Rightful Claim: Israel’s Primordialist-Constructivist Approach to Urban Planning and Policy in Jerusalem

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The city of Jerusalem is sacred to three of the world’s most important monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It lies between two territories, Israel and the West Bank, and encompasses the complexities and problems that plague its governance. Though religious divergences may characterize the crucial emotional aspects of Jerusalem politics, some issues are purely economic and social. This city of multitudes—of people, of religions, and of changing histories and historiographies—some of its constitutents’ most essential issues are not ideological or historical (awkward phrasing). Instead, the issues that are most important to these citizens, particularly the Arabs, pertain to bread-and-butter issues: these issues directly affect people’s well-being and standard of living. Perhaps these concerns are even more important than those ideological and historical ones, for these are pervasive. Jerusalem, which resides under Israeli authority, has excluded Palestinian Arabs from resources and basic necessities through a combined primordial-constructivist approach to urban planning.

Since its establishment in 1948, Israel has focused on absorbing Jewish immigrants and providing them with space, housing, and basic necessities. However, the land of Israel was previously occupied by Palestinian Arabs, who have been displaced by the influx of Jewish settlers onto their lands. Even more problematic, the Israeli government has at times authorized municipalities, such as that of Jerusalem, to legally and politically displace the Palestinians. In this section, I explain the ethno-ideological basis of these actions and the development of the Jewish Quarter as a mechanism of Arab exclusion.

Israel, which was founded on the basis of Zionism, focused on absorbing Jewish immigrants and providing them with space, housing, and basic necessities. However, at first, Zionism’s emphasis on political gains and the establishment of the Jewish homeland led to an initial focus on Tel Aviv; Jerusalem only later became an important city as people sought to develop the Holy City into a suitable living environment for the Jews. Prior to 1948, the Armenian cathedral, the Syrian and Maronite converts, and four small Muslim quarters bordered the small, pre-existing Jewish Quarter. Starting in the 1930s, development towns throughout Israel became a model for what would later occur in Jerusalem, whereupon Jewish settlers created artificial towns on unused land in order to displace the indigenous population, absorb the immigrants, and provide security for the Jewish homeland. The motivation behind these acts is based on the myth oftern, as the Old City of Jerusalem is essential to religious mythology and ideology within the Arab-Israeli conflict as well as the very existence of Israel.9

Essentially, the concept of myths in relation to Jerusalem serves to frame the myth oftern, the Jewish heritage and identity through which primordial-constructivist approaches can also be considered an ideology through which individuals and communities can filter reality.10 A combined conceptualization of Jewish-Israeli nationalism provides insight as to how the Israeli government has handled the situation of Jewish settlements in Jerusalem: the feeling of being both ethically and ethnically right validates Jews’ annexation of quarters and neighborhoods in Jerusalem. Additionally, the settlers have operated under the guise of security concerns and the desire to make Israel truly theirs, which few governments or nations have experienced.

The emergence of Jewish settlements primarily arose in the area West of the Old City, where its population often refrained “from mixing with their neighbors, a tradition that reflected centuries of discrimination in widely scattered areas.” This is apparent in the settlers’ decisions to maintain the pre-existing cul-de-sac style street layout, which would allow the Jews to maintain a separation of public and private space and residential areas can be separated from tourist areas as well as the undesirable Palestinians.11 In establishing their right to the city, the settlers used planning against the residents who had lived there previously, working to institute gentrification and ethnic segregation. The government also legally authorized the old quarters and ghettos of Jerusalem: the Moroccan Quarter as the Jewish Quarter in order to declare Jewish ownership of the land, reaffirm the defense posts from 1948, and appropriate as much land as possible without upsetting the Status Quo agreements.12 The rationale for this incorporation of former Arab districts in Jerusalem into the Jewish Quarter was that the Arabs existed there only as “substitute tenants” (the Jews) could return and reclaim their land rightfully.13 This line of thinking has reified the expulsion of Arabs from the Moroccan Quarter, as well as the districts of ash-Shari‘, Bub al-Silhab, Dar al-Tubana, and the forms of Jewish Quarter.

