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International Journal of Housing Policy

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/reuj20

Shifting realities: dislocating Palestinian Jerusalemites from the capital to the edge

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Published online: 11 Jul 2014.

To cite this article: Noura Alkhalili, Muna Dajani & Daniela De Leo (2014): Shifting realities: dislocating Palestinian Jerusalemites from the capital to the edge, International Journal of Housing Policy, DOI: 10.1080/14616718.2014.933651

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616718.2014.933651

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International Journal of Housing Policy, 2014
http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616718.2014.933651

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Shifting realities: dislocating Palestinian Jerusalemites from the capital to the edge

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Lefebvre's 'right to the city' was an expression of a new politics of citizenship, residency and above all the right to urban life. We thus build our argument in this paper on the Lefebvre concept and through the case study of Kufr Aqab, the northernmost neighbourhood of the occupied city of Jerusalem. In order to systematically displace Palestinian Jerusalemites and to achieve the Judaisation of Jerusalem, the right to urban life and any sort of 'right to the city' have been completely denied. In fact, through the spatial–demographic policies practised by Israeli authorities, Kufr Aqab has been aggressively excluded from the central area of Jerusalem (by the separation wall and the military border crossing) and progressively ethnically segregated. Kufr Aqab is highly populated by displaced Palestinian Jerusalemites since it is the only alternative that allows them to maintain their Jerusalem residency and their few civic rights. Ongoing unregulated urban development and deliberate informality has rendered Kufr Aqab a space of legal and civic exceptions and an insecure environment suspended within a notion of 'permanent temporariness'. This case study poses important questions to the relevance of Lefebvrian concepts, even if the 'point of departure of this urban problematic' is not industrialisation but the Israeli occupation, and the 'critical point' is not within a western context.

Keywords: right to the city; Jerusalem; Kufr Aqab; Israeli occupation; displacement; residual spaces

1. Henri Lefebvre in occupied Palestine

Urban studies and social sciences in general have witnessed an explosion of interest in Henri Lefebvre's concepts such as *everyday life* (1947, 1961, and 1981), the *right to the city* (1968) and *the production of space* (1976). However, the problem with many of these discourses has been that they have remained abstract for far too long, even if current globalised processes offer opportunities for new conceptualisations of spatio-temporal orders, making Lefebvre's discourse more attractive (Belli,

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2012, p. 47). In particular, there has been a wide fascination with the idea of the 'right to the city' as a response to neoliberal urbanism and as a means of empowerment for urban dwellers. However, as Mark Purcell has argued, it remained both theoretically and politically inapplicable, especially in addressing current problems of disenfranchisement (Purcell, 2002).

The 'right to the city' is a loud and radical cry to challenge the existing citizenship status, capitalist social relations and property rights, and their influence on space and its formation. Moreover, it is widely critical of the accumulation of capital by power holders, which is driven by the valorisation of capital instead of the use value. To put it in Lefebvre's words:

> . . .the right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life (. . .). This right slowly meanders through the surprising detours of nostalgia and tourism, the return to the heart of the traditional city, and the call of existent or recently developed centralities. (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158)

This paper presents a special case of urban inhabitance in an occupied and contested city: Jerusalem.[1] It is the prime example of cities deeply influenced by political and nationalistic aspirations through its urban policy-making. Since 1967, the Israeli authorities had full power over East Jerusalem's land and demography, in terms of spatial planning, housing policies, political arrangements and the re-drawing of Jerusalem borders. Consequently, political instability has become the norm: the city's boundaries became elastic and socio-spatial policies have been tailored according to race and identity.

The 'elasticity' of Jerusalem's official boundaries creates a notion of paradox, ranging from the severity of building regulations imposed on the Palestinian inhabitants living in East Jerusalem to near impossibility of obtaining legal planning permits. As a consequence, the Palestinians find themselves within a matrix of illegality, outside the legal planning framework when it comes to constructing their own houses in East Jerusalem, thus under continuous threats of demolitions and displacements, and in search of any housing solution that responds to their natural demographic growth.

