The Routledge Handbook on Informal Urbanization

Edited by Roberto Rocco and Jan van Ballegooijen

THE ROUTLEDGE HANDBOOK ON INFORMAL URBANIZATION

The Routledge Handbook on Informal Urbanization investigates the mutual relationship between the struggle for political inclusion and processes of informal urbanization in different socio-political and cultural settings.

It seeks a middle ground between two opposing perspectives on the political meaning of urban informality. The first, the 'emancipatory perspective', frames urban informality as a practice that fosters autonomy, entrepreneurship and social mobility. The other perspective, more critical, sees informality predominantly as a result of political exclusion, inequality, and poverty. Do we see urban informality as a fertile breeding ground for bottom-up democracy and more political participation? Or is urban informality indeed merely the result of a democratic deficit caused by governing autocratic elites and ineffective bureaucracies?

This book displays a wide variety of political practices and narratives around these positions based on narratives conceived upon specific case cities. It investigates how processes of urbanization are politicized in countries in the Global South and in transition economies.

The handbook explores 24 cities in the Global South, as well as examples from Eastern Europe, and East Asia, with contributions written by a global group of scholars familiar with the cases (often local scholars working in the cities analyzed) who offer unique insight on how informal urbanization can be interpreted in different contexts. These contributions engage the extreme urban environments under scrutiny which are likely to be the new laboratories of 21st-century democracy. It is vital reading for scholars, practitioners, and activists engaged in informal urbanization.

Roberto Rocco is a senior Assistant Professor in the Department of Urbanism of the Delft University of Technology. He has got a degree in Architecture and Planning from the University of São Paulo and a post-graduate MSc degree in Spatial Planning from the same university. He worked as an independent researcher for NGOs in Brazil before being awarded a PhD by TU Delft in 2008, with a thesis on 'new urban geographies of globalization'. He has published on issues of governance, sustainability, and spatial justice and currently focuses on challenges of urbanization in the Global South and the implementation and governance of the New Urban Agenda.

Jan van Ballegooijen is an independent researcher and practicing architect. He received an MSc degree at Delft University of Technology in 2011, with a project focusing on the relationships between democratization and urban informality in São Paulo's periphery. At TU Delft, he has also worked as a research assistant for the chair 'Design as Politics', investigating the tensions between politics and urban design. Besides his current work as an independent researcher, he is also a practicing architect in the Netherlands and Belgium. He is currently expanding his research on the relationship between urban informality and democracy.
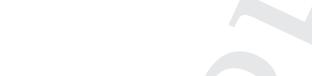
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To our families, who supported us in this endeavor.

To the citizens toiling to build our cities and our democracies.

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CONTRIBUTORS

Adrián Lerner is a PhD candidate at Yale University, Department of History, USA.

Alessandro Frigerio is a researcher and former PhD candidate at MSLab, Department of Architecture and Urban Studies, Politecnico di Milano, Italy.

Alex Ferreira Magalhães is Professor of Urban and Environmental Law at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), coordinator of the Brazilian Urban Law Transformation Studies Laboratory (LEDUB), Brazil.

Alexandre Apsan Frediani is Senior Lecturer at the Development Planning Unit, Faculty of the Built Environment The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, University College London, UK.

Alina Delgado is Professor and researcher at Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Universidad de Guayaquil, Ecuador, and post-doctoral researcher at the Department of Architecture, KU Leuven, Belgium.

Ananda Martins Carvalho is Graduated in Psychology and a Master Student in Architecture at Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Brazil.

Angela Sherwood is a PhD candidate at Queen Mary University of London, UK.

Anna Konotchick is programme manager at the American Red Cross Canaan project, USA.

Baraka Mwau is urban planning and research consultant in Nairobi, Kenya.

Beatrice De Carli is a lecturer at the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield, UK.

Beatriz Rufino is Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil.

Benedito Roberto Barbosa is a member of Central dos Movimentos Populares and Universidade Federal do ABC, Brazil.

Boram Kim, also known as Boram Kimhur, is co-founder of the Architects for Society and People and is a PhD candidate at OTB (Research for the Built Environment), Delft University of Technology, the Netherlands.

Bruno De Meulder is Professor at the Department of Architecture, KU Leuven, Belgium,

Budoor Bukhari is Urban Design and Development Practitioner at LEED AP BD+C, Estidama PQP, Associate Member of the RTPI.

Camillo Boano is Professor of Urban Design and Critical Theory, The Bartlett Development Planning Unit, Faculty of the Built Environment, UCL, London, UK.

