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**Mapping communities and social  
problems in Jerusalem.  
Demographic trends, neighbourhood  
identities and clashing narratives.**

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Jerusalem is neither holy nor ordinary city. It is difficult to understand how such a contested space, where different legitimizations and narratives are continuously involved and at odds with each other, might be rhetorically assumed as a symbol of peace and coexistence. To all visitors coming first to the city it is clearly visible that Jerusalem is neither heaven on earth nor any especially spiritual place, where all of a sudden human historical or philosophical dilemma will set at rest and find an answer. On the contrary, most probably visitors might walk out of the city more confused and wretched than they stepped in. Exploring the Old City and all its monumental alleys, full of history and diverging memories, foreigners, tourists or whatever the goal of the journey, will come up with the feeling that human beings are complex creatures, difficult to understand in-depth, while even more difficult is to grasp the hidden and ideal motivations of their actions.

I would like therefore to introduce my short paper by three of the theoretical premises around which it is built: the first is that Jerusalem is exploiting a collective rhetorical imaginary that has nothing to do with its real marks and features; the second is that Jerusalem is an Israeli city, although with a large Arab minority and a strong cultural bond with its cultural heritage and current presence- and this is by no means a political statement, rather an objective remark; the third is that Jerusalem is no example of multiculturalism, although is a good one of pluralism or segregated coexistence, where, unlike Europe, respective communities are not opposing each other in terms of ethnical racism but more out of national and cultural belonging (and social well-being). I would elaborate further on this point as it needs additional clarification.

The paper will consist therefore on *excursus* and introduction to the different communities, historically shaped and currently living in the city, which bestow a collective identity and a specific narrative to the neighborhood they inhabit. The analysis of the way and understanding of the city by its various residents will show the complexity of the open problems and questions still facing the city. It will try to convey the main cleavages of the city which combine practical socio-economic aspects with community cultural and religious expectations, while at the same time interplaying with broader military and security aspects that go beyond the city and its management to point and reveal their connection to the yet unsolved Arab-Israeli conflict.

The purpose is so demythologizing Jerusalem as a “community of destiny”, while the groups that are living the city do not share any of the premises that traditionally bring people together. I would finally remark on the role play by projects of modernization- of transports, services and communications- that point to the development of the city through a certain degree of normalization, which, however, tend implicitly to minimize or deny the existence of an open conflict, while suggesting that technical means and productivity might autonomously be able to deliver major changes both in space and in the hearts and minds of the people.

## 1.1 The “ambiguity” of a united Jerusalem: some remarks

Ira Sharkansky talks about Jerusalem as the siege of ambiguity *par excellence*, in reference to the policies carried out by the Israeli government since 1967<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, the State of Israel spent some 13 years in defining the final legal *status* of the city with the Basic Law, after its miraculous recapture by the IDF, celebrated and canonized by the picture of two Israeli secular soldiers taking off their helmets mesmerized by the Wailing Wall just at the end of the battle<sup>3</sup>. This image suddenly toured around and became the symbolic tool for conveying a new message of national reconciliation between secular and religious Jews:

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<sup>2</sup> Sharansky, I., “The Potential of ambiguity: the case of Jerusalem”, *Israel Affairs*, 3: 3, 187 - 200, Jerusalem, 1997;

<sup>3</sup> “Chief Military Rabbi Shlomo Goren embracing a Torah scroll, with a paratrooper standing behind him The headline: “the great trumpet shall be blown” (Isaiah 27:13) (Sheffi,, N., “Shifting boundaries: the 1967 War in Israeli children’s magazine”, *The Journal of Israeli History*, Vol. 28, no.2., Sept. 2009 , p.145)

with the conquest of Jerusalem, both Jewish groups were able to identify with the reborn state of Israel on an equal footing, with their respective narratives holding a evenhanded position in the new national *ethos*<sup>4</sup>.

After 1967, some observers were still betting on the transitory character of the conquest of the city and on the Israeli government's will to give it back once promising negotiations with the Jordanian kingdom would have started off: this stance proved to be very optimistic. Nowadays there is broad historical evidence of the contrary, which means the absolute and clear intentions of the Israeli establishment to unify the city since the early beginning, whatever the price and international risks implied by this choice<sup>5</sup>. However, this strong commitment did not point in the sense of a European-style annexation of the Eastern side of the city, rather on a target-oriented and Ottoman- style management of services and spaces on a community-base. For example, the management of the Christian religious complexes was demanded to their respective religious *establishments* with no financial or administrative check by the Israeli authorities, also in order not to clash explicitly with the Vatican and the board of Orthodox Churches present in the country. Similarly, some services and Jordanian laws already in place in East Jerusalem were not immediately removed or repealed, but for example Jordanian licenses, associations and school-curricula were hold on, while also the Jordanian currency – the dinar- continued to be widely employed. What it is interesting to notice here, is that the selective and community-based approach was not only employed in reference to the Muslim or Christian minorities of the newly conquered half of the city, but also towards the Jewish religious ultra-Orthodox groups spreading in and out of the Old City.

Sharansky points out to this element of “managed ambiguity”<sup>6</sup> while stating that the same technique characterizes the attitude of Israeli authorities to both Jewish and non-Jewish minorities. In this line, Sharansky underlines the ineffectiveness and inconsistency of Israeli policies in the light of accomplishing a real unification of the city by pinning out how in 1993, during the Oslo agreements, the government had agreed “even” to grant the Palestinians of East Jerusalem the right to vote for the Palestinian elections, as if they were no citizens of the State of Israel.

While my reasoning does not fall in line with Sharansky and is sustained by a different perspective of the overall conflict, the core of the statement is true: the designedly ambiguous attitude of Israeli authorities towards the status of the city had a double and controversial effect on its management and further contributed to both the misleading opinions circulating about it in the international community and to the increase of the real inter-communities' problems the city has to face on a daily basis. Therefore, it can be inferred that, despite the utility for politicians and policy-makers, confronted with dual and conflicting constituencies and a single urban space, to promote ambiguity in order to postpone or blur difficult decisions, in the long run this attitude leads to a worsening of the conflicts, as unmet mutual expectations weigh heavily on it, while illegality spreads in the lack of common laws and rules universally applicable by the various players<sup>7</sup>.