This paper sheds light on the effects of Israeli occupation on urban development, especially its restrictions on Palestinians, which only allows them to access a very low quality of urban life. Also, it highlights the disruptive forces of the occupier that create ethnic segregation and social fragmentation. This renders Lefebvre's analysis in 'the right to the city' extremely relevant, even if our discourse is based on an ethnic segregation and not a class one, as he says:

> . . .the political meaning of class segregation is clear, whether it is a "subject" for analysis, whether it is the end result of a series of unplanned actions, or whether it is the effect of a will. For the working class victims of segregation and expelled from the traditional city, deprived of a present or possible urban life, there is a practical and

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> therefore political problem even if it is not posed politically and even if until now the housing question has for it and its representatives concealed the problematic of the city and the urban. (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 146)

In Jerusalem, certain types of residual spaces have been progressively created in the peripheries to host displaced Palestinian inhabitants and create an illusionary sense of inhabiting the city. Such residual spaces are the by-products of the contested ones, which lack any laws and regulations and are trapped between Palestinian temporariness and a colonial oppressive power and hegemony.

Our case study of Kufr Aqab, which is the northernmost neighbourhood in Jerusalem – 14 km from the old city of Jerusalem and 4 km from Ramallah – is one of those residual spaces. In fact, Kufr Aqab is a key example of Israeli planning attempts to displace Palestinian Jerusalemites, forcing them into areas that have been excluded from the city of Jerusalem by the separation wall but which remain within the municipal boundaries. According to Lefebvre:

> . . .for the working class, rejected from the centers towards the peripheries, dispossessed of the city, expropriated thus from the best outcomes of its activity, this right has a particular bearing and significance. It represents for it at one and the same time a means and an end, a way and a horizon: but this virtual action of the working class also represents the general interests of civilization and the particular interests of all social groups of "inhabitants", for whom integration and participation become obsessional without making their obsession effective. (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 179)

In our case, the production of these residual places enhances Israeli policies of maintaining the demographic balance within the boundaries of Jerusalem by relocating the Palestinian Jerusalemites to spaces of ambiguity and residue. This mechanism facilitates the subtle displacement and removal of the area and its inhabitants from the planning agenda.

The main question of this paper is: How applicable are the concepts expressed in 'the right to the city' in a context of territorial occupation where the elements of space and citizenship are in continuous alteration? How could the segregation of the working class be compared with the ethno-segregation of the Palestinians?

In this perspective, this case study could contribute to constructing a deeper understanding of Lefebvre's concepts of 'the right to the city' (Brenner & Elden, 2009; Elden, 2001; Harvey, 2008; Kipfer, 2008; Merrifield, 2006; Shields, 1999; Soja, 1991; Stanek, 2011), namely space inhabited and urban rights obtained. It might also contribute to deconstructing these concepts within the context of Jerusalem and other similar ones. The spatial demographic mechanisms practised by the State of Israel on the Palestinian Jerusalemites have clearly created conditions of isolation and displacement and distorted the realisation of the right to the city.

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2. Jerusalem: spatial and demographic policies imposed on Palestinian Jerusalemites

In the light of the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem in 1967, a geopolitical reality was imposed: Palestinian inhabitants were forced to live under Israeli law, and their status was transformed into mere permanent residents. Historically, Israel's striving for full geographic and demographic control of the whole land of Palestine has been strongly influenced by a militarised colonial production of space (Wari, 2011), supported by a set of unclear planning processes and bureaucratic administrative procedures to sustain the occupation (Weizman, 2007). Yiftachel states that 'the entire area under Israeli control — Israel/Palestine between river and sea — should be analyzed as one political geographic unit' (Yiftachel, 2006b, p. 8). Such a statement emphasises that Israel must be analysed as a hegemonic power which controls and foresees urban developments beyond the current political and administrative arrangements under the Oslo accords.[2] This is no more evident than in the case of the city of Jerusalem and its ethnic and political divides.

In Jerusalem, around 270,000 Palestinians have the status of permanent residency and live there with no citizenship rights. Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem have been regarded as a 'demographic threat' impacting the intended vision of the *Judaisation* of all Jerusalem (OCHA, 2011). This threat has been dealt with by the Israeli government through implementing a number of laws and regulations to govern the population and its urban presence in the eastern part of Jerusalem. Since 1967, successive Israeli governments have adopted policies aimed at ensuring a 'demographic balance' in the city of Jerusalem, the purpose of which is to ensure a Palestinian minority in Jerusalem that is not larger than one-third of the city's inhabitants. The formula of 30% Arab versus 70% Jewish has guided the spatial planning and housing policies, the political arrangements and the zoning of the city limits (Dajani, 2005; Khamaisi, 2011; Khamaisi, 2007; Margalit, 2007). Particularly in Jerusalem, the Israeli government has been creating facts on the ground through two main approaches: laws, regulations and systematic policies and re-shaping and constructing new physical borders (for instance the separation wall). Both approaches aim to 'Judaise' Jerusalem by strengthening the Jewish demographic growth and including more Jewish settlements, especially in East Jerusalem, therefore excluding the Palestinian neighbourhoods and diminishing the Palestinian demography present there. This creates a duality of urban realities where the elasticity of the Jerusalem boundary expands when it comes to Israeli Jewish settlements but is very rigid when dealing with peripheral Palestinian neighbourhoods.

