

FRANCESCO CHIODELLI

Shaping Jerusalem

SPATIAL PLANNING, POLITICS AND THE CONFLICT



ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN PLANNING AND URBAN DESIGN



Shaping Jerusalem

Shaping Jerusalem: Spatial planning, politics and the conflict focuses on a hidden facet of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict: the relentless reshaping of the Holy City by the Israeli authorities through urban policies, spatial plans, infrastructural and architectural projects, land use and building regulations. From a political point of view, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over Jerusalem may appear to be at an impasse; however, it is precisely by looking at the city's physical space that one can perceive that a war of cement and stone is under way.

Many books have been written on the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over Jerusalem; while some of them have focused on the urban fabric, *Shaping Jerusalem* uniquely discusses the role of Israeli spatial actions within the conflict. It argues that Israel's main political objective—control over the whole city—is ordinarily and silently pursued through physical devices which permanently modify the territory and the urban fabric.

Relying on strong empirical evidence and data through the analysis of statistical data, official policies, urban projects, and laws, author Francesco Chiodelli substantiates the political discussion with facts and figures about the current territorial situation of the city, and about the Israeli policies implemented in the city in the past six decades.

Francesco Chiodelli is a researcher at the Gran Sasso Science Institute (Italy), where he teaches on the doctoral programme in Urban Studies. His research deals with the social effects of space regulation, with a specific focus on problems of tolerance, informality and transgression. His papers have appeared in several international scientific journals, such as *Planning Theory*, *Town Planning Review*, *Land Use Policy*, *Geoforum*, *Journal of Urban Affairs*, *European Planning Studies* and *Cities*.

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Spatial planning, politics and the conflict

Francesco Chiodelli

First published 2017
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Names: Chiodelli, Francesco, author.

Title: Shaping Jerusalem : spatial planning, politics and the conflict / Francesco Chiodelli.

Description: New York, NY : Routledge, 2016. |

Series: Routledge research in planning and urban design

Identifiers: LCCN 2016011092 (print) | LCCN 2016018568 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781138185494 (hardback) | ISBN 9781315644462 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: City planning—Political aspects—Jerusalem. |

City planning—Social aspects—Jerusalem. | Illegal buildings—Jerusalem. | Arab-Israeli conflict.

Classification: LCC HT169.J4 C483 2016 (print) | LCC HT169.J4 (ebook) |

DDC 307.1/21609569442—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016011092>

ISBN: 978-1-138-18549-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-315-64446-2 (ebk)

Typeset in Sabon
by Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon, UK

Contents

<i>List of illustrations</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
1. The spatial dimension of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over Jerusalem	1
2. The occupied city: planning the occupation of East Jerusalem	23
3. The illegal city: urban policies for Arab neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem	55
4. The locked city: the separation Barrier as territorial strategy	87
5. The lesson of Jerusalem	127
<i>Index</i>	141



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Illustrations

Figures

1.1	West and East Jerusalem	3
1.2	Main Jewish and Arab neighbourhoods in Jerusalem	7
1.3	Shape and organisation of the urban fabric; Arab and Jewish neighbourhoods in comparison	9
1.4	Redrawing of Jerusalem's municipal boundaries, from 1931 onwards	15
1.5	The Jerusalem Light Rail, in the area of the Old City	17
2.1	Residential buildings in Pisgat Ze'ev, East Jerusalem	27
2.2	Residential buildings in Har Homa, East Jerusalem	27
2.3	The Jewish neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem	28
2.4	Residential buildings in Pisgat Ze'ev, East Jerusalem	36
2.5	Residential buildings in Pisgat Ze'ev, East Jerusalem	36
2.6	High housing density in the Arab neighbourhood of Silwan	37
2.7	A view of Har Homa, East Jerusalem	39
2.8	A view of Har Homa, East Jerusalem	39
2.9	Jerusalem Master Plan, areas for residential expansion	40
2.10	Recent detailed plans for Jewish neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem	43
2.11	The Shu'fat refugee camp, which was cut off from Jerusalem by the separation Barrier	45
2.12	The separation Barrier and the Jerusalem Master Plan	47
3.1	A house in the Arab neighbourhood of Silwan	58
3.2	A view of the Arab neighbourhood of Silwan	59
3.3	Localisation of housing demolitions in 2010	61
3.4	A view of the neighbourhood of Silwan	62
3.5	Land use zoning in East Jerusalem	68
3.6	A street in the Arab neighbourhood of Silwan	69
3.7	A tall building in the Jewish neighbourhood of Har Homa, East Jerusalem	72
3.8	High-density buildings in the Jewish neighbourhood of Gilo, East Jerusalem	73