Carolina Spyer Vieira Assad is a Master Student in Law at UFMG, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Catalina Ortiz is Senior Lecturer in Building and Urban Design in Development, Development Planning Unit, Faculty of the Built Environment, UCL, London, UK.

Clarissa Sampaio Freitas is Assistant Professor at Universidade Federal do Ceará, Fortaleza, Brazil.

Costanza La Mantia is Honorary Research Fellow and Lecturer at the School of Architecture and Planning, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

Davison Muchadenyika is a researcher at the Institute for Social Development, University of the Western Cape, South Africa.

Débora Sanches is a Lecturer at Centro Universitário Belas Artes de São Paulo, Brazil.

Dorina Pojani is Senior Lecturer in Urban Planning, School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

Elham Bahman Teymouri is a Lecturer at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Francesco Chiodelli is Associate Professor in urban planning at the Gran Sasso Science Institute (GSSI), Social Sciences Research Ares, and vice-coordinator of the international PhD programme in Urban Studies and Regional Sciences, L'Aquila, Italy.

Francisco de Assis Comarú is a Lecturer at Centro de Engenharia, Modelagem e Ciências Sociais Aplicadas, Universidade Federal do ABC, Santo André, Brazil.

Fúlvio Alvarenga Sampaio is a Law student at UFMG, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Germana Câmara is a Lecturer and Researcher at Centro Universitário Christus, Fortaleza, Brazil.

Hogeun Park is a PhD candidate, Urban and Regional Planning, Michigan State University, East Lansing, USA.

Jaehyeon Park is a PhD candidate at the Department of Urban Planning, University of California, Los Angeles, USA.

Jeroen Stevens is a PhD candidate at OSA, the Research Group on Urbanism & Architecture, Department of Architecture, KU Leuven, Belgium.

Josefine Fokdal is Senior Researcher at the University of Stuttgart, Department of International Urbanism, Stuttgart, Germany.

Julia Dinardi Alves Pinto is a Law student at UFMG, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Juliano dos Santos Calixto is Master in Law and Doctoral Researcher at UFMG, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Kritika Sha has a Masters in Urbanism from TU Delft, and is Deputy Manager, I-WIN Advisory Services Limited, Calcutta, India.

Larissa Pirchiner de Oliveira Vieira is a lawyer at Margarida Alves Association, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Laura Smits is an urban planner at the Municipality of Amsterdam, and Shelter Technical Advisor UN-Habitat, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

Lucas Nasser Marques de Souza is a graduate in Law and Social Sciences at UFMG, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Marcos Bernardes Rosa is Law student at UFMG, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Maria Tereza Fonseca Dias is Associate Professor at the Department of Public Law, Federal University of Minas Gerais, UFMG, Researcher at the National Research Council (CNPq) and member of Cidade e Alteridade Research Project, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.

Matteo Stiglich is a PhD candidate at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, New York, USA.

Michael Leaf is Associate Professor, School of Community and Regional Planning, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

Miriam Maina is a PhD candidate at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa.

Mohsen Mohammadzadeh is a Lecturer at the University of Auckland, New Zealand.

Molin K. Chakamba is a member of Dialogue on Shelter, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Nabil Nazha is a PhD candidate and Visiting Assistant Professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, USA.

Noheir Elgendy is Assistant Professor in Architecture and Urbanism, Department of Architecture, Cairo University, Egypt.

Olga Peek is a Teaching Assistant at the Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism, University of Guayaquil, and a PhD candidate at the Department of Architecture, KU Leuven, Belgium.

Patience Mguni is a post-doctoral researcher at the University of Wageningen, the Netherlands, and a research assistant at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Peter Herrle is Prof. Dr. em., head of the Habitat Unit at the TU Berlin, Germany.

Ricardo de Sousa Moretti is a Lecturer at Centro de Engenharia, Modelagem e Ciências Sociais Aplicadas, Universidade Federal do ABC, Santo André, Brazil.

Rohan Varma is a PhD candidate at the Delft University of Technology, Department of Architecture, Delft, the Netherlands.

Sonia Roitman is Senior Lecturer at School of Earth and Environmental Sciences, The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.

Stephanie Geertman is senior researcher at the ILS – Research Institute for Regional and Urban Development, Dortmund, Germany.

Viviana d'Auria is Assistant Professor in International Urbanism, Department of Architecture, KU Leuven, andd Assistant Professor in International Urbanism at the Department of Architecture, Faculty of Engineering, KU Leuven, Belgium.

Vrushti Mawani is a PhD candidate, School of Community and Regional Planning, University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada.