Living outside of those ambiguous borders of the municipality poses a threat to the residency rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites, but who are also left with no option but to move into these periphery neighbourhoods to overcome the discrimination they face. The 'centre of life' policy, enforced by the Israeli government in 1995, stipulates that Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem must reside within

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the Jerusalem municipality boundaries in order to maintain their right to residency in the city or risk losing residency rights in their city.[3] This requires residents to demonstrate that Jerusalem has been their centre of life by providing proof of payment for services and taxes to Israel. All periphery neighbourhoods of Jerusalem today, physically separated from the rest of the city, are considered the only refuge for Palestinian Jerusalemites to maintain a status of resident in the city, albeit with a high level of uncertainty and ambiguity.

To further hinder the expansion of Palestinian neighbourhoods, Israeli authorities issue around 1000 building permits annually in East Jerusalem for the 270,000 residents. To manoeuvre over the tedious and never ending permit process, Palestinian inhabitants are forced to build illegally inside East Jerusalem neighbourhoods, risking the threat of demolition orders, imprisonment and fines. Only 13% of East Jerusalem is currently zoned for Palestinian construction, and most of the area is already built up.[4] Moreover, Israeli authorities have prioritised the construction and expansion of Israeli Jewish-only settlements in East Jerusalem. This has come at the expense of the natural expansion of Palestinian neighbourhoods. The Jerusalem municipality prefers national parks to neighbourhoods for Palestinian residents in East Jerusalem. The designation of land as a national park is a powerful and unjustified planning tool that is harmful for Palestinian inhabitants (Bimkom, 2012).

Under discriminatory laws and legislation, land appropriation and house demolitions, isolation by the segregation wall and confinement into fragmented ghettos, the Palestinian Jerusalemite presence in the city has been shaped and defined (B'Tselem, 1995). The construction of the separation wall and redefinition of the boundaries of the Jerusalem municipality have created and substantially altered many periphery neighbourhoods within broader process of ghettoisation and enclavisation, as is the case of the Jerusalem North neighbourhood of Kufr Aqab. Jerusalem residents married to a West Bank ID holder must apply for family re-unification, a process which has become near impossible after 2003 with the freezing of all newly submitted family re-unification applications. Since 2000, the Ministry of Interior rejected 43% of family unification applications and 24% of child registration applications (St. Yves, 2013). Therefore, many Palestinian families that fail to obtain family reunification have been forced to live in an area such as Kufr Aqab that provides them with the requirements of proving that they live within the Jerusalem municipality boundaries but also offers a legal base for the West Bank ID holders who are members of the family (OCHA, 2011).

The influx of Palestinian inhabitants to periphery neighbourhoods in East Jerusalem such as the neighbourhood of Kufr Aqab[5] is happening as a result of these policies. Periphery neighbourhoods of East Jerusalem, excluded physically behind the separation wall, are witnessing a surge of uncontrolled population movement and construction boom. Today, these residual spaces all around Jerusalem contain a total population of 90,000 Palestinian inhabitants who are under the constant threat of losing their residency rights in the city (CCDPRJ, 2012).

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These spatial and planning regulations show that Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem are not only excluded from participating in the planning and transformation of their space but are also forbidden/deprived from improving their existing overcrowded neighbourhoods and producing new neighbourhoods to accommodate their acute housing needs (Dajani, 2005). All the policies mentioned above contribute to dis-empowering the Palestinian presence in the city and impede their participation in decisions regarding urban planning and development of their city. Without the right to participate in elections to the Israeli Parliament (Knesset) as candidates, Palestinians are only entitled to choose their representatives in the municipality.[6] The systematic mechanisms practised by Israel deliberately weaken public participation of Palestinian Jerusalemites and also limit their involvement in the decision-making process, especially in urban planning issues in their city. The status of permanent residency has many ramifications for Palestinian residents, such as not having access to decent jobs in Jerusalem, especially jobs related to city planning and development, therefore violating Palestinians' civil, social and economic rights in their city. For instance, since the year 1988, the 'Authority for Developing Jerusalem' law stated that non-Israeli citizens are not permitted to serve as council members or to be members of the management of the 'Authority for Developing Jerusalem'. Yet, this body plays an authoritative role in everything related to city planning and development.[7]