viii *List of illustrations*

3.9	High housing density in the Jewish neighbourhood of Har Homa, East Jerusalem	73
4.1	The Barrier in East Jerusalem	91
4.2	The route of the Barrier in the Jerusalem area	97
4.3	West Bank settlements annexed by the Barrier	98
4.4	Ma'ale Adummim	101
4.5	Ma'ale Adummim	101
4.6	Ma'ale Adummim	102
4.7	Ma'ale Adummim	102
4.8	Areas for future expansion of Jewish neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem annexed by the Barrier	104
4.9	In the foreground, residential buildings in Pisgat Ze'ev. In the background, the Shu'fat refugee camp	105
4.10	Palestinian neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem excluded by the Barrier	106
4.11	The Shu'fat refugee camp, beyond the Barrier	107
4.12	The Shu'fat refugee camp, beyond the Barrier	107
4.13	Tall residential buildings in Kafr Aqab	109
4.14	A tall (unfinished) residential building in Kafr Aqab, close to the Barrier	109
4.15	The Arab city, the Palestinian suburbs and the Barrier	111
4.16	The Barrier in Abu Dis (Israeli side)	113
4.17	The Barrier in Abu Dis (Palestinian side)	114
4.18	Residential buildings in French Hill, East Jerusalem	118

Tables

1.1	Population of Jerusalem, by population sub-group	11
2.1	Master Plan's prospect for residential increase	35
3.1	Measures against housing illegality, 2004	64

Preface

This is not a book about the Old City

Jerusalem is at the centre of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. More precisely, the 0.9 square kilometre walled area called the Old City can be considered the key to the conflict because it contains the contested site of the Temple Mount, comprising both the Jewish *Kotel* (the Western Wall) and the Muslim al-Aqsa Mosque and Dome of the Rock. Neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis are willing to relinquish their claims to some of the most important holy places of their respective main faiths; both claim a Jerusalem including the Old City as the capital of their state and as an integral part of their national identity. It is not by chance that shared decisions about the city's sovereignty and borders have never been reached in the history of the peace talks between Israeli and Palestinian authorities—even the Oslo Accords, the historic peace agreements signed in the mid-1990s, deferred every negotiation on Jerusalem.

The political and religious importance of the Old City contributes to its synecdochic identification with the city as a whole. In the eyes of many, Jerusalem is first and foremost the Old City, and the Old City is the first place (sometimes also the only one) that a tourist or a pilgrim visits on arriving in the city. Pictures of the Old City in particular, and of the holy sites located there, bedeck the covers of books and guidebooks, and are shown on television or in newspapers when something happens in Jerusalem (these images also appear on propaganda posters and on the flags of Palestinian and Israeli political groups).

Despite all this, I will not dwell at length about the Old City in this book. Many excellent books deal extensively with the Old City and its role in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. I will instead focus almost exclusively on the eastern peripheral zones of the city, a part of twentieth-century Jerusalem that has grown rapidly mainly in the last 50 years, where there are no monuments, religious places or historic sites. These areas are physically located very close to the Old City (a few kilometres at most), but they are tremendously distant from its monumental splendour. They consist of barren hills on which Palestinian and Israeli neighbourhoods alternate, sometimes very close to each other. The former are usually haphazard clumps of

hundreds or thousands of low-quality buildings heaped along shabby roads. This is where the Palestinian population of Jerusalem steadfastly lives despite discriminatory and oppressive treatment by the Israeli authorities. The latter neighbourhoods consist of dense blocks that are normally well finished and maintained, but often repetitive and anonymous (the main aim of the builders was to build as much as possible as quickly as possible). It is here, in a territory formally under military occupation, that the Israeli authorities have induced thousands of Jews to move since the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, in order to reiterate that this contested part of the city, despite the provisions of several international resolutions, is an integral part of Israel.