These explanations that the Israeli government and Jewish settlers have provided to defend their actions in demolishing prior buildings, monuments, and districts are based in an ethnoreligious ideology. This ideology is connected to archaeological excavation in order to prove Jewish heritage and to focus on Israel’s historical and biblical rights to the city; in essence, it is an ideology that bound ethnoreligious issues to space and territory. It is noted in literature that this ideology is based on a desire to make Jerusalem truly theirs, which few governments or nations have experienced.14

Though urban planning in Jerusalem has often focused on religious monuments, the main problematic issue is that of housing development and regulations for the Arab communities in the city.15 In this paper, I first briefly evaluate Jewish housing development and land use expropriation in Jerusalem since 1948, with a specific emphasis on the reconstruction of the Jewish Quarter. Second, I turn to current Israeli land use laws and codes to determine the official policies on Arab rights to build and maintain public and private space. Finally, I look at the most recent issues being raised in Jerusalem urban planning to examine the prospects for increasing equality between Jews and Arabs in terms of land use and housing. I draw from equitable urban plans to formulate these suggestions. I posit that Jerusalem’s city codes and Israeli policies have excluded Arabs from basic necessities through a combined primordialist-constructivist approach to urban planning.
stems from a feeling of ethnic and ethnic superiority and a desire to gentrify the Palestinian Arab property of Palestinians and the construction of the Jewish Quarter. As the governance of Jerusalem has become more complex because of its status as a city, and perhaps, so have the laws and codes that have developed. Yet still, the legal barriers these laws have effectively constrained the Arabs’ ability to create living space or appropriately address the needs of their communities. The enactment of this is the Military Order No. 190 of 1968, whereupon the Israeli Castellari of Absentee Property was authorized to expropriate land belonging to Palestinians who were not recorded in the official East Jerusalem census prior to 1967. Palestinians had no way to know this, since the order was established ex post. In this section, I look at the installation of various laws and codes that have been instrumental in reducing Arabs’ political power in Jerusalem’s urban planning.

Jerusalem has been a unique case in urban planning because of the intimacy of its citizens, who have “a life of encounters, personal and public, with each of these communities, yet remaining extraneous, and alienated.” The basic structure of how urban planning functions in Jerusalem further solidifies the barriers to development and planning that Arabs in the city face; the Ministry of the Interior regulates issues and locations of national significance, while a local municipal planning commission focuses on implementation. However, the local commission, though with more control, is unable to make independent decisions. At the municipal level, there is also the problem of the multiplicity of actors ranging from public to private, local to international. The combination of these two planning systems that are in conflict and have hardly addressed Palestinian building and land use concerns to achieve Judaisation. The political expression of this process, through laws and regulations, has manipulated Palestinian freedom within urban planning. One such issue is that of building permit regulations: “between 1968 and 1974 only 58 permits were issued. In recent years about 150 permits per year were issued.” By installing legal frameworks to determine and issue permits in the public sector, Palestinians are unable to justify their displacement of Palestinians in areas without permits in the courts or to the federal government. Also, in constraining the number of permits and spatial restrictions, the Israeli state has led its residents to utilize the 43rd amendment to the 1963 Planning and Construction Law. The 43rd amendment, which is by and large exclusive to Jews, provides a voice to the public who claim ownership to the area under planning or have a vested interest in the area under planning. Israeli residents attempted to contest the lack of infrastructure, though their proposal was delayed because of the outbreak of the second Intifada. Thus, though the majority of the residents have made allowances for the institutional mechanisms to affect change and become involved in the urban planning process, some constituents have become locked into the system of the planning process. Many of these systemic barriers for the Israeli state explain this exclusionary approach to Jerusalem urban planning.