A final issue to be raised is the mounting nationalistic symbolism of the city for a intermingled Jewish and Israeli national identity. On May 12<sup>th</sup> 1968, a Jerusalem day was established by the State of Israel to mark the reunification of the city: it was turned by the

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<sup>4</sup> “We have a feeling that this time we are fighting on our sacred historical and. It is a tremendous experience flying over Jericho, Hebron, Bethlehem, and the Philistines' Ashkelon, More than to thousand years ago Joshua bin Nun already encircled Jericho. Now we will do it again (...) I want my children to learn a lot about their people in school, I want them to be able to visit all the places where the Jewish people resided.” (Bar Zohar, M., “HaKodesh haArokh beIoter”, TA, Lewin Epstein, 1968, pag263-64)

<sup>5</sup> See Dumper, M. , *The Politics of Jerusalem since 1967*, The Institute of Palestinian Studies, Jerusalem, 1997.

<sup>6</sup> *Sharansky, cit.* pag. 191.

<sup>7</sup> See Friedman, A., Nasrallah, R., *Divided cities in transition, International Peace and Cooperation Centre*, Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies, 2003.

majority of the Knesset into a public holiday only in 1998<sup>8</sup>. Actually, the date is not falling every year on the same day of the Christian/universal calendar, as it is celebrated according to the Jewish one, on the 28<sup>th</sup> of Iyar. This might look like a minor aspect, but it should not be overlooked, as the Jewish calendar is often imposed on festivities and other national dates in order to remind all Jews of the unique history of their people and the religious significance attached to national events, thus acquiring a double meaning. All national events should be a reminder of the double loyalty and devotion of the Jewish people to their land and their religion, as if they were two facets of the same coin, totally intertwined. Therefore, the Jerusalem Day has both a nationalistic and a religious meaning<sup>9</sup>.

The timing of its conversion into a public holiday is also significant: in 1998, the former Netanyahu government is progressively parting from the Oslo Agreements, soon doomed to fail. Marking the Jerusalem Day as a public holiday and a day of national unity was directed at conveying the message that Israel was a Jewish state where religion was and should continue to play a leading role in defining citizenship and in orienting the conduct of the state and the army. It was also a sign sent to religious Jews in order to appease them - and all the ones deceived or openly oppose to the agreements and a process of reconciliation with the Palestinians: again the message put across was that Jerusalem was never to be divided under the framework of the negotiations officially still in progress. The celebrations include many controversial actions and summons of past events, such as: the inauguration of the homes of the first two Jewish families to live on Mount of Olives in 2,000 years; the celebration of the undergoing seizure of East Jerusalem blocks ( for example, in Nachalat Shimon, just 200 meters west of the Shimon HaTzaddik neighborhood) by Yeshivat Beit Orot, a *hesder* yeshiva (combining Torah studies with army service), all initiatives deemed to “redeem” old Jewish neighborhoods in the capital. These activities, sponsored by MK Rabbi Benny Elon, the former dean of the abovementioned yeshiva, said that the purpose is to form Jewish "territorial contiguity" in the area, "from Shmuel HaNavi neighborhood, through Shimon HaTzaddik, to the Hyatt Regency area, to Beit Orot<sup>10</sup>". If the nationalistic symbolism would not stand out from these actions, it is further possible to recall that the flag march characterizing the celebrations on that day bring together thousands of school pupils from all over the country and includes a walk around the Old City Gate, an explicit commemoration of the seizure of the Eastern side of the city, and it is organized in cooperation with the Yeshivat Merkaz HaRav Kook, the main supporter of religious settlements of the West Bank, renamed “Judea and Samaria” , while no mention whatsoever is made to the Arab heritage and community of the city<sup>11</sup>.

The question is therefore how such a provocative and harmful initiative has gained the support of the authorities and the minds of most of the Jewish residents of the city, as they recall the reunification with the other side of the city, whereas no mention is made to the people living in this space, as if they had been completely driven away of history. In retaliation, and increasingly worried about the denial of their identity by public authorities, the Arab residents have enhanced cooperation with the Palestinian National Authority with the aim of marking their Nakba Day and appointing Jerusalem- al Quds as the Arab capital of culture in 2009<sup>12</sup>. However, they could not escape the paradox of Mahmoud Abbas launching the celebration from Bethlehem. Besides, Arab Jerusalemites and Palestinians alike met a very repressive response from Israeli authorities, with Israeli Internal Security Minister Avi Dichter instructing police to suppress PNA-sponsored events because they

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/jerusalem\\_day\\_law.htm](http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/jerusalem_day_law.htm).

<sup>9</sup> “(Regarding the 1967 War) for instance, the Passover Haggadah only six weeks prior to the conquest of the desert that, according to tradition, their ancestors had crossed, while the war ended immediately before Shavuot, which marks the giving of the Torah to the Jewish people in their journey through the Sinai.” (Sheffi, N., cit., p.147)

<sup>10</sup> Rutz Sheva, Jerusalem, 9/5/2002.

<sup>11</sup> Sheleg, Y., “Merkaz HaRav: the flagship of national-religious yeshivas”, Haaretz, 7.3.2008.

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.alquds2009.org/etemplate.php?id=92>.

constituted a violation of the Oslo *interim* agreements, which include a clause stating that the PA is prohibited from organizing events in Israeli territory<sup>13</sup>. It is likely that further taunts by Jewish radical groups and counter-reactions from Arab Palestinians Jerusalemites might be able to provoke an escalation and inflame again the precarious coexistence in the city, as the prevailing confidence in Jewish-Arab relations has been already compromised by the 2008 terrorist attacks carried out by Arab Jerusalemites<sup>14</sup>, while at the same time the Palestinians reproach to their fellow Jerusalemite Jews to express consensus, whether implicitly or explicitly, to the eroding of Palestinian sovereignty on the Eastern side of the city.

It is unmistakable that ambiguity, in the case of Jerusalem, has not helped promoting neither intercommunity coexistence nor the desirable pragmatic, though difficult, compromises yet to achieve.

