

## The Politics of Roads in Jerusalem \*

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The planning of roads in Jerusalem and its surrounding areas is an integral tool in the appropriation of physical space in eastern Jerusalem. This essay will examine the existing and projected road system from two perspectives. First, a comparison will be made between the Palestinian neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and their contemporaries in the western part of the city. Second, we will examine the network of roads and traffic arrays in the Jerusalem metropolis. Put simply—who are those who move in this space and who are those who stand still?

Fundamentally, this task is based on the fact that planning not only addresses the aesthetics, beauty, and professional and technical organization of the environment and space, but also embodies politics in its widest sense: the manifestation in open space of power relations between groups of interests.

Even though West Jerusalem and east Jerusalem are formally "united", the division between them is evident according to the physical condition of their roads, which are very poor in the east and fully developed in the west. The quality, size and nature of

each road , one might say is a fair indicator whether Israelis or Palestinians move along it.

The planning system in Israel, and in Jerusalem in particular, is a top-down system. In the Jerusalem area, the central goal of this system is to implement the principle of a united Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty. As phrased by the planner of the previous (1978) master plan, architect Yossi Schwied "The first and foremost principle in the planning of Jerusalem is to ensure its unity [through]...the building of the city in such a way that will prevent the formation of two separate national communities, in order to prevent the possibility of the city being divided once again on the dividing line between the two communities.

The existing and planned road system in the city is a tangible manifestation of this perception. Since 1967, planning policies in Jerusalem have spurred political and urban change with two goals in mind. On the one hand, policy has sought to disengage East Jerusalem from its metropolitan hinterland in the rest of the West Bank, thus blocking any possibility of it becoming the capital of a future Palestine. On the other hand, planning policy has worked to create a Jewish metropolitan in all possible areas in the city and its surroundings, simultaneously expanding the brand name of "Jerusalem" beyond the original municipal borders into the West Bank.

### **A Capillary Road System**

A comparison of road system typology in the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem with that of western neighborhoods reveals that the eastern region is served by a very sparse road system based on old rural roads and without the various types of roads required for urban development. The eastern neighborhoods function without a major urban axis from which it is possible to develop public institutions and commercial centers, and out of which new residential neighborhoods might grow, similar to the existing model in West Jerusalem.

Currently, the roads in Arab neighborhoods are also in poor physical condition, most of them without sidewalks and infrastructure systems. Only some 10 percent of the municipal budget goes to infrastructure and services in Arab neighborhoods (30 percent of the town city population<sup>1</sup>, and the reply given by all mayors to date has been that improvements would require a titanic amount of money, and hence special governmental allotments. These never arrive, and the development gap grows. While

new Jewish neighborhoods in the west, as well as those constructed by the Housing Ministry in the east, were built according to sophisticated plans that allocate public space for public roads and passages, most of the Palestinian neighborhoods in the east remain—territorially and structurally—17 traditional villages that surrounded Jordanian East Jerusalem.

The aged road system in these villages, all of which are located on hilltops and separated by ravines, was broadly based on a central road running along the top of the mountain crest. Alongside this road, built-up areas developed organically and moderately in scattered clusters according to familial ownership.

The lack of roadway development and municipal investment in Palestinian neighborhoods is a component of a policy which seeks to limit urban development and expansion and demographic growth. The under-development policy in East Jerusalem neighborhoods is identical to that underway in Arab locales within Israel. There, too, the central planning system designs and implements development and building systems in new Jewish communities, but ignores the development of infrastructure in Arab neighborhoods, where the land is privately-owned and there is no large-scale real estate enterprise. In opposition to this ethnocentric planning policy, organizations such as Bimkom are increasingly demanding the formation of a “civic” planning policy that neutralizes the national component and addresses area planning needs objectively, and on the basis of the assumption (also partially imaginary) that planning decisions should derive from planning rights, which are among the broader human rights. In the Israeli reality where economic and national interests dictate planning priorities, this is but a distant dream.