Yelda Kızıldağ Özdemirli is a Research Fellow in Selcuk University, Konya, Turkey.

Editors

Roberto Rocco is a senior Assistant Professor at the Department of Urbanism of the Delft University of Technology. He has got a degree in Architecture and Planning from the University of São Paulo and a post-graduate MSc degree in Spatial Planning from the same university. He worked as an independent researcher for NGOs in Brazil before being awarded a PhD by TU Delft in 2008, with a thesis on 'new urban geographies of globalization'. He has published on issues of governance, sustainability, and spatial justice and currently focuses on challenges of urbanization in the Global South and the implementation and governance of the New Urban Agenda.

Jan van Ballegooijen is an independent researcher working as a consultant, architect, and teacher. He received an MSc degree at Delft University of Technology in 2011, with a project focusing on the relationships between democratization and urban informality in São Paulo's periphery. At TU Delft, he has also worked as a research assistant for the chair 'Design as Politics', investigating the tensions between politics and urban design. Besides his current work as an independent researcher, he is also a practicing architect in the Netherlands and Belgium. He is currently expanding his research on the relationship between urban informality and democracy.

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JERUSALEM

The Multifaceted Politics of Informality in Jerusalem at the Time of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Francesco Chiodelli

Introduction: The Politicization of Informality in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

Informality has, always and everywhere, a political dimension. This is not only due to the 'definitional' power of the State: that is, the simple but crucial fact that the political sphere, through urban planning and building regulations, has the power to determine "what is informal and what is not, and to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear" (Roy, 2005, p. 149). There are several other notable aspects in the political dimension of informality. For instance, formal institutions can pursue their (legitimate and, sometimes, also illegitimate) aims by using tolerance or intolerance of the informal production of space as a strategy (Chiodelli & Tzfadia, 2016).

The political dimension of informality is extremely evident in Israel/Palestine: in a highly politicized context, informality is also mobilized in the struggle to control a contested territory. Several authors have investigated this specific – and often complex and sophisticated – use of informality as a political tool: see for instance Tzfadia (2013) on the case of the Israeli outposts in the West Bank, and Yiftachel (2009a, 2009b) on the so-called "gray spaces" in the Negev desert.

The case of Jerusalem, which I shall analyze in this chapter, adds another tile to this mosaic. In particular, it sheds light on the structural complexity and ambivalence of housing informality in the Holy City: in a single municipality, there coexist different kinds of informality, which have emerged for different reasons, and are exploited by different actors for different purposes.

To this end, this chapter is divided into five main sections. In the first, an introduction to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over Jerusalem is provided. In the second, three main types of urban informality in Jerusalem are identified, while in the third section the main causes of each type are investigated. The subsequent section focuses on the different meanings, reasons, and rationales of each kind of informality, while the last section concludes.

What is Illegal in Jerusalem

The politics of informality in Jerusalem is deeply rooted in the contested status of the Holy City. For this reason, a preliminary overview of some key items of knowledge on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over the city is necessary before the specific issue of urban informality is addressed.

From an international legal viewpoint, Jerusalem is divided into two parts: West Jerusalem and East Jerusalem (see Figure 13.1).

West Jerusalem / East Jerusalem

Kfar Aqab

Barrier's route

Shu'fat
refugee camp

Green Line

Old City

Israel

Walaja

West Bank
enclosures
by the Barrier

West Bank

0   1 km   5 km

Figure 13.1 West and East Jerusalem, and the route of the Barrier in the area.
Source: map by author.

'West Jerusalem' refers to the part of the city located west of the Green Line, which is recognized by the international community as proper Israeli territory. The Green Line denotes the border established after the 1948–49 Arab-Israeli War, and in effect until the 1967 Six-Day War, to separate Israel proper from its Arab neighbors. The population living in West Jerusalem today is, as it was in the aftermath of the 1949 ceasefire, almost entirely Jewish.

'East Jerusalem' refers to the municipal area east of the Green Line, occupied by Israel during the Six-Day War. The Old City – that is, the walled historical city, which comprises both the Western Wall (the main holy place for Jews) and the al-Aqsa Mosque (one of the holiest places for Muslims) – is located in that area. From an international viewpoint, East Jerusalem is just one of the territories occupied by Israel in 1967, as is the rest of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. In contrast, from an Israeli viewpoint, East Jerusalem is an integral part of the Jewish state and, as a consequence, is subject to the ordinary Israeli civic administration. In fact, Israel does not recognize the validity of the division between West Jerusalem and East Jerusalem and, after the Six-Day War, it formalized by law their unification into a single municipal entity, which is considered to be the capital of Israel. However, no country recognizes Israeli sovereignty over East Jerusalem: several UN Security Council resolutions have censured the Israeli annexation, and Palestinians claim East Jerusalem as the capital of a future Palestinian state.

