



Cities of Collision

by Philipp Misselwitz and Tim Rieniets

Jerusalem is an ancient cradle of human culture and one of the most important loci of three world religions. But as long as the city has existed, it has been the cause and breeding ground of conflicts, as well as the target and site of dispute and war. It is both victim and weapon. During this eventful history, the city has been destroyed several times, and its urban fabric exposed to ever-shifting ownership. Different cultures and ethnicities raise claims to the city as a symbolic cultural centre. In more recent history, the city has been the staging ground for 80 years of violent conflict between Jews and Palestinian Arabs, each nurturing a long-established emotional and cultural attachment to the city, each claiming the city to be its legitimate capital.

The intense conflict over territorial and demographic control remained the most crucial engine for urban change in the city throughout its spectacular development from a landlocked provincial town into a sprawling metropolis. During this period Jerusalem has become a laboratory for the production of extreme spatial configurations, an condition that could be described by the notion of 'conflict urbanism': A conceptual tool to read urban landscapes and social and cultural behavioral patterns not only in Jerusalem, but also in other, less extreme conditions elsewhere.

Conflict Urbanism has produced a city where modernisation and adaptation always intertwine with political agendas. It is a city that changes

its physical form, infrastructural systems and in an accelerated, at times almost daily fashion. Processes of urban change such as road planning, closures, construction of walls, fences, etc. that require year-long planning processes in Western cities can be implemented virtually over night – an uneasy, panicked ridden dynamism, that relies on the rapid implementation of facts on the ground. This permanent state of radical transformation has involved a dramatic, physical and demographic growth, as well as unprecedented decline and destruction.

In this essay we would like to describe some key aspects that characterize Conflict Urbanism, using Jerusalem's present condition as a filter.

Enclaves/ Exclaves

Almost forty years after the 1967 Six Day War and Jerusalem's military unification, the notion of the city as the "unified city" remains fragile rhetorical acrobatics. In reality, residents of the city do not experience the urban territory as a continuum, but conduct their everyday lives within almost completely separate socioeconomic cultural and spatial systems. Every aspect of the city is invested with ethnicity, and a complex system of codes (wrought in architecture, signage, dress, etc.) helps residents to navigate through perceived safe passages and protected environments. This extreme level of segregation has produced a spatial landscape akin to an "archipelago" of isolated "islands" (Eyal



Weizman) [1]. As soon as Israeli military victory was achieved, fighting over permanent control of the city continued by other means. A war of cement and stone radically changed the urban fabric, altering its contours from a continuous borderline (dividing Palestinian East Jerusalem from Jewish West Jerusalem between 1948 and 1967) to a complex matrix of exclaves (settlements for Jewish Israelis built in annexed East Jerusalem) and Palestinian enclaves, served by segregated road systems and surrounded by buffer zones. While all municipal resources were mobilized to make a re-division of the city impossible, East Jerusalem's Palestinians refused to assimilate into the Israeli system, nurturing their own parallel visions of Jerusalem as the religious centre and political capital of an independent Palestinian state.

The spatial logic of exclaves and enclaves did not begin with 1967, but date to the very beginnings of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A similar simultaneous logic of spatial containment and territorial control was typical for the planning of early c20 kibbutzim, often referred to as "homa umigdal" ("wall and tower"), alluding to their perimeter wall and watchtower which protected them against an often hostile surroundings.

In the post-1967 era, the idealistic settlements of the early Zionist era have been replaced by large-scale, state-controlled investment projects. Motivated pioneers eager to construct a Jewish homeland in Palestine have been replaced by suburban dwellers seeking convenient, American-style, suburban living. Most of the current 400,000 Jewish settlers have been lured across the Green Line by state-subsidized financial incentives rather than a Greater Israel ideology. Successive Israeli governments have "succeeded in transforming much of the settlement enterprise into a socio-economic and geographical process of metropolitan suburbanization" (David Newman).

As a result of intense settlement construction in East Jerusalem, Palestinian communities are forced within the spatial containment that characterizes the settlements: they have lost their agricultural land reserves and became enclaves within a space of Israeli hegemony—

remaining largely excluded them from Israeli political, social, and cultural life. "In the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the Israeli target is the place" (Sari Hanafi). "The weapons are not so much tanks, but bulldozers that have destroyed streets, houses, cars, and dunum after dunum (1 dunum equals 1,000 square meters) of olive groves. It is a war in an age of literal agora-phobia."

Discrimination is written into the city's master plan, which is based on the declared aim to facilitate a 70% Jewish majority in Jerusalem. Yet despite all obvious restrictions, Israel has not been able to avoid rapid Palestinian population growth, exceeding Israeli population growth by far, and posing a permanent demographic threat.