## 1.2 Social cleavages and open problems

Jerusalem is a unique city struck by major problems and multiple cleavages rarely combine into a single environment. Those features may be enlisted in order of relevance as follows: poverty, religious radicalism, Arab nationalism, Jewish nationalism, double standards between Eastern/Western sides, and modernization versus tradition. In the following paragraph, I would address two of the abovementioned points (widespread **poverty and religious radicalism**), as much has been already written and researched on the other major cleavage, the deepening gap between East and West Jerusalem in social services, transports and, generally speaking, in public services, notwithstanding the fact that their citizens both contribute to the same amount in municipal taxes<sup>15</sup>. Instead, I will leave out for the moment being the issue of traditionalism versus modernization, as this would be dealt with in the last paragraph, while drawing the final remarks and conclusions.

The first point to rise in order of relevance is **poverty**, an element structurally characterizing the city. Time and again Jerusalem is renowned for its monuments and religious sites, for the contrast between its luxurious gardens and modern buildings and the sandy and bare hills of the Judean desert just outside the city, for the conflict and the symbolic role it plays within it, and, lately, for witnessing a fresh outbreak of violence and self-murderous terrorist attacks between 2001 and 2008. Seldom, the city is linked to poverty and underdevelopment: two of the main features actually characterizing its social structure and systematically affecting its population. The latter consists of 763.600 people composed of 35% of Arabs and 10.2% of ultra-Orthodox Jews<sup>16</sup>, two communities that

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<sup>13</sup> “[Police shut down Palestinian culture event in Jerusalem](#)”, Yediot Ahronot, 21/3/2009.

<sup>14</sup> The reference is to the massacre in the Yeshiva Merkaz HaRav of the 6<sup>th</sup> of March 2008 in Jerusalem. 22% of the terrorist attacks since 2000 (for a total amount of 127) have taken place in Jerusalem. Some of them were carried out by Jerusalemite Arabs, thus undermining the widespread Israeli assumption that Jerusalemite Arabs and Palestinians of the Occupied Territories were by no means engaged in the same fight for recognition.

<sup>15</sup> “Palestinian Jerusalemites are considered Israeli residents not citizens and are subject to Israeli law police and courts municipal budget taxation and infrastructure according to the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistic over 208,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites (32% of the city's total population) receive less than 12 of the municipal budget on average the city invests seven times as much on Jewish resident as on a Palestinian resident in addition Palestinians are exposed to an unfair tax system e.g arnona tax which requires them to pay the same rates as their Israeli counterparts whose per capita income is approx 8 times higher.”(PASSIA, Special Bulletin, Jerusalem, May 2002)

<sup>16</sup> 78.300 *Haredim* and 47.100 religious observant according to the data provided by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, Table III, no. 17 (2008). As it often difficult to distinguish between Orthodox or modern Orthodox) and Ultra Orthodox Jews, they all fall in the category “religious Jews”. Altogether they represent the 17% of the whole

traditionally tend to have low employment rates. In the city, only 43% of the population is employed, a rate far below the national average of 54%<sup>17</sup>. According to the same survey, 41% of the Jerusalemites are lagging under the poverty line. In East Jerusalem, this percentage is even further obvious and includes a 65% of Palestinians and 31% of Jews<sup>18</sup>. Another open plague is child poverty, rating 45% of West Jerusalem and 75% of East Jerusalem.

According to the Jerusalem Institute for Justice, increasing poverty in Jerusalem is also a direct effect of the continuous widening of social and economic gaps in the whole Israeli society in the last ten years. A report states that: “(Israel as a nation) saw a 1.3% increase in poverty between 2008 and 2009 with 15,000 families added to the growing number of poor”<sup>19</sup>. This trend grows from year to year but it is dramatically affecting the areas of the country already depressed and poorly-integrated in the globalized markets, which means the Negev’s development towns and Jerusalem’s poor neighborhoods, Kiryat Shmona in the North and the Druze villages of the Golan Heights. It is also fueling emigration: according to the statistics, approximately 6.600 leave Jerusalem every year, mostly youth<sup>20</sup>. Poverty has always been a striking element of Jerusalem - since the foundation of the State of Israel and even beforehand - while during the division of the city in two different *enclaves* and separate administrations also the Jordanian-run side was typified by a lower level of development compared to the rest of the kingdom. The same goes for West Jerusalem, for long regarded by the Israeli authorities as a place where to divert non-rewarding funds to for the sake of its politically symbolic value, while the business centre and the productive core of the country were staying in Tel Aviv. The war was affecting the structure, the transport network and the population dispersal of the city, therefore playing an important role in diverting funds and investments away to more productive and secure areas of the country. Another collective Jewish fear lingering over the city and shared by the Israeli authorities, was that Jerusalem might be recaptured by the Arabs or just handed back over again to Jordan or to the Palestinians under future peace agreements. This was also curtailing the overall volume of long-term investments carried out by the authorities in the city, while the greatest amount of them was aimed at securing its borders. The number of workers employed in financial, trade or high-tech is very low and the average salary lags behind the rest of the country: the Jerusalemite workforce stands out as mostly employed in the public sector, in tourism and in constructions. Among Jews and in the public sector, the great majority is employed in administrative tasks (mostly Ministries’ bureaucracy) and in teaching, both not financially very rewarding jobs and directly liable to inflations and political backlashes. Moreover, the two leading communities of Jerusalem, the ultra-Orthodox and the Arabs, both accounts for the greatest percentage of women unemployment, as culturally-wise both communities do not promote women employment outside the household<sup>21</sup>. In fact, there are different trends at play in the two communities: the first, the ultra-Orthodox, accounts for the highest rate of men unemployment, while traditionally women are working in teaching, services, small businesses and other low-skilled jobs. On the other way round, the same is true for the Arab communities, where findings point in the opposite direction: a very high rate of unemployment of women “left

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population of the city. The Ultra Orthodox Jews alone constitute the 29% of the Jewish population of Jerusalem.

<sup>17</sup> Central Bank of Israel, Research Division, *Statistic Yearbook*, 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Data extracted from al-Jazeera, *Poverty widespread in E-Jerusalem*, 10/5/2010. <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2010/05/201051081849739152.html>

<sup>19</sup> “Upholding Israel’s poor”, Social Justice, Jerusalem Institute for Justice, <http://www.jij.org.il/project.php?id=1>.