It is precisely because of this contested status of the city that urban informality has emerged as one of the main elements in the battle to control Jerusalem. Since the aftermath of the 1967 War, the Israeli authorities have sought to secure their physical control over the entire city, in particular through a series of urban policies and projects. They have created new urban conditions (e.g. new Jewish neighborhoods, new public infrastructures, new municipal boundaries), which are changing the political outcome of the conflict over Jerusalem in Israel's favor: in fact, whoever holds the territory is able to shape the diplomatic destiny of the Holy City. As I shall argue, one result of this process has been the dramatic spread of urban informality into the Palestinian neighborhoods of the city. Note that, at the time of the Israeli occupation, East Jerusalem was exclusively inhabited by Palestinians (Romann & Weingrod, 1991). Today, after a massive Jewish residential settlement promoted by the Israeli authorities, about 40% of the population of East Jerusalem is composed of Jewish Israelis (Choshen & Korach, 2014).

As is evident from these introductory notes on the geopolitics of the conflict in Jerusalem, the term 'illegality' can apply to very different phenomena depending on the standpoint from which the Israeli–Palestinian question is approached. From the point of view of many international agencies and organizations (as well as the Palestinians), all the Israeli settlements built on the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 are illegal, including the Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem (Barak-Erez, 2006; International Court of Justice, 2004). In contrast, from the Israeli point of view, since the entire city is under Israeli sovereignty, everything built in breach of the Israeli rules is illegal, both in West and East Jerusalem. In this chapter, I will use the term 'illegality' according to the Israeli interpretation, given that Israeli laws and regulations are de facto enforced also in the eastern part of the city. Note also that I prefer to use the term 'illegality' rather than 'informality', because it emphasizes the close nexus between the phenomena that I shall analyze and the urban laws and policies shaping the city.

In order to complete this introductory overview, the urban transformations linked to the construction of the recently built "security barrier" must be added to the picture. In 2002 the Israeli authorities started the construction of a separation barrier between Israel and the West Bank, the official reason being to combat terrorism. The Barrier (or 'Wall', as it is sometimes called) conforms with the Green Line (that is, with the 'international' borders between Israel and the Palestinian territories) for a mere 15% of its length. For the rest of its length, it penetrates deeply into the West Bank, in order to include on the Israeli side as many of the Jewish settlements in the Palestinian territories as possible.

In the Jerusalem area, the Barrier does not run only east of the Green Line; almost everywhere, it also runs east of the municipal boundary. However, at certain points, the Barrier suddenly dips sharply back into the municipal perimeter: it thus amputates some Palestinian areas in East Jerusalem (Kafr Aqab to the north, the Shu'fat refugee camp to the east, and Walaja to the south) that, even if they lie within the city borders, have been left on the Palestinian side of the Barrier (Figure 13.1). The future of these areas – and of the tens of thousands of Palestinian Jerusalemites living there[1] – is uncertain. On paper, they still belong to Jerusalem, because they are situated within the administrative boundaries of the city. However, in real terms, a nine-meter-high concrete barrier has physically cut these areas off from Jerusalem and from any control and intervention by the municipal administration. As a consequence, de facto, living in them is equivalent to living in the West Bank itself, and no longer living in the Holy City, whose services, jobs, and opportunities are very difficult to access from those neighborhoods (Kimhi, 2006; Nasrallah, 2007).

Kinds of Illegal Housing in Jerusalem

Types of Illegal Housing

Generally speaking, one can identify three main kinds of illegal housing in Jerusalem. The first refers to Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem lying on the Israeli (western) side of the Barrier. The second refers to Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem lying on the West Bank (eastern) side of the Wall (the above-mentioned quarters of Kafr Aqab, the Shu'fat refugee camp, and Walaja) (see Figure 13.1). The third refers to Jewish neighborhoods in both East and West Jerusalem. As I shall argue, illegal housing in these various areas differs in both qualitative and quantitative terms, as well as from the point of view of its causes and its political meanings.

The first kind of illegality concerns Palestinian areas in East Jerusalem lying on the Israeli side of the Barrier, which represent the majority of Palestinian neighborhoods in Jerusalem. Depending on the source, illegal housing units in these areas are estimated to account for around 30–40% of the overall Palestinian housing stock (UN OCHA OPT, 2009, 2011a). In the majority of cases, these illegal housing units are not precarious shacks built with makeshift materials, as in many informal settlements in countries of the so-called Global South. Rather, they are an extension of the consolidated city: they have been built with cement and bricks and, often, they cannot be distinguished from the formal city at first glance. Illegal housing in these Palestinian neighborhoods usually does not comprise brand-new buildings, but rather takes the form of unauthorized additional stories and enlargements in the existing housing stock (Figure 13.2).

