Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism.”

The elimination of the indigenous society in order to replace it with a new settler society has been at the core of Israel's project. As Theodor Herzl wrote: "If I wish to substitute a new building for an old one, I must demolish before I construct."⁵ In Jerusalem, attempts to eliminate indigenous presence have taken different forms, not all of which involve physical acts or the use of force, as in 1948, when Arab villages in the western part of Jerusalem were emptied and razed. Israel has also sought to assimilate or incorporate Palestinians into the polity as the threatening others who should be under constant surveillance.⁶

However, the assimilation of Palestinians has been conditional on one important demographic principle — that Palestinians must be the minority to secure Jewish dominance. Therefore, since 1967, one of the goals of Israeli policies has been to ensure the growth of the Jewish population and "force Arab residents to make their homes elsewhere".⁷ To deal with the "demographic threat" posed by Palestinians, Israel designated them as "permanent residents", whose residency cards may be revoked at any time under the pretext of having committed a "breach of allegiance".⁸ Israel also imposed severe restrictions on family unification and enforced discriminatory urban and zoning policies,⁹ which confined Palestinian buildings to only 13 per cent¹⁰ of East Jerusalem.¹¹

"The Logic of Expansion"

Expansion and access to land have also been at the heart of Israel's settler-colonial project, which perceives its frontier "as a moving structure that facilitates territorial acquisition".¹² In 1967, Israel redrew the municipal boundaries of Jerusalem and annexed 70 km² of West Bank territory, including East Jerusalem (6.5 km²). In doing so, Israel ensured that the highly populated Palestinian neighbourhoods were excluded, annexing only the areas with small numbers of Palestinians.

The establishment of illegal settlements in Jerusalem has also facilitated territorial acquisition. For example, 35 per cent of the land in East Jerusalem has been seized for Israeli

⁵ Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism," 388.

⁶ Shir Hever, "Securing the Occupation in East Jerusalem: Divisions in Israeli Policy," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 75, (Autumn 2018): 104.

⁷ Amir Cheshin, Bill Hutman, and Avi Melamed, *Separate and Unequal: The Inside Story of Israeli Rule in East Jerusalem*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 31.

⁸ Munir Nuseibah, "Israel's Dangerous New Transfer Tactic in Jerusalem," *Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network*, 12 April 2016, <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/israels-dangerous-new-transfer-tactic-in-jerusalem/>.

⁹ "Aggressive Urbanism: Urban Planning and the Displacement of Palestinians within and from Occupied East Jerusalem," The Civic Coalition for Defending Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem, 2009, accessed 9 June 2019. <http://rete-eco.it/2012/attachments/article/38254/Aggressive%20Urbanism%20Report.pdf>.

¹⁰ "West Bank, East Jerusalem: Key humanitarian concerns," UNOCHA, accessed 14 June 2019, <https://www.ochaopt.org/content/west-bank-east-jerusalem-key-humanitarian-concerns>.

¹¹ It is this logic of elimination that is behind the potential plan by Israeli authorities to excise Palestinian neighbourhoods situated east of the wall (Kufr Aqab, Shoafat refugee camp/Anata, Sawahra and al-Walaja) with a view to preventing Jerusalem from becoming a minority-Jewish city by 2045, as a recent report by the International Crisis Group foretold. "Reversing Israel's Deepening Annexation of Occupied East Jerusalem", International Crisis Group (ICG), <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/israel-palestine/202-reversing-israels-deepening-annexation-occupied-east-jerusalem>.

¹² Collins, *Global Palestine*, 32.

settlements,¹³ thus raising the number of settlers in East Jerusalem (to 212,000),¹⁴ while also reshaping the geographical landscape by isolating East Jerusalem from the rest of the occupied West Bank. The building of the so-called separation wall is another demographic control measure taken by Israel to enforce the de facto political borders of Jerusalem, as it allows Israel to annex an additional 160 km² of occupied Palestinian territory while ensuring a Jewish majority in the city by separating more than 25 per cent of the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem from the city centre.¹⁵

“The logic of denial”

Another logic that has guided Israel’s settler-colonial enterprise is that of denying that there were indigenous people on the land before the establishment of Israel. The creation of myths has thus been central to the Zionist project — myths such as “A land without people for a people without land.” Worse, some Zionist movements stand reality on its head: for example, the Temple Mount Movement declares that one of its goals is to “liberate the Temple Mount from Arab [Islamic] occupation”, thus transforming the colonisers into the colonised and the indigenes.¹⁶

This logic of denial entails the manipulation of history and archaeology as powerful political tools in the recreation of Jerusalem as a Jewish city. Israel also undertook a renaming process in East Jerusalem to re-write history along the lines of Zionist dicta. For instance, Mamilla cemetery was renamed “Independence Park” and Talbiyeh neighbourhood was renamed “Komemiyut”.