<sup>20</sup> See *Statistical Yearbook of Jerusalem of 2002*, Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies, 2003. See also: Shachar, A., “Jérusalem risqué-t-elle une crise économique?”, Jerusalem Institute for Israeli Studies, 15/11/2004.

<sup>21</sup> See Hazan, M., “Child labor, female labor force participation, and economic growth”, Jerusalem, 2002.

at home” and a slightly higher percentage of men employment concentrated in shops, small trades and construction sites.

The productive potential of Jerusalem is in fact low and further penalized by the high concentration of unskilled or low-skilled workers residing in the area. No major industries are located in the city (only 9% of the working population are employed in industry) and even those companies which attempt to install some plants in its outskirts, enticed by state subsidies directed at tackling the traditionally high unemployment rate, rarely succeed due to the complex social and religious issues linked to the city.

An example among all, the huge demonstrations staged by *haredi* Jews in 2010 against the decision of the Intel industrial giant to open its plants on Saturdays: the question at stake was the desecration of *Shabbat*. In these events and in similar cases, local authorities tried to negotiate between the two parties for the best general interest of the city, but there was no consensus on what this latter would mean. Although it might be rational to think that improving the industrial network and the working opportunities of the city would turn into an amelioration of its general conditions, the symbolic value of keeping *Shabbat* in the most sacred city of the Jews and the political interest in not harassing demographically-increasing *haredi* communities, does not point in a single, clear-cut direction. This example by itself is illustrative of the cleavages at stake in the Israeli society, that take a particular turn for the worse in Jerusalem, a place where all conflicts tend to deepen.

This case perfectly exemplifies and pins out the second main cleavage of the city: religious radicalism. Although some cases of Islamic religious radicalism and Christian Evangelical and Mormons’ fundamentalism might be also met, the main inclination stays with the ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities<sup>22</sup>. Demographically growing, those communities are getting bolder and increasingly vocal on the public scene. They are much differentiated among themselves and refer to different rabbis and traditions, but they gather together in order to claim a more religious outlook for the city. For example, they require their neighborhoods to be sealed off from the rest of the city and closed off for traffic on weekends, their local services and shops to employ only religious Jews wearing a skullcap, their schools and transport means serving their neighborhoods to apply segregation between men and women, and police and state authorities not to meddle too further in their own community affairs<sup>23</sup>.

Traditionally, they inhabit limited and *haredi*-only areas, such as Mea Sharim and Bukharim in the centre, or they infiltrated former secular or new neighborhoods, such as Neve Yaacov, Givat Shaul, Har Nof e Kiryat Moshe more in the outskirts. Those neighborhoods are characterized by their dense demographic concentration per square meter, by low standards of buildings and community infrastructures, by poor and self-run services and by total lack of integration of their social and commercial activities with the rest of the city. Therefore, the ultra-Orthodox communities residing in these areas might be described as “self-reliant and retreated in themselves”. Cradling themselves in the overambitious ambition of relying only on their own both from a community and cultural perspective, they financially rely on secular tax payers and state funds for their well-being, comprising a huge percentage of the population heavily relying on social security’s benefits.

Ultra-Orthodox Jews are no single group. They differentiate among themselves according to ethnic and religious origins (Askenazi-Sephardic) and according to the Rabbi regarded as the founder of a particular stream. The main denominations are the group of the Baal Shem Tov, the one that harks back to the Gaon of Vilna (also known as *hassidim*), the one of Rabbi Scach of Lithuania and the Sephardic groups that relate to and merge in the Shas

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<sup>22</sup> Stadler, N., “Yeshiva fundamentalism: piety, gender, and resistance in the ultra-Orthodox world”, New York University Press, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> To further inquiry on Jerusalem’s Orthodox communities, see: Rabbi Bezalel Cohen, “Economic hardship and gainful employment in Haredi society in Israel”, Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, Jerusalem, 2006.

party of Rabbi Ovadia Yosef<sup>24</sup>. Although the level of inter-conflict is quite high, all the *haredi* streams join in waging a war to the secular authorities of the State claiming more representation on the public scene and on national politics. They consist of around 30.000 people in Jerusalem, by no means the highest *haredi* concentration of the country, which consists altogether in 250.000 ultra-Orthodox Jews, mostly residing in Bnei Brak, a suburban town close to Tel Aviv.

However, it is in Jerusalem, due to the symbolic role of the city, that they staged their most significant battles against the Zionist state, challenging the *status quo* agreed upon with Ben Gurion in 1948. At that time, *haredi* Jews were counting only 400, while nowadays, they feel they can get more vocal on social and legal issues imposing their demands on the wider collectivity thanks to the political weight they conquered since 1999. Then, Shas became the third biggest party in the Knesset and altogether the religious party gathered 22 seats, thus controlling *de facto* the balance of power between the two major secular parties. In a very fragmented political *spectrum* such as the Israeli one and due to the low-mark proportional system in place, the religious party achieved the power to determine the outcome of any election and therefore also to impose their own agenda in the Knesset. This agenda includes sensitive issues such as the definition of Israeli citizens, a bellicose stance in the Arab-Israeli conflict, the upkeep of the military exemption for young *haredi* scholars and for women; the constant tug-of-war with the Israeli Supreme Court on issues regarding personal status, inheritance, marriages and women's rights, and the relevance of religious *halachic* rules and festivities not only in the public calendar but also on the work schedule of private and national companies, such as the cases of the Ashdod Harbor's opening and the El Al's flights on *Shabbats*.

Major *haredi* riots took place in June-July 2009 as well as during the 2010 spring: the main claims were targeting the opening of some touristic parking lots next to the Old City on *Shabbats*, the digging up of some ancient graves and the arrest of an *haredi* mother starving her 3-years old child due to psychiatric problems and the intervention of secular social assistants in the latter case. The increasing radicalism of both demands and riots of *haredi* Jews have spurred some weak reactions by secular Jews, which have gathered in a movement called "Wake-up Jerusalem", under the banner of a "free Jerusalem", asking for a municipality truly representative of all Jerusalemites and sincerely committed to their cohabitation. The protests have led the authorities to halt activities and remove municipal employees from the neighborhoods concerned by the riots until violence totally ends: however, the authorities are constantly blackmailed and under electoral pressure to give in to *haredi* claims in order not to compromise the ultra-Orthodox parties' support for the current government, both at local and national level.