The second kind of illegality again refers to Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem, but this time to areas on the eastern side of the Wall.[2] Here, the type of illegal building changes completely with respect to the previous case. It is no longer composed of small enlargements or additional floors, but mainly of brand-new buildings. In many cases, these are tall residential buildings with up to 10–15 stories (Figure 13.2). Viewed from the outside, they are similar to residential buildings constructed in the West Bank towns nearby. There are no estimates of the number of residential units illegally built in these quarters; however, they probably represent the bulk of the building stock in these neighborhoods, accounting for several thousands of dwellings, most of them realized after the construction of the Wall (Chiodelli, 2017).

The third kind of illegal housing refers to Jewish neighborhoods in both East and West Jerusalem. In this case, infractions are usually minor: building violations relate mainly to portions of a building or secondary facilities (such as balconies, verandas or garages); they rarely concern extra stories or a brand-new building. In this case, too, there are no precise estimates of the magnitude of the phenomenon, but the number of these infractions is visibly very high. To gain an idea of their order of magnitude, consider that, between 2006 and 2008, about 10,000 violations were recorded by the public authorities in the Jewish neighborhoods – compared with around 3,000 violations in the Palestinian ones (Schaeffer, 2011).

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Figure 13.2 Illegal housing in East Jerusalem. Upper: a view of the Arab neighborhood of Silwan, East Jerusalem. The additions of illegal extra stories and enlargements are clearly recognizable. Lower: (illegal) buildings in Shu'fat refugee camp, East Jerusalem.
Source: photographs by Davide Locatelli (2016).

Measures Against Illegal Housing

In order to tackle the spread of illegal housing in Jerusalem, the main action of the Israeli authorities has been repression. The public authorities have always been very reluctant to implement policies

of regularization, officially due to the historical and environmental sensitiveness of the context; instead, they have been strongly committed to the demolition of illegal buildings. However, repressive measures against illegal housing are enforced differently according to the kind of illegality in question.

The demolition of illegal buildings applies exclusively to Palestinian housing units in areas on the Israeli side of the Barrier. More than 2,000 illegal housing units have been demolished by the Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem (UN OCHA OPT, 2009, p. 2). In recent years, the pace of demolitions has increased: in the 15 years between 2000 and 2015, more than 1,000 Palestinian buildings were destroyed (B'Tselem, 2015). Note that, on paper, every detection of a building transgression must lead either to regularization or to demolition. However, the reality is more complex and, in many cases, the detection of a major building infraction does not lead to the destruction of the building: sometimes it leads to the issue of a demolition order that is not executed, sometimes to only a fine, sometimes to nothing. For instance, in 2009 about 1,500 demolition orders against Palestinian illegal housing units were still awaiting execution (Ir Amim, 2009).

These numbers tell us that the public authorities are strongly committed to tackling urban illegality in Palestinian neighborhoods on the Israeli side of the Barrier, but the illegal housing units annually destroyed represent only a minority (around 10%) of the units illegally built during the same year (Ir Amim, 2009). This is why, whatever one's opinion on the practice of housing demolition may be, it can be agreed that this repressive approach to illegality does not resolve the issue, nor is it an instrument of deterrence, since illegal housing trends have proved to be quite steady over the years and are not influenced by the pace of demolitions (Ir Amim, 2009).

Contrary to the previous case, in the case of Palestinian neighborhoods on the eastern side of the Barrier illegal buildings are usually not demolished. In fact, the Wall has created de facto a dual planning regime in Jerusalem. The Israeli authorities enforce planning and building rules strictly only in the Palestinian quarters on the western side of the Wall. By contrast, they are entirely unconcerned about building and planning violations in the Palestinian neighborhoods isolated by the Barrier, even if they are still officially part of the city. For all practical purposes, Israel considers those areas to be part of the West Bank. As a consequence, in those neighborhoods anyone can start construction work without applying to the Israeli authorities for a building permit or abiding by the Jerusalem planning and building rules. This is why, in recent years, illegal multi-storey residential buildings have started to mushroom in those neighborhoods (Charney & Rosen, 2014). Note that, since these areas are on paper still under Israeli sovereignty, the Palestinian National Authority is not allowed to operate in them, for instance in order to implement spatial plans or to deal with increasing urban and social problems.