### **Moving Around in "Greater Jerusalem"**

The settlement project from Gush Etzion in the south to Givat Ze'ev in the north, and from Beitar in the west to Ma'ale Adumim in the east, has been dubbed “Greater Jerusalem.” All those settlements are connected to West Jerusalem with new highway road system bridges and tunnels bypassing the Palestinian neighborhoods. Today all of this land formerly on the Jordanian side of the 1948 lines is located on the *Israeli* side of the series of walls, barbed wire, fences and patrol roads (the Separation Wall) that Israel is constructing in the West Bank.

Roads, as taught in all architecture schools, are the basis, the skeleton, of every urban plan. In a parallel metaphor, they are comparable to the vascular system, the network supplying blood to all areas of the body. Central roads are the traffic arteries, secondary roads are the veins, and local roads serve as capillaries. The city center is the heart of the urban area, and bypasses are required to reroute traffic blockages. While the west city was open to its Jewish satellites ,the Abu Dis road to which was the main axis to east Jerusalem from the Dead Sea has been turned from a central traffic route to a cul-de-sac, the main road from the north to the south of the West Bank going from Rammalla to Hebron through Jerusalem, (Road No. 60) is currently closed to Palestinian traffic and serve the Jewish population in Jerusalem and the surrounding settlements exclusively.

The detachment of East Jerusalem from its Palestinian metropolis is not achieved solely through lack of planning or non-development of roadways. It is an integrated policy that incorporates the removal of Palestinian official markings and cultural centers from the eastern side (such as the closing down of the Orient House, the long-time Jerusalem address for Palestinian nationalist organs) and the restricting of Palestinian West Bank residents from the city (even those who want to pray at its holy sites). The prohibition of non-Jerusalemite Palestinians from entering the Jerusalem city boundaries has been an expanding process, one which began in 1991 ,before the Oslo agreements between the Israelis and the Palestinians. To visit the city, West Bank Palestinians are required to request a permit to enter Jerusalem from the Civilian Authority (a cover name for the military commander) in the West Bank, and this permit must be presented at military barriers set at the city's eastern entrances. Permits are only afforded those of a certain age and marital status and with a "clean" security file, and can be turned down for any unstated reason. They are usually given solely for the daylight hours and span only a number of days at a time. Alternately, Palestinians carrying West Bank identity cards can attempt to steal in "illegally" into Jerusalem territory, risking arrest and monetary fines.

Today this policy is being "perfected" by the Separation Wall under construction on the edges of Jerusalem's municipal boundaries (which twists and turns to avoid incorporating large Palestinian populations on the city's hinterlands). Eventually, this barrier will make it impossible to enter the Jerusalem area with cars and merchandise. The city will be surrounded by five control centers where merchandise will be transferred into Jerusalem in a "back-to-back" process, where trucks meet for the

transfer of goods but never leave their respective areas (similar to the existing passages between the Gaza Strip and the State of Israel). Hence the relative freedom of movement previously enjoyed by Arabs of East Jerusalem to enter and leave the rest of the West Bank will also be constrained.

The development of high-speed traffic systems for the use of Jewish settlers is prominent in the whole of the West Bank, where all major roads are located (as per the Oslo agreement) in Area C, under full Israeli control. These road systems, serving the Jewish settlements while barring Palestinian traffic,( presented in "Betsalem report, "Forbbiden\_Roads")(3) , often these highways run through difficult topography, causing damage to the landscape and Palestinian agriculture(4).

The destruction of East Jerusalem and the transformation of its neighborhoods into culs-de-sac is also destroying West Jerusalem. In the western part of the city, which is currently expanding towards the green lungs of the Jerusalem mountains, a new traffic array is planned incorporating a western ring road in the Beit Zait and Mevasaret Tsion area, to connect to the new access road coming from Beit Shemesh (Road No. 39) and to the traffic array entering into the urban area under construction near Moza and Lifta. This traffic array, in combination with the fast train being built to Tel Aviv, is awakening public disputes, one over environmental damage and another concerning Jerusalem's urban character as the largest and most scattered city in Israel.