“The Logic of Exceptionalism”

The moral force behind Israeli policies, especially in Jerusalem, has been the sense of Israeli Jewish exceptionalism, as exemplified in the claim that the Jews are “the chosen people”. These beliefs remain widespread today. For example, a poll by *Haaretz* in 2018 showed that 56 per cent of Jewish Israelis believe that the Jews are a chosen people, and three out of four right-wingers believe that Israel has a divine deed for its land and that their right to Israel stems from God. This belief in the exceptionalism of the state of Israel, coupled with the dehumanisation of Palestinians, has provided “ethical” or “legal” justifications for the dispossession of Palestinians and for the institutionalised discrimination against them.

(II) Israeli Master Plans for Jerusalem

¹³ “West Bank, East Jerusalem,” UNOCHA.

¹⁴ “West Bank, East Jerusalem,” UNOCHA.

¹⁵ “Displaced in their own city: The impact of Israeli policy in East Jerusalem on the Palestinian neighborhoods of the city beyond the separation barrier,” Ir Amim, 2015, accessed 14 June 2019, http://www.ir-amim.org.il/sites/default/files/akurim_ENG_for%20web_0.pdf.

¹⁶ “Objectives of the Temple Mount Faithful,” Temple Mount and Land of Israel Faithful Movement, accessed 2 June 2019. <http://templemountfaithful.org/objectives.php>.

To turn its vision of Jerusalem into reality, Israel has perfected a planning system¹⁷ that represents the “highest stage of settler colonialism.”¹⁸ This system combines national, district, local, and detailed outline plans and is advanced by different stakeholders — the state, non-government organisations (NGOs) and the private sector.

Advancing Settler Colonialism Through Urban Planning and Tourism

Israel’s “2000 Master Plan for Jerusalem”, also called “Jerusalem 2020”, is considered the eternal master plan. Published in August 2004, it is the first comprehensive spatial plan for both East and West Jerusalem since 1967. The plan, which views Jerusalem as one urban unit and as the capital of Israel, seeks to ensure a solid Jewish majority in the city. It uses urban planning as a geopolitical and strategic tool to conquer more land while constricting Palestinian urban development.

For instance, in the area of housing, while most (62.4 per cent) of the increase in Israeli Jewish housing construction will happen through expansion and the building of new settlements,¹⁹ more than half (55.7 per cent) of the increase in housing for Palestinians will happen through densification, ie building within the existing areas, despite the presence of serious hurdles to the vertical expansion of Palestinian buildings.²⁰ Israeli Jews are thus allowed more territorial expansion and control than Palestinians. Moreover, the plan allocates only 2,300 dunams²¹ for Palestinian construction compared to 9,500 dunams for Israeli Jews.²²

Another area that has received much attention from policymakers is the promotion of the tourism sector to build a Jewish international city. The Jerusalem 2020 master plan focuses on supporting international and urban tourism and on investing in tourism infrastructure. The development of the tourism sector is not only used as a tool to achieve economic growth and thus attract Jews to the city, it is also used as a political tool to develop an exclusively Jewish narrative of Jerusalem, thus re-creating it as a Jewish city. This explains why Israel has strict rules over who can serve as tour guides and the history tourists are told.

The Role of Israeli NGOs and Businessmen in Judaizing Jerusalem

Several Israeli NGOs and the private sector play an important role in Israel’s settler-colonial project, and their goals intersect with those of the state. For instance, Elad, a right-wing settler organisation, has been growing in political influence and financial power and has been playing a major role in the remaking of urban space. Elad works on settling Jews in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Silwan and runs tourist and archaeological sites there. Tourists are exposed to Elad’s selective Zionist

¹⁷ Yousef Jabarin, *Israeli planning in Jerusalem: Strategies for Control and Hegemony: A Treatise on Israel’s Attempts to Settle the Future of Jerusalem* (Ramallah: The Palestinian Forum for Israeli Studies (MADAR), 2016).

¹⁸ Raja Khalidi, borrowing from Lenin, in reference to his “Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism”, in: Arafah, Nur, Raja Khalidi and Maha Samman, “Roundtable: Israel’s Colonial Projection and Future Plans for Jerusalem,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 68, (Winter 2016), <https://www.palestine-studies.org/sites/default/files/jq-articles/Pages%20from%20JQ%2068%20-%20Arafah%2C%20Samman%2C%20Khalidi.pdf>.

¹⁹ Francesco Chiodelli, “The Jerusalem Master Plan: Planning into the Conflict,” *Jerusalem Quarterly* 51 (Autumn 2012).