As in the case of Palestinian neighborhoods on the eastern side of the Barrier, so in that of Jewish quarters housing illegality is not usually punished by demolition. However, in this case the reason is different: Israeli authorities have always considered violations in Jewish sectors to be of minor importance, and they have preferred to concentrate all their energies on the demolition of Palestinian illegal buildings (Chiodelli, 2012; Marom, 2006; Schaeffer, 2011). A sort of implicit impunity reigns in the Jewish areas: everyone in Jerusalem knows that unauthorized buildings are not demolished in the Jewish neighborhoods, and that it suffices to pay a small fine in order to regularize building transgressions (Margalit, 2006, p. 24).

The Municipality justifies its repressive focus on the Palestinian sectors by stating that the most serious building infringements are registered in the Palestinian quarters. However, even if this is true, the fact remains that Jews and Palestinians in Jerusalem are not equal before the (building) law. This is demonstrated by the analysis of data on law enforcement: moving from the detection of the infringement to the initiation of proceedings against the lawbreaker, then to the demolition order issue and finally to its execution, the number of Jewish owners involved increasingly diminishes, whereas the number of Palestinians involved increases rapidly (Marom, 2006). For instance, although 80% of violations in 2004 took place in the Jewish neighborhoods, only 10% of demolitions took place in those areas, while the rest affected Palestinian buildings (see Table 13.1).

Table 13.1. Measures against housing illegality, 2004.

	Jewish neighborhoods		Palestinian neighborhoods		Jerusalem
Infringements detected	5,583	(80%)	1,386	(20%)	6,969
Proceedings initiated against lawbreakers	980	(56%)	780	(44%)	1,760
Demolition orders issued	50	(19%)	216	(81%)	266
Demolitions executed	13	(10%)	114	(90%)	127

Source: author's calculations based on Margalit (2006, p. 28).

The Causes of Illegal Housing in Jerusalem

As argued in the previous sections, illegal housing is a widespread phenomenon in Jerusalem that characterizes the entire urban fabric. But what are its main causes?

There are many intertwined factors contributing to the spread of illegal building in Jerusalem. Some of them are linked to cultural reasons, which I shall not investigate here. Then, with reference to the Jewish sectors, a widespread sense of impunity related to poor enforcement of the building law must be added. However, this last is not the case in Palestinian neighborhoods on the western side of the Wall, where the Israeli authorities are strongly committed to combating illegal building practices. So why is illegality so common in these Palestinian sectors?

According to the Municipality (Jerusalem Municipality, 2004), political and economic factors are the main drivers of Palestinian illegality: Palestinian Jerusalemites would prefer to build outside the law, partly because it is a way to save money (avoiding fees and taxes related to building legally) and partly as a political act against the Israeli occupation (Weiner, 2003). Whilst this is certainly true for a portion of Palestinian illegal housing, however, the main cause seems to consist in the obstacles to Palestinian legal development put in place by Israeli urban policies and regulations (Chiodelli, 2012). These obstacles have produced a dramatic housing shortage in the Palestinian neighborhoods, so that building without public authorization has become the only way for many Palestinians to access an apartment in the city. For most of them illegality is not a free choice, but a forced solution to a basic need. This is supported for instance by the data on building permits issued by the Municipality for Palestinian housing development: after the 1967 occupation, only around 10% of the requests for building permits submitted by Palestinian Jerusalemites were approved by the Israeli authorities (Amirav, 2009), accounting for around 4,350 building permits from 1967 to 2010 (Braier, 2013). Consider that, in the same period, the Palestinian population of Jerusalem increased by approximately 215,000 people.

There is no space here for analysis of the specific factors hindering the issue of building permits for Palestinian quarters (for an in-depth investigation, see Chiodelli, 2017). However, all of those factors are linked to Israeli planning and building policies and regulations. For instance, since the occupation, the Israeli authorities have allowed Palestinian housing expansion in a limited number of areas: in fact, around 30% of the surface of East Jerusalem has been expropriated, mainly for the building of Jewish neighborhoods, around 20% is zoned as green area, and around 30% is not covered by any detailed plan, hence nothing can be constructed there (UN OCHA OPT, 2011a). Then, when a plot in Arab East Jerusalem has been zoned for residential use, the number of housing units that the authorities allow to be built on these areas is generally very low (Charney & Rosen, 2014). This is due to the fact that detailed plans for Palestinian neighborhoods assign very low floor area ratios and maximum building height to them (Weizman, 2007; Schaeffer, 2011). Note that, if in the Palestinian areas buildings cannot usually exceed two or three floors, in the Jewish sectors tower apartment buildings are also allowed.