A crucial aspect of the urban planning problem in Jerusalem is that the Arabs are immobilized by taxation without representation: the Palestinians of Jerusalem pay taxes to the municipal government yet do not receive any of the public services that are associated with this tax. This dates back to a time before Jerusalem’s unification, when the master plan for the expansion of Jerusalem of 1964 displayed few detailed planning recommendations for improving living conditions or providing public services. Conversely, the westward expansion of the Jewish settlements enjoyed levels of organization and efficiency that have now characterized Israeli public planning. The land expropriation and displacement clearly ensures that Jewish areas receive development funds while Palestinian areas are restricted. As the political analyst Alex Ringrose explains, “The distribution of urban planning is the distribution of development opportunities for rows of building lots consumed by the road.” This practice limited building and improvements in Arab neighborhoods. However, for Jewish immigrants, public housing projects were exclusively reserved for the government to accommodate this select part of the Jerusalem population.

Another problematic issue in Jerusalem urban planning is the “intentionally wide road standards that closed off development opportunities for rows of building lots consumed by the road” versus Arab ones. This budget discrepancy can be translated to infrastructure development, such as the issues that the Iwayji village has faced. Iwayji’s side streets, sidewalks, schools, hospitals, and parks, as well as a deficient postal service and water supply, inadequately access to water and poor sewage systems entail an environment that is lacking in basic standards of living and represents a truly imbalanced allocation of financial benefits to different ethnic communities. These gaps cannot be defended legislatively without the combined primordialist-constructivist approach to planning. The very systems that can address these gaps cannot be defended legislatively, combined with linguistic and religious commonalities, provides an emotionally compelling reason to provide more resources to one’s own than to the “iniminate enemies.” Moreover, the discriminatory policies are validated and reified by the discursive framework of the primordialist-constructivist influence on the municipality of Jerusalem and thereby creates a new environment that is lacking in basic standards of living and represents a truly imbalanced allocation of financial benefits to different ethnic communities. The body responsible for the imposition of these restrictions is the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality, otherwise known as the city government. They delay the construction and development processes in Arab neighborhoods, which is a desire and thought is supported by the emotional and ethnic appeal. The very systems that have been established to monitor urban planning ensure the primordialist-constructivist approach, since if the municipality is sympathetic to the Arab community, other organizations can place pressure on the municipal government; therefore, the approach to excluding Arabs from the urban planning process is self-enforcing, as it works “to change the geographic and demographic balance.”

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Irroneing the wrinkles of inequality in Jerusalem’s urban planning system will not happen overnight. It will involve a series of reforms in the structural and social policies of the municipal government that will shift from a partisan to a community-based attitude toward Arabs. Jerusalem in this section, I present the necessary mindset that would engender a more equitable urban planning system that addresses the multiplicity of issues, though I believe it to be somewhat unachievable considering the current situation. I will then also recommend urban policy and planning changes in Jerusalem to correct the economic and spatial imbalance.

The primary problem with the urban planning approach that Jerusalem’s municipal government utilizes is self-affirming and primordialist-constructivist in nature. Thus, any rational thought about allocating resources to Arab neighborhoods, land, or planning is pushed aside in favor of the more emotionally powerful ties to common ancestors, leading to an organically-developed nationalistic approach to urban policy. Any individual that does not share this common ancestry, or identity cannot be considered an accepted citizen. Altering this mindset is difficult because the beliefs are so emotionally ingrained to the community. To make matters more complicated, there is a self-enforcing ghettoization that has occurred in Jerusalem, where ethnic and religious communities have preferred to stay within their own enclaves, further perpetuating the primordialist-constructivist approach to urban planning.

The ideal mindset for producing more equitable planning would incorporate policies that made solely on population size, cross-cultural and multicultural concerns, and balanced financial support for the different communities. It is essential that any change in urban policy reflect an understanding of story buildings, thus creating low density Arab housing.” (The racial segregation of homes such as large terraced homes like high-rise apartment buildings—a dubious assertion at best.) “Hidden guidelines” exist to regulate Arab expansion, like limiting the distance between lots and development opportunities for rows of building lots consumed by the road; this practice limited building and improvements in Arab neighborhoods. However, for Jewish immigrants, public housing projects were exclusively reserved for the government to accommodate this select part of the Jerusalem population.