Endurance and resilience have been effective tactics for Palestinians. Prohibited from expanding beyond established built-up areas, villages and neighborhoods have become densely knit, congested, and uncontrollable. Families invest cash in cement and mortar, upgrades and small extensions, improving daily life gradually by adding modern conveniences. The conflict between modernization and military occupation, between stubbornly preserved traditions and new lifestyles, between growing communities and lack of public institutions forces Palestinian neighborhoods into "urbanization without urbanity" (Rassem Khamaisi).

Barriers/ Links

In Jerusalem, "[t]he quality, size, and nature of each road, one might say, is a fair indicator of whether Palestinians or Israelis move along it" (Shmuel Groag). A short drive along one of the convenient fast highways, with breathtaking desert views, links the settlements of East Jerusalem to western Jerusalem. Behind the banality of commuter traffic, however, lays the same settlement logic. Cutting right through hostile territory, bypassing Palestinian neighborhoods without distracting their Israeli drivers, commuter cars are the bullets of civilian warfare.



In contrast, roads in Palestinian neighborhoods and villages suffer from chronic underinvestment. Residents rely on old, evolved capillary road systems whose non-hierarchical nature require familiarity. The result is the parallel and superimposed existence of two almost completely separate systems. With such inequality in spending of municipal resources, urban space becomes treacherous and unreliable, fuelling biases and distrust. Indeed, "In Israel, the mundane is a strategic weapon." (Sharon Rotbard): a highway directly connecting settlements with Israeli territory is at the same time an invincible barrier for Palestinians who live next door, but have no access to it.

The most obvious and ruthless example of the dual presence of barrier and links in the same infrastructural system is the construction of more than 60 kilometers of Separation Wall in the Jerusalem area, which has radically altered physical and socioeconomic realities. Its absurdly meandering contours, combined with new roads and tunnels, fulfils the two (at times contradictory) principles of securing a "unified city" for a Jewish Israeli population while at the same time excluding many thousand Palestinian Jerusalemites.

Monuments/ No-Man's-Land

The Separation Wall has become a photogenic asset for a global media persistently in search of new iconic images to represent the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But the Separation Wall can be seen within a much larger historical continuum that denies Arab Palestinian cultural presence in the region, detectable in the works of European Christian photographers in the mid-19th century. Then Palestinian natives were "reduced to a backdrop upon which the biblical story could be substantiated, rather than recognized as a real place in the real world—attesting to real histories other than the Judeo-Christian narrative" (Issam Nassar). From this perspective, Issam Nassar reconsiders the spatial impact of the Separation Wall and "the effect it has on one's imagination of the Other. The issue of seeing, or, in our case, not seeing, the Other may not be of enormous

consequence in the short run, but...will have serious long term effects."

Fear and denial of the Other is equally present wherever Israeli and Palestinian urban fragments collide and produce a host of frontier spaces: territories of fear and anxiety, a hostile wilderness, excess space where garbage is dumped or fragments of ancient agricultural landscapes disintegrate.

Contradictory elements of decay are juxtaposed with areas orchestrated by Israeli designers, producing pockets of a highly-engineered and aesthetic (yet often equally deserted) landscape. The rural has been replaced by the suburban, the agricultural by the decorative, all symptomatic of a fight over identity, ownership, and aesthetic domination of the urban landscape.

Design is also strategically used to create a decorative veneer on spatial planning that effectively limits the expansion of Palestinian urban space. Vast tracks of Palestinian private land in East Jerusalem have been legally expropriated and designated as public green zones blocked from Palestinian construction, often later to be rezoned for the construction of Jewish settlements. A naive trust in professional (versus political) planning ethics or financial incentives lures Israeli planners to accept commissions for settlements, blurring agendas of good design and political planning.

Confrontation/ Exchange

In Jerusalem, xenophobia is heightened and space is divided into that of "us" and "them," resulting in islands of cultural containment and social exclusion. Wherever possible, the crossing of ethnic boundaries is avoided. But a complete physical disengagement is equally impossible. One of the most notorious sites of involuntary interaction is Qalandiya checkpoint, one of the largest checkpoints in the West Bank, which separates the Palestinian suburbs of Jerusalem and Ramallah. Drawing on Michel de Certeau's distinction between "strategy, which is the domain of the powerful who possess a place and perspective of their own (e.g. a watchtower) and tactics, which is the "art



of the weak," those who are limited by the givens of place and time (...) a degree of Palestinian power and Israeli weakness, a place of resilience, even defiance. The Palestinians defy the brutality of the checkpoint with their very presence—passive in appearance, pacifist in practice, self-controlled and civil, as they transverse a threatening, humiliating obstacle" (Tamar Berger).

Such patterns yield to a muddling of roles, unveiling the schizophrenic conditions of a city that is politically "unified" but ethnically divided. "Tell me, did you occupy East Jerusalem or did we occupy you?" a Palestinian cab driver from East Jerusalem asks his Israeli colleague from West Jerusalem, cynically alluding to his own Israeli identity card, which allows him to pragmatically exploit some advantages of access to the other side. "I go wherever I want. I eat in your restaurants, sleep with your women, and take your work. I think it was we who occupied you in 1967" (Yaakov Garb).