²⁰ To be able to build, one needs a building permit from Israeli authorities. A number of requirements should be met before Israeli authorities issue building permits, including the presence of: an adequate road system; sewage networks; public buildings and institutions; and parking spaces. However, these conditions are the responsibility of the municipality, thus making it very hard for Palestinians to build new houses.

²¹ A unit of measurement for land area used in countries such as Israel equivalent to 1,000 square metres.

²² Rami Nasrallah, “Planning the Divide: Israel’s 2020 Master Plan and Its Impact on East Jerusalem,” in *Decolonizing Palestinian Political Economy: De-Development and Beyond*, ed. Mandy Turner and Omar Shweiki, (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014), 158-175.

narrative of history that disregards the centuries-old Arab presence there²³ and thus fits in with the state's project of re-creating Jerusalem as a Jewish city with a predominantly Jewish history and heritage. Furthermore, since Elad funds most of the excavations in the site, it has been able to use archaeology as a powerful tool to produce a solely Jewish history of the city, in line with its political interests.²⁴

Among Jewish entrepreneurs who have been playing a key role in Jerusalem is Kevin Bermeister, an Australian technology innovator and real estate investor. Bermeister developed the Jerusalem 5800 master plan, which provides a vision of Jerusalem as a “Global City”. Although the plan attempts to present itself as an apolitical plan, it works in line with the state's politico-demographic goals and expansionist logic. For example, the plan, whose project manager is a former member of Elad, has a full chapter on the “demographic problem” and strives to increase the share of the Jewish population in Jerusalem through increased migration to the city.²⁵

“Development” Plans for East Jerusalem: A Political Tool

Israel's plans to Judaize Jerusalem have been coupled with “development” plans for East Jerusalem. For instance, in 2015, a five-year plan was approved to invest US\$3.85 billion for the social and employment development of Palestinians in Jerusalem.²⁶ In 2018, US\$550 million was to be invested in East Jerusalem over a five-year period, especially in the education sector, to promote Hebrew education and urge Palestinian schools to use the Israeli curriculum.²⁷ The stated objective of these plans was to bridge the gap between the eastern and western parts of Jerusalem. However, in reality, these plans were a political tool based on the belief that the improvement of socioeconomic conditions would subsume Palestinians under the Israeli system and weaken their resistance.

(III) Palestinian Life under Israel's Settler-Colonial Regime

Israel's regime in Jerusalem has heavily affected Palestinians in the city at the political, institutional, economic and community levels.

Leadership, Political, and Institutional Vacuum

Two of the serious setbacks to the Palestinian resistance were the death of Palestinian leader Faisal Husseini in 2001 and Israel's closure of the Orient House, which had served as the unofficial headquarters of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in Jerusalem. These two events exacerbated the void left after the Oslo accords and the deferral of Jerusalem to final status negotiations. Since then, Palestinians in Jerusalem have endured a leadership vacuum, which has left

²³ Matt Broomfield, “Inside a settler-run tour of an East Jerusalem tourist trap,” *Electronic Intifada*, 1 February 2017, <https://electronicintifada.net/content/inside-settler-run-tour-east-jerusalem-tourist-trap/19391>.

²⁴ “Archaeology in the shadow of the conflict: The Mound of Ancient Jerusalem (City of David) in Silwan,” *Emek Shaveh*, accessed 10 June 2019, https://alt-arch.org/en/booklet_online/.

²⁵ Nir Hasson, “Right-wing Master Plan Envisages mega-Jerusalem in 2040 - With Invisible Palestinians,” *Haaretz*, 28 November 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium.MAGAZINE-rightist-plan-mega-jerusalem-in-2040-with-invisible-palestinians-1.5465629>.

²⁶ Moti Bassok, “Cabinet Approves Five-year Plan for Arab Development,” *Haaretz*, 31 December 2015, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-cabinet-approves-five-year-plan-for-arab-development-1.5384104>.

²⁷ Nir Hasson, “Israel Promises 'Revolution' for East Jerusalem Schools. Palestinians Say It's 'Brainwashing',” *Haaretz*, 29 August 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-critics-five-year-plan-for-e-j-lem-focuses-on-israelization-1.6429472>.

them with limited political power. The official entities that represent them²⁸ are either completely inactive or play a limited role and are weakened by internal conflicts and poor coordination among themselves. Moreover, while several plans have been developed for East Jerusalem since Oslo,²⁹ they have mostly remained ink on paper owing to the absence of executive arms and sufficient funding to implement them.³⁰ Palestinians' disgruntlement with the Palestinian Authority has therefore increased.