In the tug-of-war between secular and religious Jews in Jerusalem, there is much at stake: first of all, the definition of the country as a Jewish state with no distinction between state and religion and no equal rights for Jews and non-Jews alike; second point, the battle waged on the laws regulating immigration and *aliyah*, against a background of total seizure of the Ministry of Interior by the religious Shas; third point, the state subsidies allotted yearly to religious Jews, which amount to about 30 million dollars a year; fourth point, the issue of military duty and its exemption for religious Jews; fifth of all, the overall character of Israeli society and the increasing difficulty in handling a budget that bears heavily on secular Jews<sup>25</sup>.

In the backdrop, though, additional economical and development questions are also lingering and waiting for a decision by the municipal and state authorities. Nir Barkat, the current mayor of Jerusalem, has bet majorly on tourism, setting the target of 15 millions tourists a year for the city at its fullest potential. However, the achievement of this goal

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<sup>24</sup> Shas only obtained 17 seats in the 1999 elections. For further inquiries about the history of the party, see: Lehmann, D., Siebzeiner, B., *Remaking Israeli Judaism: the challenge of Shas*, Oxford University Press, USA, 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Zarembski, L., "Refracted vision: an analysis of religious-secular tensions in Israel", The Floersheimer Institute for Policy Studies, 2005.



relies heavily on the ability of the city to display new infrastructures, to provide security and to ensure overall a tourists-friendly environment. The latter is influenced by the day-to-day international appraisal of the country's political conditions and immediately affected by negative forecasts on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

### 1.3 Jerusalem: neighborhoods' and communities' narratives

It is impossible to review and give a comprehensive account of Jerusalem neighborhoods and of the different communities sharing the same urban space: what I would rather try to sum up here, is the main examples of communities lifestyles and narratives buttressing the open problems of the city, too often overlooked by foreign ministries and politicians addressing the issue of the nature and possible lines of division of the city according to international laws. Leaving out for once the ultra-Orthodox Jews, already dealt with in the paragraph devoted to religious radicalism, and the Arabs, whose community issues have been widely addressed in other studies, the following paragraph will concentrate on *Mizrahi* Jews (or Jews from Arab countries), Soviet immigrants, the Christian minorities and the Beta Israel.

Looking at the city plan, it is not difficult to understand where boundaries lie in a urban spaces defined by clear-cut dividing lines such as the route 1, the main transport link, crossing the city from north to south and connecting the new fortress-style neighborhoods Pisgat Zeev with the south edge of the city, the industrial and commercial area of Talpiot. This main road was also the historical boundary between East and West, which means between Israel and Jordan for 19 years. On both sides the two armies were staring at each other and from time to time exchanging fire and the areas of Musrara and Wadi el-Joz, respectively located at the two sides of the road, were traditionally regarded as dangerous and inhabited by distressed and low-class workers, or new immigrants in the case of Israel<sup>26</sup>.

It is in the 80s, after the Likud won the elections in 1977 and Begin launched "Project Renewal" - a plan designed to "address the effects of social and economic distress among residents of urban neighborhoods undergoing rapid physical and social deterioration"<sup>27</sup> - that the fate of neighborhoods like Musrara and Wadi el-Joz started parting from each other. The first was singled out for financial aids in the form of subsidized loans and the government pushed residents to buy their own apartments within the maximum provided for by the State. This project did not comprise any neighborhood of East Jerusalem. The final goal was renovating ancient Arab houses and buildings, upgrading the already existing infrastructures and enlarging the housing unit built in the 50s under immigration pressure, the "famous" cheap two and four family homes, usually no bigger than 32 square meters in size.

However, once the renovation completed some of the main buildings and particularly the old stone Arab houses spread in the neighborhood became the target of financial speculation by entrepreneurs looking for new investments' opportunities in the city. Thus, they progressively pushed out the former residents and turned the buildings and the

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<sup>26</sup> The same goes for other areas of the city, such as Katamon, also known as Gonenim (the defenders") in Hebrew and others:

"Que ce soit Bet Shean, Maalot, Kiryat Shmone, Eilat Musrara, Katamonim, Talpiot, Mamilla, Mandelbaum ou Shmuel Hanavi, Ben Gurion et ses successeurs ont pris soin de placer les Juifs orientaux sur la première ligne de confrontation et de les transformer de cette manière en une véritable muraille vivante contre le Liban, la Syrie, la Jordanie et la bande de Gaza. 20 années durant, jusqu'au 1967, les Sépharades ont ainsi vécu dans la peur permanente des assauts arabes. Quoi de plus naturel qu'ils redoutent ces derniers, eux qui se trouvent dans les endroits aussi vulnérables? (Marciano, S., Discrimination et intoxication" in Flapan, S., Shaham, D., *Outlook*, TA, 1981, p. 64)

<sup>27</sup> Lazar, F., *Politics and Policy Implementation, Project Renewal in Israel*, New York Press, Albany, 1994.

character of most parts Musrara into a well-off, comfortable residential area, where also the Ministry of Education, the City Hall complex of Safra Square, the HaTefer Museum of Tolerance and the Musrara-Morasha music school are located. Some of the oldest residents, second- and third-generation *Mizrahim*, offspring of the Mass *Aliyah* immigrants of the 50s, are still residing in the neighborhood in the small area where the few original blocks are standing<sup>28</sup>. There it is possible to breathe the old social atmosphere of Musrara: especially, its ambiguous stance towards official Zionism and the mainstream version of Israeli history sponsored by the national authorities, which does not embrace nor value Sephardic culture and the generation of the desert's contribution in setting up the State<sup>29</sup>. In the small alleys of Musrara and among its destitute buildings, Moroccan Jews' families are living apart from the state, guarding some kind of resentment toward the former Askenazi-led society in all its variations: the intellectuals, the great generals of the Independence War, the historical Mapai leaders Ben Gurion, Levi Eskol and Golda Meir, the internationalists and the Lithuanian-school *haredim*, which turned the Jewish religion into a closed-off and self-centered, fundamentalist and over-hierarchical community exploiting faith as a tool of power.

