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Contrasting Jerusalem: Contested Urbanism at the Crossroads

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As far as the relation between planning and politics is concerned, Jerusalem represents an exceptional urban case to study. Jerusalem is a symbolic and tangible focal point in the Israeli Palestinian conflict, earning its position in urban studies and planning literature as one of the most ethno-nationally divided, polarized and contested cities (Bollens 2000; Klien 2001; Dumper 2014; Shlay and Rosen 2015). Competing religious and political narratives have affected Jerusalem's development and over the past half-century Israeli ethno-national principles have held a significant role in forming the contemporary city. For anyone contemplating about what our urban world can become under forces of extreme nationalism and exclusionary planning policy, Jeruaslem is an important lesson and cautionary warning for a growing number of contested cities. It is with these developments that *Shaping Jerusalem* engages with in further rigour and detail.

The book's author Francesco Chiodelli has over the past decade researched Israeli planning politics and practices in Jeruaslem. The book open with the statement; "[t]his is not another book about the Old City of Jeruaslem" (Perface), differentiating it from most of the prevalent academic social science literatures focus on the city's worldwide historical and religious significance. Instead we are presented with an intimate examination of Jerusalem's contested spatial politics over the past decades with a specific interest in recent dominant spatial and social transformations. Not surprisingly the principal focus throughout the text remains the city's tangible and symbolic geopolitical role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and why and how urban planning policy and practice has been a dominant tool to enhance one group's dominance over the other. There is commendable attention to detail in Chiodelli practical account of the production of unequal power relations and the formation of what has since 1967 become a forceful and partisan urban

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expansion project, with the aim of marginalising and excluding Palestinian existence and reinforcing sole Israeli spatial, political and demographic supremacy in Jerusalem (Margalit 2006).

The text is organised across three key sections, conjointly reviewing some of the major transformations since Jerusalem's 1967 expansion[1]; (1) planning Jewish neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem, (2) Israel's (lack) of sustainable urban policies and implantation of the dark side of planning (Yiftachel 1999) towards Palestinian's, and, (3) the "barrier-wall"[2] with it's wide ranging social and spatial discriminatory implications. The book effectively reviews the one-sided strategic planning policy and practice. On the one hand restricting any major future Palestinian expansion and demolishing what are zoned as "illegally built housing" excluded from the option of receiving planning permission by a discriminatory planning regime (Marom 2004), and on the other hand, erecting massive new neighbourhoods and infrastructure for Jewish residents in the annexed Eastern side of the city and its West Bank hinterlands (Rokem and Allegra 2016).

One of the central themes in the book is the exclusion of Palestinian communities cut off by the "barrier-wall" [2]. These impoverished walled enclaves have an unofficially estimated population of 80,000 residents. In concurrence with Chiodelli's projection that these areas were deliberately left on the Eastern side of the "barrier-wall", the current Israeli right-wing Netanyahu government is in the process of formulating a new law with the aim of omitting precisely these Palestinian neighbourhoods from the municipality's administrative boundary. In practice, it would imply the population living in these areas are striped from their Jeruaslem residency cards and will no longer have what is already a most restricted "right to the city". The Israeli right wing politicians see this change as critical in balancing the politically

[1] There is several different ways of describing the outcome of the 1967 War and the post war changes in Jeruaslem. Depending on political narrative some of the more common terms are, unification, annexation and occupation.

[2] Different terminology reflecting political narratives are used to describe the "barrier-wall", such as; ('security barrier', 'separation fence' and 'apartheid wall') to simplify, the common term "barrier-wall" is used in the text.

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charged demography of the city in favour of the Jewish majority in what will be the first modification of Jerusalem's municipal boundary since 1967.
This is a new phase in what has been labelled "the war over demography" (Fenster 2004). The Israel Central Bureau of Statistics estimated that at the end of 2013 the population of Jerusalem numbered 816,000. The Jewish population totalled 515,000 (63%) and the Palestinian population totalled 301,000 (37%). Unofficial statistics suggest that the actual demography is closer to a 43% Palestinians / 57% Jews ratio. Omitting about 80,000 Palestinian residents from Jerusalem's population would dramatically shift the demography in favour of the Jewish majority and may also translate to changing the current official Israeli planning strategy of maintaining 40% / 60% demographic balance to the original post 1967 target of keeping a 30% Palestinians /70% Jewish ratio in Jerusalem.