Palestinians often employ tactics that undermine and erode the otherwise clear-cut roles and patterns of occupier and occupied. In light of the recent housing crunch, Israeli newspapers report an increase in Palestinians considering buying apartments in Jewish settlements, which are generally a no-go zone for them. This trend could undermine Jewish ethnic hegemony in the settlements, as involuntary pioneers employ techniques of camouflage and assimilation: a potential "Trojan horse." [2]

Thus social and economic innovation is born from need, as one can explore most clearly at places such as Sudra checkpoint. While suffering from humiliation, endless delays and obstacles in arriving at school, work, and home, Palestinians "establish the collectively understood, but individually achieved, daily resistance of simply getting there." Nevertheless, "the unlikely symbols of the new steadfastness are not "national institutions," but rather the sub-proletariat Ford van drivers, whose semi-criminal bravado is summed up by ubiquitous Nike "No Fear" stickers emblazoned on their rear windshields" (Rema Hammami). These entrepreneurs are ambiguous figures, easing everyday

oppression but also benefiting from it.

Opportunism also fuels a fragile web of economic relationships between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem. The proximity of contrasting social cultures and resources, the asynchronism of Arab and Jewish religious holidays, as well as the salary gap between the two groups, has created economic possibilities for both. Despite the persistence of two parallel economic centers, transport, and education systems, approximately half of East Jerusalem's workforce migrates into West Jerusalem as day laborers, while cheaper goods and services in Palestinian communities lure Jewish Jerusalemites. Although asymmetric power relations dominate these economic exchanges, they effectively undermine the notion of closed borders and strict segregation.

Service economies in West Jerusalem accessible to Palestinian employees—health, transportation, or construction—are the only places where regular personal exchange takes place between Jews and Arabs. Despite a backdrop of fear and hatred, these casual and inconspicuous work encounters in West Jerusalem offer the opportunity to escape "the posturing and political declarations about a united/occupied Jerusalem...[E]veryday passions, kindnesses, mischief, and creativity weave us together" (Yaakov Garb).

Innovation/ Destruction

"Kulanu yehudim!" ("We're all Jews!"), Yaakov Garb quotes a Palestinian cab driver jokingly using the phrase Jews, sometimes use to express brotherly largesse, to allude to the absurdity of his situation, "ruling" Jerusalem's roads with a fleet of yellow cabs. The turn of phrase is symptomatic for the contradictory dynamics emerging between the two opposing groups, each seeking for, and protecting, its identity, but always in relation to the other.

The involuntary encounter with 'the other' present in slang is also registered in fashion, lifestyle or built environment, reflecting the struggle for identity and spatial belonging. Representations of cultural and political identity in architecture embody the persistent



tension and contradiction between assimilation and rejection. For Zionist architects, the creation of an independent and recognisable Israeli architecture led initially to the embracing of an international style, only to be replaced quickly by a fascination with the forms of Palestinian Arab villages: "[t]he Israeli desire to achieve the Arab's nativeness—which was seen as the ultimate expression of locality" (Nitzan-Shif-tan).

The aesthetic appropriation of the Palestinian vernacular into a new style of Israeli architecture was paralleled by the programmatic appropriation of a vast stock of buildings expropriated from Palestinian refugees. Especially the homes of middle class Palestinian Arabs were quickly absorbed and divided up to house newly arriving Jewish immigrants. But even some of the village architecture, left in ruins after the fighting of 1948. Many mosques were turned into museums, restaurants and cemeteries into parks. A particularly poignant example of is the home of the Baramki family. Between 1948 and 1967, the building lay along the Jordan-Israel no-man's-land dividing Jerusalem. After being confiscated, then serving as an Israeli military border post, it was later reopened as the Museum on the Seam, with the municipality refusing to acknowledge the Baramki family's ownership of the home. Today the Baramki house serves "as a component of a different architecture of knowledge production" (Thomas Abowd).

Israeli cultural references are also found on the Palestinian side. Israeli settlements for example are often viewed with ambivalence: symbols of the occupation, yet a window on modernity and Western life-style at the same time, admired for their formidable organization and high-quality construction. These cross-cultural influences do not necessarily travel a direct route from Israel to Palestine or visa versa, however. Diaspora links in both communities play a role in these cultural importations. In fact, this back-door route leads to the unintended approximation of both groups in the references of international capitalism. Cultural and political elites returning to Palestine during

the Oslo period (1994–2000) introduced economic power and entrepreneurship, as well as new urban and architectonic models. Palestinian "gated communities" for new elites resemble their Israeli counterparts, and even apply settlement security strategies.