Not all *Mizrahi* Jews are reproachful of the current situation or nostalgic of the past. The ones that moved on to the middle class became less and less politicized, besides the local level, and more involved in the mainstream Israeli society at the business and social level<sup>30</sup>. They lived in neighborhoods such as the French Hill, Ramat Eshkol, Givat Ha-Mivtar, Talpiot and Talpiot East, Karen Avraham, Ma'aleh Adumim and some succeeded even in making their way to the German Colony. The great majority of the *Mizrahi* Jews<sup>31</sup> portray themselves as "traditionalists", which means selectively religiously-observant, and together with the more radical streams of Judaism also represented in the city, they contribute to imparting the city its dominant religious atmosphere. They vote mostly for Likud, Kadima or Shas, are critical of Oslo, supporters of Netanyahu and envious of the immigrating conditions and the linguistic autonomy enjoyed by the Russians, have relatives in the *settlements* or those not publicly (according to the Israeli domestic *consensus*) regarded as such, which span from the neighborhood of Gilo, built on land conquered in 1967, to Ma'aleh Adumim, a model community built on land that both from a geographical and a political Oslo agreements-based point of view, should be fully located in the future state of Palestine. Generally speaking, they do not make it up to University, besides enrolling in increasing numbers in the Faculties of Law and Economics, but mostly swell the ranks of private colleges granting a variety of post-secondary degrees<sup>32</sup> or the ones of the army and the Ministries, or start up a self-entrepreneurship carrier in high-tech or trade.

The Old City is a unique case on its own. Traditionally divided in 4 neighborhoods according to the historical main religious groups of the city, it counts nowadays only 14.000

<sup>28</sup> Hoffman, A., *House of windows: portraits from a Jerusalem neighbourhood*, Arcadia, London, 2001.

<sup>29</sup> This is the neighbourhood where the Black Panthers movement started in 1971.

<sup>30</sup> "Prominent communities are to be found (...) in the French Hill district of Jerusalem and in the town of Ma'aleh Adumim in the West Bank (...) We focus here on regions which fall between 6ad 9 on the 10-point scale employed by the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) for measuring socio-economic status. (...) These are not "troubled neighborhoods" or peripheral regions from a social perspective. (...) On the contrary, these communities vibrate with optimism and a sense of progress and social empowerment." (Cohen, U., Leon, N., *The new Mizrahi middle class: ethnic mobility and class integration in Israel*, Journal of Israeli History, 27:1, 51-64)

<sup>31</sup> Ghanem, A., *Ethnic politics in Israel: the margins and the Ashkenazi center*, Routledge, London, 2010.

<sup>32</sup> "During the 80s and 90s, the higher education system in Israel was transformed from a small, fairly centralized and homogeneous system revolving around the "Seven Stars"- the country's dominant universities and research institutions- into a large, diversified system (...) the total number of colleges increased 400%, from 21 to 84." (*ibidem*).

Christians, including the whole Arab Christian communities and the clergy. In Israel, Christian counts overall only for 2% of the population. Of the Jerusalemite Christians, 4.500 are Catholics, 3.500 Orthodox and 2.600 Reform or Protestants. Their number is progressively diminishing due to emigration, both caused by the harassment of the majority Muslim community, the discriminatory policies of Israeli authorities affecting Muslim and Christian Arabs alike, and the uncertainty of the future and the widespread violence. Christians usually enjoy better economic *status* than their Muslim fellows and therefore they can emigrate more easily to neighbouring European Christian countries, especially Greece, and overseas, mostly to the U.S.A. and Canada. Historically, the Christians have fought along their Muslim Jerusalemites and taken part in the PLO, joining the ranks of the Leftist Palestinian groups such as the Popular Front for Liberation of Palestine or the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. However, in the last decade they have been trapped between their Arab cultural identity and the re-politicization of Islam taking the upper hand among the Muslim community, thus gradually distancing and marginalizing them from official Palestinian representations<sup>33</sup>. During his last pastoral visit in the Holy Land the Pope Benedict the XVI<sup>o</sup> expressed all his anxiety about the conditions and the shrinking percentage of Christian in the country and particularly in Jerusalem, launching a fund for helping out Christian Palestinians to stay and even to provide incentives to those who left to resettle there. In the demographic fight for community recognition in the Holy Land, it seems that loosing the grip on Jerusalem is a hard task even for the Catholic Church. While the Catholics are busy re-filling the ranks of their community, the Orthodox care about their formal representation in another way: they gave up fighting for religious freedom and freedom of worship as stated in sound international agreements as well as from a demographic point of view, but they wage an open competition with the Catholic Church for any inch of the Holy Sepulcher and the Nativity Church in Bethlehem. Both groups consider that the importance of their presence in the Holy City far outweigh their demographic size and that they still have a role to play in the near future of the city. However, it seems more likely that they will follow the footsteps of their fellow Armenian Christians, which survive altogether in the number of 2.500 people as an historical and somehow folkloristic remnant of a remote time<sup>34</sup>.

The Russians or ex-FSU immigrants are poorly represented in Jerusalem. Only a small percentage opted for the city and the Russian immigrants of the 90s count barely for 4.5% of the Jewish population of the city, whereas most of them chose small and medium-sized cities in the South and on the Southern shores, Haifa or the metropolitan Tel Aviv area. Russians do not mention Jerusalem at all as an ideal destination, as they do not feel themselves part of the traditional religious *consensus* prevailing in the city, but more supporters of the Zionist nationalist and pioneering *ethos*. Therefore, the majority of Russians live in East Jerusalem neighborhoods such as Nev Ya'kov, East Talpiot or Gilo, where 15% of the 1990s emigration wave ended up to and decided to stay, notwithstanding the fact that between the year 2000 and 2002 more than 400 shooting incidents were recorded, carried out by snipers hiding in the neighboring Palestinian village of Beit Jalla<sup>35</sup>. Half of them (49%) vote for ethnical parties such as Israel B'Aliyah of Nathan Sharansky (currently Head of the Jewish Agency) and Israel Beitenu of Avidgor Lieberman, while the other half support majority, right wing parties such as Kadima and Likud. On the other

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<sup>33</sup> Safieh, A., *Bethlehem 2000, Palestine year one?: Christian voices from the Holy Land*, Palestinian General Delegation to the U.K. and the Office of Representation of the P.L.O. to the Holy See, London, 1999.