West and East Jerusalem are like Siamese twins, one of them receiving excessive nourishment, while the other is systematically suffocating. Despite the growth of West Jerusalem, the economic decline of East Jerusalem is degenerating its Siamese twin. Even flashy, expensive transportation projects such as the light-rail train(se, will not revive the degenerating center of West Jerusalem

### **Moving Below and Under Reality**

On the eve of the Six Day War in 1967, Naomi Shemer wrote the song "Jerusalem of Gold". The songwriter, a deeply-rooted *sabra* (native-born Israeli) from the Jordan Valley, described the Old City and East Jerusalem as vacated of humans ("The market square stands empty"). The roadways to Jerusalem are also described in the song—this time not as empty but as untrafficked: "And no one goes to the Dead Sea through Jericho." These lines in the song that has almost become Israel's new national anthem regard the eastern city and the roads leading to it as empty—inasmuch as they are

empty of Jewish visitors. But the metaphor of “the empty land” and “the invisible Palestinian” is not only literary; the absurdity in Jerusalem is the way in which metaphors and images are turned into operative action a distorted situation of time and space created also through the road system.

Zigmund Bauman,(5) in his book about globalization(1998), describes a world-wide process of strong populations gaining unlimited mobility and a free flow of capital, while weak populations gradually become enclosed in their domestic spaces .Conditions in East Jerusalem and the West Bank are a tangible example of this process. The development of neighborhoods and settlements in the " Greater Jerusalem" area has also introduced sophisticated and multi-leveled traffic systems. In order to enable the direct access enjoyed by residents of these neighborhoods and settlements to the sources of the occupation and the city center, residents of Palestinian neighborhoods and towns have been closed in. In constructing the traffic systems leading to settlements such as Gush Etzion and Ma'ale Adumim, unprecedented investments were made into bridge systems and wide, state-of-the-art tunnels passing below and above the Palestinian areas and, in fact, below and above the Palestinian reality, which Jewish residents do not even want to see.

One example of this can be found on Road No. 443, where the Palestinian town of Bir Nabala is hidden from those who cross the bridge above it by an array of concrete walls painted with rainbows and blue empty skies. An imagined orientalist view of reality replaces the panorama of the actual community, all the while masked by the argument that such a wall is necessary to guard the security of passing travelers. In the Bethlehem-area Jewish settlement of Gilo, a similar wall was constructed, ostensibly to protect residents from gunfire, and painted with an “improved” landscape of nearby Palestinian Beit Jala.

### **The Eastern Ring Road**

One of the largest transportation projects is a case study to the observed concepts , is that of Jerusalem’s Eastern Ring Road(Plan no 4558). This 15-kilometer-long highway that will pass through the most under-developed eastern neighborhoods, which house approximately one-third of the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem (some 65,000 people). This highway will be facilitated by tunnels and bridges, more or less on the edge of Jerusalem’s municipal territory, between the Palestinian neighborhoods

that are inside Jerusalem and those that lie to the east of the city, such as Azariyya, Abu Dis and az-Zaim.

"Bimkom" was asked by the Palestinian communities to help them with the formal objection to this road and check all the planning documents(6) , an examination of the reasons given for this sophisticated road revealed that they are not merely transportational , for example, completion of the traffic ring that already exists in West Jerusalem—but also geopolitical. The planned road will serve as a kind of patrol and border road, defining Jerusalem's municipal boundaries in conjunction with the Separation Wall. The implicit assumption is that this road will help prevent division of the city and the transfer of Palestinian neighborhoods to the Palestinian Authority in the event of substantive political negotiations.

The mainstream Israeli argument over this road focuses on how much the related financial investments actually serve the Israeli interest. Only a tiny aspect of the argument addresses the impact Palestinians will feel from this massive infrastructure project, even though—like the settlement roads in the West Bank—this road will also pass above and below their neighborhoods and dissect them like a highway, rather than a major urban artery serving the neighborhoods themselves. The goals detailed by the road's planners were mainly the creation of a fast-moving traffic array to connect the southern settlements (the Gush Etzion area) with those in the east (Ma'ale Edumim and the E-1 area), and from there on to the north (Adam, Geva Binyamin) without clogging the city center.