As such, beyond the visible processes of negation, a thin and unconscious cultural exchange is underway. The result is an unintentional urban productivity – a common culture located between the extremes of total rejection, on one hand, and subtle, unconscious hybridity, on the other.

However, these quiet tones rendered in architecture, lifestyle, or language are mostly drowned out by the ongoing noise of the intense conflict, which has produced a city that alters its physical form in an accelerated fashion. Urban change (Israeli road planning, spatial closures, construction of walls, fences, but also private Palestinian homes) that would normally require lengthy planning processes are implemented virtually over night—an uneasy, sometimes panicked dynamism. It is "a policy of scorched earth, rather than planning..." (Meron Benvenisti). Nationalist interest determines the city's development: political planning by the Israeli municipality but also the tactical responses of the city's Palestinian inhabitants.

Epilog

From a Central European perspective, Jerusalem is frequently considered an uncanny reminder of an age long past: a conflict of colonial and terrorist violence that blurs distinctions between military and civilian, public welfare, and ethnic discrimination. Western European capitalist democracy is still seen as a universal concept dismissing both social revolutions and military conflict to the periphery of the developing world. It seemed only natural then, to export this apparent success story to the Middle East, Asia, Africa, etc., in the role of morally superior arbiter engaged in political and moral mediation. From this skewed perspective, the roots of aggression such as New York's September 11th attacks, or the subsequent attacks in Madrid or London, could only be found in



the jealousy, religious fanaticism, and barbarism that characterizes an “uncivilized” periphery. The apparently unexpected return of such violence to the “First World” city was shocking, and only seemed to reaffirm fears that “out there” barbarism still prevailed—now in the form of militant Islamic terrorism. In this light, Jerusalem’s violent urban context appears as a dangerous disease from which we must guard and protect ourselves.

Thus, the drastic measures adopted in the “War on Terror” have been justified as a means of protecting Europe and North America against outside threats. But in reality, such threats have been fused with the fears derived from internal conflicts resulting from long-term structural problems of the European and North American city: the same preventative security measures and rhetoric are readily used to “deal” with failed integration of migrant communities or increasing social polarizations. Lines between external and internal pressures are blurred.

What is changing European and American cities is not destruction by means of suicide bombings but the growing fear of “the other” and the manner in which these suspicions are manifested in urban space. Government and private measures against the pervading fear of terror threats (be they real or imagined) have challenge the very freedom of the individual that was once heralded a triumph of the Western system. Urban diversity itself is perceived as a potential threat. “The worry here is that attempts will be made by governments (and the security-military-industrial complexes which have burgeoned since the advent of the “war on terror”) to re-engineer cities so that their porous, open, and intrinsically fluid spaces and systems become little more than an endless series of securitized passage points” (Stephen Graham).

As Western cities become cultural, socio-economic and political microcosms of a globalized and diversified world, our mental map of the city should be redrawn, and the position of cities like Jerusalem vis-à-vis the European city revised. Geographic distance is no longer

relevant. What seemed at the periphery of Central Europe is now in fact closer than ever. A change of perspective not only allows us to better understand the city and the dynamics through which conflict alters urban fabric, but also allows us to better understand the development—current and predicted—of the relation of conflict and the Western metropolis. Jerusalem is a laboratory for a conflict urbanism whose symptoms are already all too familiar.

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Grenzgeografien – geographies of conflict is the first platform for cooperation between Israeli, Palestinian and international participants with the aim to investigate and analyze the spatial reality of the middle eastern conflict. Activities and events are jointly organized by a trilateral network of partners that includes the International Peace and Cooperation Centre IPCC (East Jerusalem), the Faculty of Architecture of the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design Jerusalem, the University of the Arts Berlin and, since November 2004, the Eidgenössische Technische Hochschule ETH Zürich.

International workshops were conducted, that brought together Israeli, Palestinian, German and Swiss students of architecture. The unique cross cultural composition of the teams allowed them to break everyday rules of urban segregation and to bend stereotypical ethnic roles, thus gaining a new qualitative access to the city—access that has long been lost to Jerusalem’s residents, including its professional and academic communities.

The results of these workshops encouraged us to open the project to a wider community of local and international experts in the fields of architecture, urban and cultural studies participated in the conference “Cities of Collision” held at the Van Leer Institute Jerusalem in November 2004.

The contributions of experts and students resulted in the book ‘City of Collision – Jerusalem and the principles of Conflict Urbanism’, (Birkhäuser Publishers for Architecture, Basel, 2006).

[1] all quotes are referring to the essays published in:

Philipp Misselwitz and Tim Rieniets (editors), ‘City of Collision – Jerusalem and the Principles of Conflict Urbanism’, Birkhäuser Publisher for Architecture, Basel, 2006

[2] Tom Segev, “Conceding Har Homa,” 1 February 2006 www.haaretz.com