The book's primary emphasis on the ethno-national conflict and its prominent manifestation in defining Jerusalem's contemporary contested urban development is written with commendable attention to facts on the ground and joins several other prominent contributions (for some illustrations see: Bollens 2000; Klein 2001; Dumper 2014; Shlay and Rosen 2015). It is in the second most important aim of the book "The Lesson of Jeruaslem" outlined in it's final section that it holds the most promising and innovative potential for urban studies. In the last paragraph of the book Chiodelli open's up a new deliberation where he provides us with a hint towards what we can learn from Jerusalem's exceptional conditions:

> "The second lesson form the city relates to the peculiarities of planning an urban space. Some of these peculiarities (such as the unavoidable redistributive effects of spatial planning, it's nexus with the political sphere and its none neutrality) are clearly evident in Jeruaslem as they are so greatly amplified by the uniqueness of the context. On the contrary, in cases where ethnic and social tensions are lower and the stakes are less important from all points of view (historical, political, religious and symbolic), these aspects are mitigated and

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> sometimes reduced to a minimum. As a result they tend to despair from view. However Jeruaslem teaches us that one fact remains: these aspects are at the core of spatial planning; consequently they should be taken into account when one considers the organisation, regulation and design of urban space [in other urban areas]" (p. 137, emphasis added).

In other words Jerusalem's extreme conditions point to emergent contested processes more generally taking shape in other cities. Located between Europe, Africa and Asia, Jerusalem holds a pivotal metaphoric and practical illustration as the historical, geographical and theoretical crossroads of global urban studies. Placed between the *urban North and South* it has the potential of adding to current debates of "learning from anywhere" to enrich a more global urban studies (Robinson 2016). However, over the last few decades the city of Jeruaslem has been labelled as one of the most polarised (Bollens 2000); divided (Klein 2001; Wasserstein 2001); contested (Safier 2000, Rokem 2013); ethnocratic (Yiftachel and Yacobi 2002); colonial (Yiftachel 2016; Shlomo 2016); neo-colonial and neo-apartheid (Yacobi 2015), to mention some of the prevalent examples. All these contributions position the ethno-national conflict and unequal power relations as the principal force shaping Jeruaslem.

Whilst this is true, any description of a city through a one-dimensional conceptual lens suggests everything can be reduced to a specific frame. In reality below the looming geopolitical conflict a multi-layered and dynamically evolving urban everyday activity continues. It is precisely this overlapping and contrasting dimension of conflict and ordinariness in everyday urban life that makes Jeruaslem such a valuable case to learn from. While so far most of the academic literature frames Jeruaslem through its extreme political and violent fault-lines there has been less attention given to the full picture of daily conditions on the ground for those who are living within it's exclusionary and violent walled municipal borders. It is from this perspective that the book adds an important contribution to the emerging interest in *Learning from Jerusalem: to rethinking urban conflicts in the 21st century* (Rokem 2016). Chiodelli's

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theoretical contribution opens up ways to comprehend the potential of learning from one specific city to develop a wider theoretical conversation informing the growing interest in learning from other cities to deepen urban studies theory and practice.

The concluding fifth chapter uses the earlier chapters experiences to ground a wider theoretical discussion. Moving beyond the description of the national conflict and its implication on the politics of urban space brings a new opportunity to learn from the city's unequal production of exclusionary power relations more generally. It brings to the fore a need to reconsider planning policy more broadly asking what we can learn from extreme cases such as Jeruaslem to enrich our understanding of other planning and housing policies that marginalise urban residents across the realm of cities. As such, the book accomplishes its chief aim from an empirical perspective showcasing through detailed maps and in-depth policy analysis Jerusalem's local dark political conditions and their unequal impact on urban space and society are exposed. Current trends suggest that if the status quo remains, Jerusalem will continue to fragment along ethno-national and religious lines. Existing imbalances of political power are likely to intensify with the population trajectories of the Jewish ultra-orthodox population on the one hand and the Palestinian on the other. Nevertheless, it is hoped that given the abiding international interest in the city a shift in local political motivations will allow it to move on to new, more positive tracks that build on its long history of coexistence (Rokem and Vaughan 2017).

What this book teaches us beyond the tragedy of prioritising Israeli national interests leading to violent and one-sided use of a planning in Jeruaslem; is a need for a general wakeup call to scrutinize neo-liberal urban planning practices and the different degrees and nuances that they overlap with national and ethnic discriminatory and exclusionary practices affecting a growing part of global urban societies. There is both a political and humanitarian concern that is predominantly *urban* and affecting the everyday life of city dwellers across urban geopolitics scales (Rokem and Boano 2018). As researchers and residents in a predominantly urbanized world we can no

longer ignore expanding violence, disaster, and division. Urban environments across the planet are becoming hypersecuritised and yet insecure (Rokem 2017 et al). For anyone with interested in an in-depth account of the recent politics and planning changes in Jeruaslem I would warmly recommend to read the book. But I would suggest reading this book can also be an important warning sign pointing us at some of the ethno-national forces shaping the nature of contested cities on a global scale.

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