The road's development necessitates the expropriation of 1,250 acres of privately-owned lands from East Jerusalem Palestinians, and the destruction (at least) of 43 buildings only in the Jabel Mukaber neighborhood. The width of the area impacted by the highway ,as much as 200 meters, will further entail new construction limitations on buildings standing alongside it, not to mention certain damage to agricultural lands and sensitive natural resources. The blueprints as they stand will disconnect the neighborhoods through which the road passes (there are minimal entries and exits incorporated for the neighborhoods), as well as dissect an existing array of roads. Figure 3 demonstrates the expected damage in the Kidron River area. Bimkom has submitted objections to the construction of this ring road, emphasizing that it will not serve the neighborhoods it passes through, nor contribute to the development of urban areas, public institutions and residential neighborhoods, as its

plans are limited solely to the construction of the roadway. The plan does not propose alternative compensation, for instance, which would allow a landowner whose agricultural land was expropriated or damaged to build in a commercial development or residential area. Instead, Bimkom demanded that the proposed plan become a lever for the urban development of the entire East Jerusalem area, and that the plan be altered to minimize the injury to private landowners. The objection suggested, for one, that construction of supporting beams along the road could prevent the expropriation of agricultural lands currently needed for the work process alone.

### **One Way Mobility**

For Israelis, West Jerusalem before 1967 was a quiet, sleepy capital city at the end of a no-exit highway commonly called the “Jerusalem Corridor”; to them, it was a city centered around government offices and the Hebrew University. Since 1967, the Israeli planning system has resolved to invert this metropolitan process—i.e., to turn expanded Jewish Jerusalem into an urban metropolis, while simultaneously turning Palestinian East Jerusalem into a closed and degenerated neighborhood at the end of a cul-de-sac.

The development of this ring road as a fast highway and patrol road alongside the Separation Wall that seals Jerusalem will hinder the possibility of developing the local road system in East Jerusalem and adapting it to that of a modern and progressive city. Additionally, it will reinforce the trend of Israeli spatial domination over the whole Jerusalem metropolis, strengthening connections between the Jewish settlements near Jerusalem and the city itself.

Palestinian movement is at a stand-still. The Separation Wall will soon dramatically impact traffic flow into East Jerusalem. While previously regulated admission into the city occurred alongside unregulated admission, the Wall is intended to achieve complete control over all entrances and transitions. As previously noted, the historic road running towards the Dead Sea from Abu Dis has been completely blocked. The main road between Jerusalem and Ramallah has been bisected lengthwise and turned from a four-lane thoroughfare into a two-lane road, only be severed in the middle by the Separation Wall. Since the concrete barrier in this section is exposed to those traveling along the road, its built elements were reduced from a height of 8 meters to a height of 6.5 meters, in a “mini wall” model. (Petitions entered by the Palestinian

residents, accompanied by Bimkom's advisory brief, to abolish the wall or enable additional entrances through the wall were rejected by the Israeli Supreme Court.) Thus, a situation has been created in which East Jerusalem is gradually being closed in, and unlike other cities in the world where traffic systems are being enlarged and improved, the number of entrances into East Jerusalem is being purposefully minimized and its roads made narrower and narrower. In an analogy to blood vessels, the "veins" leading into the city are being blocked at an actual risk of "gangrene" to its limbs.

. In total, Jerusalem's road array—both existing and planned—can be read as a graph of political and planning realities in the city and the West Bank. The massive physical changes brought about by this system do not alter the essential problem that Jerusalem is a divided city. Theoretically, a solution might lie in the separation of the Siamese twins, or in finding a political resolution that enables cooperation based on principles of equality and freedom of movement.

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<sup>1</sup> The roads that were developed were generally the one tourist and foreigners could see as a "shop-window" concept  
see also in(  
[http://www.btselem.org/english/Jerusalem/Infrastructure\\_and\\_Services.asp](http://www.btselem.org/english/Jerusalem/Infrastructure_and_Services.asp)). Almost 90 percent of the sewage pipes, roads, and sidewalks are found in West Jerusalem; Entire Palestinian neighborhoods are not connected to a sewage system and do not have paved roads or sidewalks.