When considering Israeli obstacles to Palestinian housing development, problems related to the land registration system must also be cited: today, about half of the Palestinian land in East Jerusalem

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does not meet the requirements for registration with the Israeli cadaster. The reason is that the cadaster does not recognize the legal validity of many documents and mechanisms that used to regulate land property successions and trades in East Jerusalem before the Israeli occupation (Amirav, 2009; Margalit, 2007).

Proof that Palestinian building is artificially quashed by the Israeli authorities is provided by the building boom experienced by Jerusalem's Palestinian neighborhoods on the West Bank side of the Wall: as soon as Israeli building restrictions de facto ceased to be implemented in those neighborhoods, tall apartment buildings started mushrooming and tens of thousands of Palestinian Jerusalemites moved to those areas (Charney & Rosen, 2014). Living there does not mean being physically inside the city, with easy access to all municipal facilities. However, housing prices are among the lowest in Jerusalem and, what is even more important, residing there means being technically within the municipal boundaries.

This last point warrants clarification, because it is crucial: Palestinian residents of Jerusalem are not Israeli citizens, but they have a special legal status (the status of permanent residents of Jerusalem). This allows them to enjoy several fundamental benefits and privileges to which the Palestinian residents of the West Bank are not entitled. For instance, they can work in Israel, and they are entitled to use Jerusalem's municipal public services (which are far superior in terms of both quantity and quality to services in West Bank cities) as well as being eligible for all social benefits provided by the Israeli National Insurance Institute (such as health care, education, and social assistance). However, to maintain their special status as residents, Israeli authorities require Palestinian Jerusalemites to reside within the municipal boundaries. If they move to another town in the West Bank, their status of permanent resident is revoked forever by Israel, and they lose all the mentioned benefits (B'Tselem & HaMoked, 1997, 1998; Jefferis, 2012). Therefore, for Palestinian Jerusalemites, residing within the municipal border is a forced necessity: when they are not able to find legal accommodation, resorting to illegal housing is the only available option.

The Multifaceted Politics of Informality

There is a tendency to give an oversimplified interpretation of informality. This is also the case for Jerusalem. For instance, housing illegality in the Holy City has been viewed only as a form of political resistance to the Israeli occupation, or only as the direct result of colonial policies by the Israeli authorities. However, the phenomenon is more complex than this. Whilst in reality diverse issues are closely intertwined, they can be separated at least from an analytical viewpoint.

There are five main components that mold illegal housing in Jerusalem.

First, housing illegality in East Jerusalem is a piece of the political strategy enacted by the Israeli authorities to control and colonize the city. According to different scholars, the impediments to legal Palestinian housing development enable the simultaneous achievement of several alleged Israeli aims (see for instance: Amirav, 2009; Bollens, 2000; Chiodelli, 2017; Dumper, 1997; Misselwitz & Rieniets, 2006; Shlay & Rosen, 2015): it preserves free space for Jewish urban expansion in East Jerusalem; it induces Palestinian Jerusalemites to leave the city; it keeps them in a situation of permanent precariousness, submission, and constriction, hence facilitating their control and domination. In this regard, illegal housing seems to be the *intentional* and *direct* result of several Israeli urban measures, such as the above-mentioned lack of residential zoning for Palestinian neighborhoods.

In addition to this explicit and direct Israeli strategy, there is also a different issue, which is *indirectly* contributing to Palestinian housing illegality. According to Oren Yiftachel (2006), Israel can be considered an ethnocratic state: that is, a political and institutional regime which promotes the expansion and control of a dominant (Jewish) ethnic group over a contested (Arab/Palestinian) territory and polity. This materializes in ethnic preference for the Jewish majority, and insensitivity towards the Arab/Palestinian minority (Shlay & Rosen, 2015), and it applies also to the case of housing

informality in Jerusalem. Hence, in some cases, the constraints on Palestinian housing development are likely to be an *indirect* (and, to some extent, *unintended*) effect of urban measures that do not take adequate account of the specificity and needs of the Palestinian areas and population, more than being an intentional colonial stratagem. This may be exemplified by the above-mentioned issue of land registration with the Israeli cadastral system, or the slowness with which detailed plans are approved (which is another main impediment to the issuing of building permits to Palestinian Jerusalemites).