This political void has been exacerbated by an institutional vacuum. Since 2001, Israeli authorities have closed at least 32 Palestinian institutions and NGOs in Jerusalem.³¹ While a number of Palestinian organisations have been trying to fill the gap in the areas of education, youth, culture, and the Old City, these organisations are weakened by their dependency on donor funds, which have been declining, and by the increasing competition among themselves.

Economic Deterioration of East Jerusalem³²

Socioeconomic conditions in Jerusalem have been characterised by a debilitated business and trade sector, a stagnant investment environment,³³ de-industrialisation, the economy's loss of productive capacity, a restricted tourism sector, a depleted education sector, housing deficiency, discrimination in service provision and drug issues. Meanwhile, the poverty rates in the city have been high: in 2016, 75 per cent of Palestinians in Jerusalem were living below the poverty line, compared with a rate of 29 per cent for Jews in Jerusalem.³⁴

Identity Crisis Coupled with Community Resistance

Israel has sought to occupy not only land but also the mind since the physical elimination of the natives cannot be fully realised. To eradicate political consciousness in East Jerusalem, Israel has

²⁸ These entities include: the High Committee for Jerusalem Affairs (*al-Lajna al-'uliyā li-shu'un al-Quds*); the Palestine Liberation Organization's Department of Jerusalem Affairs (*Da'irat shu'un al-Quds*); the Ministry of Jerusalem Affairs (*Wizarat shu'un al-Quds*); the Palestinian Authority's Jerusalem Governorate (*Muhafadhat al-Quds*); the Popular National Conference for Jerusalem (*al-Mu'tamar al-watani al-sha'bi lil-Quds*); and the Jerusalem Municipality (*Amanat al-Quds*).

²⁹ These include: a strategic plan developed by Faisal Husseini and the Arab Studies Association in 1999; a plan by the Welfare Organization in 2002; a multisector review by the Arab Studies Association in 2003; a strategic multisector development plan in 2006; the *Strategic Multi-Sector Development Plan for East Jerusalem* published by the Jerusalem Unit at the President's Office in 2010; and the new *Strategic Sectorial Development Plan for Jerusalem* (SSDP) (2018–2022) launched in 2019 on the same day when another plan was published by the Palestine Economic Policy Research Institute (MAS) and the Negotiations Affairs Department, entitled: *Preserving East Jerusalem in the Context of the Two State Solution. Short- and Medium-Term Sectorial Development Agenda for East Jerusalem (SMSDA-EJ)* (2019–2023).

³⁰ Nur Arafah, "How Strategic is the Strategic Sectorial Development Plan for Jerusalem? A Review of the "Strategic Sectorial Development Plan for Jerusalem (2018–2022)," *Jerusalem Quarterly* 76, (Winter 2018).

³¹ The Civic Coalition for Palestinian Rights in Jerusalem, "Israel orders Jerusalem office of Palestinian Health Union closed for one year," 2015, accessed 3 November 2018, https://plateforme-palestine.org/IMG/doc/pr_-_ngo_closure_in_jerusalem_final_hwc.doc.

³² Nur Arafah, "Economic Collapse in East Jerusalem: Strategies for Recovery," *Al-Shabaka: The Palestinian Policy Network*, 30 November 2016, <https://al-shabaka.org/briefs/economic-collapse-east-jerusalem-strategies-recovery/>.

³³ Except for the investment boom that took place between 2008 and 2012.

³⁴ Michal Korach and Maya Choshen. *Jerusalem: Facts and Trends* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research, 2018), <http://en.jerusalem-institute.org.il/upload/jerusalem/%D7%A2%D7%9C%20%D7%A0%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%99%D7%A%20%D7%90%D7%A0%D7%92%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%AA%202018%20-%20%D7%93%D7%99%D7%92%D7%99%D7%98%D7%9C%20-%20%D7%A1%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%99%20.pdf>

been targeting the education sector. For example, since 2011, schools in East Jerusalem have been increasingly pressured to use textbooks censored by the Israeli government. More recently, the Israeli Education Ministry proposed giving more funding to Palestinian schools should they switch to the Israeli curriculum.³⁵

These efforts to control what Palestinian students are taught, coupled with the political and institutional void and socioeconomic deterioration, have led to an identity crisis in East Jerusalem. Nevertheless, Palestinian resistance remains strong, even if unorganised, as seen in July 2017, when Palestinian protests forced Israel to remove the metal detectors it had installed at the entrance of Al-Aqsa mosque.

About the Author

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³⁵ Or Kashti and Nir Hasson, “Israel’s Education Ministry to Pay East Jerusalem Schools to ‘Israelize’ Curriculum,” *Haaretz*, 29 January 2016, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-israel-to-pay-e-jlem-schools-to-israelize-curriculum-1.5397288>.