The reason for dealing with these areas of East Jerusalem is simple: the ways in which urban space is shaped in these outlying sectors in particular is the key to full understanding of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over the Holy City. While diplomacy has come to a standstill, if one considers the spatial transformations of East Jerusalem it is clear that the battle for control over the city (and thus over the Old City) is ongoing on a daily basis. This battle occurs mostly in silence. Although the conflict sometimes takes a violent and bloody turn, thus making headlines in the international news media, more often it remains hidden and no drop of blood is spilled. In fact, the battle is fought mainly with technical and neutral weapons, such as urban policies, spatial planning and architectural projects, and their outputs are usually small in scale (the demolition of an unauthorised house, the expropriation of a piece of land, the construction of a stretch of road). Yet, taken together, these actions are radically changing the city's physiognomy and consequently, as I will show, the fate of the conflict. They are the main means through which the political future of the Old City (and of Jerusalem as a whole) is being moulded.

This is not a book only about Jerusalem

Jerusalem is a unique city. Obviously, it can be argued that every city has unique aspects. However, I think that the uniqueness of Jerusalem is more striking than that of many other cities around the world because of its past and recent history. Hence, many things that happen in Jerusalem happen only in Jerusalem.

Nonetheless, some other events that occur in Jerusalem are not as unique; even if contextually specific, they take place in other cities across the world in a similar manner. I refer in particular to shaping the urban space as a way to mould *lato sensu* the society that inhabits it—for instance, to direct and control the geographical distribution of specific groups in the city or to give one group advantages (or disadvantages) *vis-à-vis* land use. This hints, generally speaking, at the nexus among space, power and conflict.

It is possible to identify several twentieth-century cities in which this nexus is crystal clear (and often dramatic). South African cities during apartheid and divided cities, such as Belfast and Sarajevo, are notorious examples. An

expert on urban history might mention also land use conflicts in the cases of Mt. Laurel (New Jersey, US) and Modesto (California, US). However, these few cases are not sufficient to make Jerusalem an “ordinary” city. What makes Jerusalem “ordinary” is the fact that this relationship among space, power and conflict emerges, or could emerge, in *every* city, because this is a constitutive, and not accidental or occasional, feature of urban planning and policies. The difference with respect to Jerusalem is only a matter of magnitude and nuances: in Jerusalem, this relationship is convulsive; by contrast, in an ordinary city it is weaker and often deeper-lying—and it hits the headlines only on particular occasions (for example, an urban renewal project triggering processes of eviction and gentrification that become particularly violent).

A city so far away as Jerusalem, therefore, epitomises what happens every day in many “normal” cities.

What is this book about?

So, what is this book about? It focuses on what has happened in only one portion of Jerusalem in a very limited time span: it deals with the Israeli urban measures (plans, projects, regulations and laws concerning the territory, with a focus on housing) implemented in East Jerusalem since 1967. The main thesis is that what has happened in this particular part of the city in this period of time is determining the future of the conflict over the city.

That said, I now outline the content of each chapter in this book.

Chapter 1 details the spatial dimension of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict in Jerusalem. In particular, it highlights the dual role of territory and the related importance of measures (urban policies, plans and projects) aimed at shaping it. On the one hand, gaining control of the territory is the direct object of the conflict, given that political sovereignty over the city is closely tied to its physical control. On the other hand, the territory is the means by which the Israeli authorities try to influence the city’s demographic composition because, in order to keep political control over the city, they must maintain a solid Jewish demographic majority within municipal borders. In this regard, a specific section detailing the main demographic issues is included in the chapter. A dual process of de-Arabisation and Judaisation of East Jerusalem emerges as the main outcome of the complex, diverse and sometimes messy urban policies implemented by the Israeli authorities in East Jerusalem since 1967.

Chapter 2 analyses the process of Jewish territorial expansion in East Jerusalem promoted by Israel in particular through the building of a series of residential neighbourhoods. After introducing the role of public housing as a means to enhance Jewish control of Jerusalem, the chapter conducts an in-depth examination of the so-called “Jerusalem Master Plan”, which is the latest outline plan conceived for the city. Its contents relating to new residential

opportunities for Jews and Palestinians are considered. The chapter shows how, why, and to what extent the plan is aligned with the Israeli policies to Judaise Jerusalem implemented since the end of the Six-Day War.

[Chapter 3](#) deals with the de-Arabisation of East Jerusalem: that is, the containment of Palestinian urban and demographic expansion pursued by Israeli urban policies. The discussion centres on the phenomenon of unauthorised building in the Arab sectors, which is the main side effect of this de-Arabisation process and, at the same time, the best indicator of the discriminatory nature of Israeli urban policies. Facts and figures relating to unauthorised Arab building and to the Israeli demolition policy are presented. The connection between the spread of illegal housing in the Palestinian neighbourhoods and specific Israeli policies, plans and rules is analysed.