Third, Palestinian illegal housing can be seen as a form of resistance to the Israeli occupation, pointing to the illegality of East Jerusalem's annexation by Israel. From this viewpoint, it is part of the tactic of *sumud*, an Arab term meaning 'staying steady on the land' and referring to a passive form of resistance (Bollens, 2000). For Palestinians, living in East Jerusalem despite all the difficulties is a political act per se, and leaving the city (or selling a property in Jerusalem to a Jewish person) is a politically unacceptable action (Bollens, 2000).

> The Palestinians of Arab Jerusalem challenge Israeli hegemonic dominance by being present and absent at the same time. They remain in the city, build homes, and raise their families. The Palestinians of Arab Jerusalem are present and are not going anywhere. […] They shun the Israeli political structure, reminding everyone that they are not Israeli political subjects.
>
> *(Shlay & Rosen, 2015, p. 142)*

Fourth, illegal housing is a necessity for survival: enlarging a house without proper authorization or building an illegal extra storey is the only way in which the large majority of Palestinian Jerusalemites can continue to reside in the city, given the extreme difficulty of building a house in compliance with all Israeli laws and regulations. This is even more evident if we consider the above-mentioned issue of residency status: Palestinians cannot leave Jerusalem for the suburbs in order to escape the city's urban problems (such as high housing prices or overcrowding), as people would do in most parts of the world, because it would mean losing their resident status and with it the possibility to access the city for work, education or public services. For the Palestinian Jerusalemites, the municipal boundary is not a simple administrative line; rather, it is a border between two worlds.

Fifth, illegality is also an opportunity for economic development – which is something more than mere survival. This process is particularly evident in the Palestinian neighborhoods on the eastern side of the Barrier. Despite the Barrier's grave repercussions on the large majority of the people cut off by it, the limbo in which these areas are trapped paradoxically generates new opportunities for some Palestinians. Many activities impeded by the Israeli authorities within the Jerusalem on the western side of the Wall are now flourishing in the quarters on the other side of the Barrier, where Israel no longer enforces its laws. For instance, whilst the Jerusalem neighborhood of Kafr Aqab is suffering dire consequences from the Barrier's presence (such as the decline in urban quality, facilities, and public services) (UN OCHA OPT, 2011b), at the same time it has enjoyed an unprecedented building boom and an intense growth of commercial activities (Nasrallah, 2007) due to the migration of many Palestinian Jerusalemites. In these areas, illegality has become the routine mode of urban and economic development. However, the future of these areas (and, as a consequence, the use of informality as an opportunity for development) is very precarious. For instance, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, during a cabinet meeting, raised the possibility of revoking the status of residence for Palestinians living in these neighborhoods, which would mean excluding *de jure* those areas from the city, and forcibly annexing them to the West Bank (Ravid, 2015).

Conclusions

As argued in this chapter, the forms, causes, and rationales of informality in Jerusalem are multiple, multifaceted, and intertwined. Hence, when considering the politics of informality in Jerusalem, it is difficult to identify its predominant features and determinants precisely.

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Nevertheless, it seems to me that, today, Palestinian housing informality in East Jerusalem can be interpreted mainly (even if not only) as the result of Israeli political strategies to control the city. If the urban governance of Jerusalem were shared, if urban laws and regulations were applied equally, the majority of Palestinian informal housing would simply not exist. And Jerusalem would be a city more similar to many other Mediterranean cities, also in terms of the structure of the urban fabric: a city characterized by a certain degree of informality driven by economic and cultural reasons, but without the shocking difference between Jewish and Palestinian neighborhoods which today typifies the Holy City.

This geopolitical cause of illegal housing is probably the main peculiarity of current informality in the Holy City. However, what makes Jerusalem exceptional is not the political origin of informality per se, but its glaring political character. Urban planning and policies always have unavoidable redistributive effects, are necessarily not neutral, and are closely connected with political aims; at the same time, informality is always produced also by spatial planning and the State (Chiodelli & Moroni, 2014; Mazza, 2009; Roy, 2009a, 2009b; Watson, 2009). But in cases where ethnic tensions are lower and the stakes are less important than in Jerusalem, these aspects are reduced to a minimum and disappear from view. Thus, as Yiftachel (2009a, p. 250) states, "Israel/Palestine [is not] an exception, but rather a hyper example of structural relations unfolding in thousands of cities around the changing globe".

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 There are no precise data on the number of Palestinian Jerusalemites living in these areas. According to a 2006 survey, they amounted to around 55,000 (out of 250,000 Palestinians living in Jerusalem) (Nasrallah, 2007).
2 As already mentioned, these neighbourhoods are officially within the municipal border, hence they are still under Israeli sovereignty. However, de facto they have been cut off from Jerusalem, and the Israeli law is enforced loosely in them.

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