<sup>34</sup> O'Mahony, A., *The Christian communities of Jerusalem and the Holy Land: studies in history, religion and politics*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> The Jerusalem district is rendered even more interesting by the fact that the first two choices of ex-Soviets who leave Jerusalem are the occupied territories, with 823 immigrants. (Berthomière, W., *Aliyah from the Former Soviet Union*, Bulletin du Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem, n.8, 2001)

hand, concerning the Russian community, Jerusalem is traditionally the siege of the small intelligentsia, whose 2/3 chose the city as their residence<sup>36</sup>.

Finally, the Beta Israel came to Israel in two flows, in 1984 by Operation Moses and in 1991 by Operation Salomon. They consisted in two major airlift operations carried out by the Jewish Agency with the support of the Jewish American Joint Distribution Committee<sup>37</sup>. They currently consist of 70.000 people, but their immigration is yet not over. Overall, as the latest immigrant community but also as a culturally distant stream of Judaism, the "Beta Israelis" have met major problems in their absorption in the Israeli society<sup>38</sup>. The main negative features are visible in their labor market conditions: more than 90% of Ethiopian immigrants, who are employed, work in low-paying manual labor, minimum wage or risky positions, such as security guards, while only 47% of men and 38% of women are overall employed. Statistics state that 62% of Ethiopian families have basically no income, thus inferring that they rely heavily on state subsidies. The community figures increasingly in the crime statistics, as its youth drop out from school early and seem therefore more at risk than other youngsters<sup>39</sup>.

The statistic data displayed by the Ministry of Absorption state that only 1.940 Ethiopian immigrants were directed by the Ministry of Absorption to Jerusalem between 1989 and 2004, which overall consist of an Ethiopian population of 5.000 people and as a city absorbed only 8% of the new immigrant<sup>40</sup>. Of those, a small percentage of Ethiopian Jews are residing within the boundaries of the city. They concentrate in the neighboring towns, such as Mevasseret Sion, thus commuting to the nearby Jerusalem for work. In their voting patterns, they basically cast an ethnical preference for the few Ethiopians politicians introduced in the electoral lists of Likud, Labour, Shas and Kadima. Particularly Shas tried to reach out to the new immigrants exploiting both their distress and their strong religious affiliation, but this attempt did not work out smoothly as the ultra-Orthodox religious establishment in Israel, especially the Chief Rabbinate but also other *haredi* groups, have been traditionally very vocal against their absorption and their "Jewishness". However, it should be placed credit on Ovadia Yosef to have tried his best to fight against discrimination of Ethiopian Jews both on issues of conversions and weddings and to speak out against *haredi* schools denying them attendance in 2005<sup>41</sup>.

The Israelis authorities have made official the Sigd, an Ethiopian Jewish festivity celebrated for over 2,000 years by Jews in Ethiopia, symbolizing the renewal of the covenant with God and the Diaspora community's longing for Zion, as a national holiday<sup>42</sup>. The attempt is to integrate Ethiopian Jews in the national culture and calendar, while appeasing them against their claims of discrimination in social and economic standards, confirmed and sustained by the Ministry of Absorption data reporting that 74% of Ethiopian Jews earn wages lower than the national average. Exploring Jerusalem, it is however difficult to deny that some sort of discrimination is still affecting the "Beta Israelis", as they do not hold any administrative charge in public offices or in shops (besides being employed as waiters), are hardly visible in the Hebrew University and, moreover, do not step in many bourgeois

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<sup>36</sup> Jerusalem has seen the blossoming of cultural hubs where the intelligentsia meets as a function of their republic of origin. On Jaffa street, a building houses the cultural centre for Soviet Jews where different Landmanschaft have been formed, such as the one of Moscow and St. Petersburg, and where different groups of Jews from the former USSR meet in a central location for intelligentsia, the Russian Library of the Zionist Forum. (*ibidem*)

<sup>37</sup> Arbel, A. S., *Riding the wave: the Jewish Agency's role in the mass aliyah of Soviet and Ethiopian Jewry to Israel, 1987-1995*, Gefen, Jerusalem, 2001.

<sup>38</sup> Parfit, T., Trevisan Semi, E., *The Beta Israel in Ethiopia and Israel: studies on Ethiopian Jews*, Curzon, Richmond, 1999.

<sup>39</sup> [http://www.cbs.gov.il/hodaot2009n/11\\_09\\_252b.pdf](http://www.cbs.gov.il/hodaot2009n/11_09_252b.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> See: [http://www.moia.gov.il/Moia\\_he/Research/ReserchSummeries.htm](http://www.moia.gov.il/Moia_he/Research/ReserchSummeries.htm).

<sup>41</sup> Haaretz, *Breaking the glass ceiling*, 5/6&/2005.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3500772,00.html>.

neighborhoods of the city such as Rekhavia or the German Colony, while they are widely employed in security checks at the entrance of supermarkets, stations, the Wailing Wall and the network of checkpoints filtering in and out the entrance to the city.

Jerusalem communities live their lives apart from each other, each one walking off its path made out of traditions, habits and future expectations: what is lacking is a comprehensive view and understanding of what means living together, not as an abstract entity such as the “Jewish people” but on the concrete level of citizens of the same city, entitled both to the same rights and the same duties<sup>43</sup>.

#### 1.4 Final remarks. Modernity versus traditionalism: what about the next future?

Is Jerusalem entering the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a rush, revolutionizing its image and getting rid of the conflictive social and ethnic patterns marking the century just gone?