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the socioeconomic climate in Jerusalem. One should analyze the interactions between Ashkenazi, Mizrahi, and Ethiopian Jews before turning to the extreme interrelations between Arabs and Jews in terms of spatial resources. Otherwise, this mindset could occur in the Israeli political culture and prevent them from living in Jerusalem with equal amounts of space and resources is important.\(^\text{77}\) The plan is to keep the interactions within the system or if it will not work, to change the system so that the land must be neutral as at all but instead culture-less and lacking context. A new urban strategy must work to unentrench territoriality, aim for a reduction of exclusion, and allow more access to land and neighborhoods to decrease tensions.\(^\text{78}\) SRWHQWLDOO\(\text{HUGXFHWKHLQHRIWKHWRSGRZQIHGHUDORIWKHFLW\(V\)}}\) because of the destruction of buildings and homes in this area. Basic human needs and rights must remain at the forefront of urban planning. Consider each community’s individual needs depending on the socioeconomic climate in Jerusalem. One should analyze the potential for future development in Arab Jerusalem in order to formulate a model for the future of its policies toward Palestinians. Arabs must be able to reappropriate their land, their dignity, and their identity, which can only come about with cooperation and accommodation between the various communities in Jerusalem.\(^\text{79}\)

REFERENCES & NOTES

2. 2002: 36.
5. Fenster, 13.
6. Ardi Imseis, 1044. In 1967, “the Israeli government enacted the Municipalities Law, which allowed the government to declare areas as Jewish settlements, thus preventing them from living in Jerusalem with equal amounts of space and resources and effectively bar Arabs from participating in the urban planning and policy planning processes. This is combined with a subtle move toward land and space under the belief that all of Jerusalem is an ‘eternal, indivisible’ part of Israel.”\(^\text{80}\) Such ethnocratic and primitivist thinking fails to account for any equity across the city’s neighborhoods. For considerations for urban planning in Jerusalem must address the imbalance of financial transactions, available resources, public services, and housing development for its communities. Such change and consideration must be preceded by a change in social understanding and communication, lest these changes occur under the Israeli primordialist–constructivist mindset; this would only lead to increased repression of the Palestinians, decreased government transparency and accountability, and an absence of representation. The potential for future development in Arab Jerusalem may in fact serve as a model for the future of its policies toward Palestinians. Arabs must be able to reappropriate their land, their dignity, and their identity, which can only come about with cooperation and accommodation between the various communities in Jerusalem.\(^\text{81}\)

CONCLUSION

Jerusalem, the Holy City for the world’s three major monotheistic faiths, is precarious managed, with an entire population of people facing discriminatory policies and legal action because of an emotional and ideological approach to politics. This approach, which I call a combined primitivist–constructivist method,\(^\text{82}\) is exclusionary based on ethnic and ethnic factors. Though not usually outright discriminatory, the Israeli political culture has nurtured an atmosphere of ethnocentric policies and laws that effectively bar Arabs from participating in the plan in policy planning. This process is combined with a subtle move to place land and space under the belief that all of Jerusalem is an “eternal, indivisible” part of Israel.\(^\text{77}\) Such ethnocratic and primitivist thinking fails to account for any equity across the city’s neighborhoods. For considerations for urban planning in Jerusalem must address the imbalance of financial transactions, available resources, public services, and housing development for its communities. Such change and consideration must be preceded by a change in social understanding and communication, lest these changes occur under the Israeli primordialist–constructivist mindset; this would only lead to increased repression of the Palestinians, decreased government transparency and accountability, and an absence of representation. The potential for future development in Arab Jerusalem may in fact serve as a model for the future of its policies toward Palestinians. Arabs must be able to reappropriate their land, their dignity, and their identity, which can only come about with cooperation and accommodation between the various communities in Jerusalem.\(^\text{81}\)