[Chapter 4](#) focuses on the territorial impacts of the separation Barrier in Jerusalem. It argues that the Barrier radically influences the spatial structure and functioning of the city and of the metropolitan area. It does so through the implementation of a series of selective inclusions and exclusions and the creation of new spatial continuities and discontinuities. The Barrier's overall spatial outcomes are stressed: the Barrier has given rise to a new urban entity, a greater Jewish Jerusalem straddling the municipal boundaries, where the Jewish population is the majority both to the west and the east of the Green Line; at the same time, it destroys the *de facto* Arab city, which managed to resist occupation and annexation for several decades thanks to symbiosis with the Palestinian suburbs in the West Bank. The crucial political implications of this new urban structural arrangement are also analysed.

The [fifth](#) and final [chapter](#), [Chapter 5](#), highlights several lessons to be learned from the case of Jerusalem with regard to the nature and scope of urban planning and policies, thus extending the value of studying Jerusalem beyond the outcome of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. In particular, the close linkage between spatial planning and the political sphere is emphasised, as well as the potential use of urban measures for regressive purposes, such as social oppression and ethnic domination. The consequences of this in terms of the role of planning in conflictual contexts are underlined.

Acknowledgements

I visited Jerusalem for the first time in 2002, when I was a university student. Since then, I have returned a dozen times. My actual research on the spatial dimension of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over the city began only a few years after my first visit, during my PhD studies, and continued in the following years. Every step of this research path and every person I met on this journey contributed to the genesis of this book: those who first proposed that I should go to Jerusalem; those who introduced me to the role of spatial planning in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; those who guided me through the streets of Jerusalem and across Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories; and those who recounted to me their stories of daily life in the city. To be added to this list are all those who, within the academic environment, advised me throughout my research path. However, it would be impossible to mention the names of all these people: there are too many of them, I would inevitably forget someone and, furthermore, I never knew the names of many of them (for example, the dozens of people who, in Jerusalem, told me their often dramatic stories of everyday life in the Holy City). Hence, I explicitly thank only Maddalena Falletti, who is the latest person in time to have supported, advised and assisted me in the writing of this book. In particular, she helped me with the drawing of all the maps.

I would also like to thank Davide Locatelli, who took the photographs that illustrate the text.

Obviously, responsibility for errors contained in this book lies solely with myself.

Finally, I would stress that my research on Jerusalem has had several intermediate outputs over the years (articles in scientific journals, conference proceedings, chapters in edited books, a small book in Italian). I consider this book to be the final output: I have tried to gather in it all my thoughts on the issue—strengthening, updating and systematizing them, and also adding some small corrections or changes to what I wrote previously.



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1 The spatial dimension of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict over Jerusalem

A low-intensity war

Israeli–Palestinian affairs are often at the centre of international news stories. Media and public opinion tend to focus on that context in particular whenever a tragic event occurs (a bombing, a killing, a terrorist attack). Unfortunately, such events are not infrequent. However, apart from very specific periods of outright combat—such as during the Second Intifada, or, more recently, during Israeli’s military operations in the Gaza Strip in the summer of 2014 and knife attacks in the autumn of 2015—one might envisage a quasi-normal situation, only occasionally interrupted by sudden upsurges of violence. This is particularly the case if we consider the Israeli cities and Jerusalem, since the majority of armed clashes take place in the Palestinian territories of Gaza and West Bank.

However, on the contrary, in Israel–Palestine, and more specifically in Jerusalem, a silent conflict is in progress—a “low-intensity war”, as it has been termed by some scholars (Hass, 2003; Segal & Weizman, 2003; Weizman, 2007).¹ Terrorist attacks and murders are not the main ingredients of this warfare. This low-intensity war is characterised by a chain of minor events related to the transformation of the urban space: the construction of a house, the denial of a building permit, the issue of a demolition order, the expropriation of a plot of land, the uprooting of an olive grove. Some of them are certainly dramatic if we take the point of view of the people involved. Consider for instance the demolition of an unauthorized house in East Jerusalem: regardless of the rationale for the demolition, this is often a tragic event for the household (suddenly lost is the place in which the parents have married and the children have grown up, the asset in which the family has invested the majority of its savings, the only roof over their heads). However, at first glance, similar events on their own may appear to be of slight importance and consequence for the destiny of the decades-long dispute over the city. Nevertheless—and this is the point of the book—having accumulated in space and time, such events are radically changing the situation of the conflict by incrementally reshaping Jerusalem’s fabric.