Some features seem to point in this direction. Jerusalem municipality is building a light train connecting Beit Hanina with the very entrance of West Jerusalem, marked by the outstanding Calatrava bridge, up to the Mount Herzl: it is the first major facility aimed at merging the transport networks of the Eastern and the Western side of the city, usually reciprocally “no-go” zones. The Arab *sberuts* and the Egged buses strolling up and down the road no.1 will be virtually replaced by the new train, a modern electrical work and non-polluting transport means designed to curb the usage of private cars and to serve Arabs and Jews alike. The whole project should end and enter into service by August 2011 (although delays are expected). In any other city, such a major infrastructural work will be mostly welcome by its citizens. However, Jerusalemites do not look enthusiastic about it, although they are eager to see the closedown of the building sites. This occurs because the train raised a number of questions which the municipality is only randomly addressing and because the doubts hovering on the project are differing according to each community’s perspective and point to broader political questions. The Arabs fear that the train will implicitly reassert the indivisibility of the city and therefore further dismiss their expectations of turning East Jerusalem into their future capital; the Jews are afraid of violence, in the occurrence of a Third Intifada that could break out again anytime soon (especially in occasion of the announcement of a Palestinian state scheduled for the next September 2011); *haredim* are worried about the train schedule and the regulations it will adopt, as it strolls around their neighborhoods; some representatives of the Municipality are worried about the number of Arabs, currently residing in the outskirts as the Beit Hanina’s area, that will be further motivated and drawn to the centre work- or shopping-wise. Any change, in a dramatically divided city, looks like a threat to the *status quo*, thus turning even the realization of a light train into a challenge. However, the light train will overcome one of the main current limits of the city: the complete segregation between Arab and Jewish buses, thus leading Jerusalem beyond 30 years of upkeep of an invisible boundary.

Different is the case of other major renovation works currently undergoing in the city, as the “Jerusalem of Gold” project. The renovation of the immediate surroundings of the city centre was launched some 10 years ago and then postponed due to the Second Intifada: in the last 4-5 years it has resumed at a fast pace. The project is aimed at converting all the surroundings of the Old City in luxurious touristic facilities or in residential complexes for rich Jerusalemites and rich Diaspora Jews looking for a *pied-à-terre* in the Holy City. The new Mamilla promenade and the related projects oriented at renovating the Mamilla cemetery, the Independence Park, the Yemin Moshe’s artists’ neighborhood, are all falling in the same line. However, while aimed at revitalizing the touristic fabric of the city and

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<sup>43</sup> To consult only one of the many peace plans and proposals for the city, see: Abraham Fund, *Advancing coexistence and equality among Jews and Arabs in Israel: a platform for action*, Jerusalem, 2003.

attracting foreign capitals and investments, those projects are also driving out traditional, low-income residents to replace them with seasonal guests. The real estate market of Jerusalem is booming thanks mostly to wealthy American and French Jews, prompted to purchase property in the country in view of the improved security conditions of the last years. Some residents and planners became therefore concerned with the phenomenon of Jerusalem rapidly turning into a “ghost town”, due to the negative balance of emigration and seasonal residents<sup>44</sup>. Together with the Holy Land affair<sup>45</sup> - that drew the former mayor of the city Olmert into a major bribery scandal - the Jerusalem of Gold and other similar projects intend to turn Jerusalem into a modern, wealthy and luxurious city, appealing to the high-class Jewish society. This strategic planning of the city is not addressing the social problems nor the internal frictions, nor even helping out with unemployment (most of the people employed in the construction sites are Palestinians from the Territories crossing back the checkpoints every night), but only lightly the municipal budget and private billionaire revenues. In this perspective, it looks like contemporary Jerusalem is betting on increasing social and economic disparities among its communities, digging up existing cleavages and building new *enclaves* class- rather than ethnical-based.

At the same time, the old-fashioned disputes are always simmering. Just in order to quote some examples, the *haredi* requests of segregation on buses back in 2010<sup>46</sup> and the leftists Sheikh Jarrah demonstrations taking place every Friday. The first poses again the question concerning the limits of *consensus* and tolerance in Israeli society and their complex interplay with democracy and its own boundaries; the second points to the conflict and to the difficulty of developing a city where a century-long national conflict is still open, on top of that with no quick resolution in sight.

Summing up, the question to rise is whether Jerusalem might be developed as a contemporary city despite its open scars. The pool of Western-inspired urban planners currently employed at the Municipality seems to think so. Their project for the future of the city is concentrated in the following lines:

“Une des lignes inspirées par l’urbanisme occidental consiste à stimuler la revivification du centre-ville e Jérusalem-Ouest. Des tours de bureau vont être érigées le long des rues de Jaffa et Hillel, ainsi que à l’entrée de la ville occidentale. La zone piétonne sera étendue autour des axes Ben Yehouda-Agrippas-Jaffa. Le tramway apportera une nouvelle possibilité de transport public plus efficace que les autobus, et devrait améliorer la fluidité du trafic. Deux ouvrages d’art monumentaux, conçus par des architectes de renommée internationale, agrémenteront le paysage: le musée de la Tolérance (Franck Geris) et le viaduc du tramway (Juan Calatrava). Cette politique urbaine manifeste un désir de “rattraper l’Occident”<sup>47</sup>”

<sup>44</sup> “The best known of the capital's "ghost towns" is David's Village, an ostentatious project built in the early 1990s on Mamilla Street, opposite the Jaffa Gate. Because most of the owners live abroad most of the year, the neighborhood is virtually deserted”. (Haaretz, Barkat, A., *Jerusalem getting smaller and pricier*, 2005)

<sup>45</sup> “Holyland is the name of a massive housing development in Jerusalem that many Israelis regard as an ugly monstrosity because of its huge high-rise towers that loom over the skyline.”(ABC, *Holyland corruption scandal grips Israel*, 29/4/2010)

<sup>46</sup> “Israel currently has as many as sixty-three segregated bus lines making 2,500 trips a day (...).The controversy over the mehadrin or “strictly kosher” bus lines through Haredi areas began a decade ago when the government-subsidized Egged bus company decided to compete with the private companies that were already servicing these parts of town. Not only are female passengers required to sit in the back third of the vehicle, they face withering looks and vocal insults men if they board the buses wearing “immodest” clothing, particularly trousers”(Mandelbaum, *Sex-segregated buses split Israel along religious divide*, Haaretz, 15/3/2010).

<sup>47</sup> Salenson, I., *Jérusalem en 2020 sous l’œil des urbanistes*, Bulletin du Centre de recherché français de Jérusalem. No.16, 2005.

If it is true the statement that the “Israelis do not link much the urban fabric of Jerusalem and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”, it does not bring any evidence of the non-influential character of this element in the city planning and in its future developments. On the contrary, it might point to a lack of awareness by Israelis residents of the sufferance and continuous discriminations endured by other residents. It would be somehow striking and disappointing that the presence of a chain of *checkpoints* just a few kilometers away from the centre won't affect the overall wellbeing of the city.

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