3. The mutated 'right to the city' in Kufr Aqab

Perhaps the most intriguing aspect regarding Kufr Aqab is its geo-political complexity. Located at the periphery of Jerusalem, yet demarcated by the physical border of the wall, which enhances its isolation from the rest of the city. It is situated within two urban settings with contradicting authorities, Jerusalem and Ramallah, the former under the Israeli control and the latter under the Palestinian Authority (PA). Israeli authorities intentionally ignore it and deal with it as a left over space of the greater Jerusalem metropolitan area, while the PA has no legitimacy whatsoever to establish laws or regulations there, stipulated under the Oslo Accords.

Kufr Aqab became the temporary alternative solution for 60,000 Jerusalemite Palestinians. This urban development reached its peak between the years of 2009 and 2010, after the construction of the wall and the creation of the Qalandia military border crossing. The Jerusalem municipality deliberately ignores what is occurring in Kufr Aqab regarding unlicensed construction and frenzied urban development processes, rendering it a space with no security or law (OCHA, 2011). The intentional silence of the Jerusalem municipality regarding the urban development in Kufr Aqab has attracted people to act individually, embarking on the construction process in a legal and authoritative vacuum. The dynamics present there are a mixture of deliberate marginalisation and structured chaos (Weizman, 2007) by the

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Jerusalem municipality and the opportunistic invasion by unregistered contractors seeking mere profit from such housing developments.

What distinguishes Kufr Aqab from any other periphery urbanisation are two essential things. First, people moving to live in Kufr Aqab come from diverse social classes with one common aspect; being Palestinian Jerusalemites. Therefore, it is not a question of belonging to a lower income group moving to the periphery in search of housing alternatives, but more a political exclusion of certain demographics from using the city and having equal accessibility and rights. Second, unregulated urban development is deliberately ignored by the Israeli authorities, thus unlike cases in the global south, no contestations or collisions exist between state and citizens, but rather there is complete silence towards unregulated construction. Arguably, this could be perceived as a utopian case, where the authorities are turning a blind eye, allowing the area to develop and evolve through the efforts of citizens, with no eviction orders or demolitions. This however, we argue, is more of a dystopian situation characterised by a total abandonment of a whole demography merely due to their ethnicity and race, not even allowing them to struggle for the fulfilment of their right to the city, but rather a false assumption of it through uncontrolled construction.

Through urban planning schemes against the Palestinian inhabitants, the Jerusalem municipality's laws and an intentionally unplanned strategy are driving the Palestinian population to the peripheral areas. The municipality's future plans for these residual spaces are ambiguous; ranging from a possibility that they hand over this peripheral space and its inhabitants to the PA, without making any political agreements over land authority and power, to simply keeping them as they are, within a notion of 'permanent temporariness'. Such planning mechanisms have rendered Kufr Aqab a space of legal exception (no law enforcement on the extensive construction process), a space of civil exception (public services are not provided by the State of Israel via the Jerusalem municipality), and an insecure environment between two hyper-securitised environments (Jerusalem and Ramallah).

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4. Conclusion

Analysing the decades-long practices inflicted on the Palestinian population in Jerusalem, it is evident that all the housing and residency policies have created a situation where the urban space of inhabitance has been shaped by the Israeli occupation and, conversely, also impacts it. In this sense, through systematic and centralised mechanisms of governance of Jerusalem, the Israeli authority is depriving Palestinian residents from achieving their own 'right to the city', by pushing them out of the city. These residual spaces outside of the city boundaries are products of the denial of citizenship rights due to the pressure of the spatial effects of the occupation:

> . . .this kind of planning established a radical form of frontier urbanism where residential areas with civilian populations are used to confront the 'other' in ways that, without any

> direct means of access or communication, can never be consummated or resolved. There is an inherent contentiousness in such planning and under Israeli stewardship it has spread throughout East Jerusalem's peripheral region. (Pullan, 2009, p. 43)

The choice of people to move is nonexistent and such residual spaces further disenfranchise and prevent the achievement of the 'right to the city'. The general assumption by many Palestinians is that, through the movement to these neighbourhoods, Palestinian inhabitants are strengthening their steadfastness and preserving their identity in their city. However, the opposite is being achieved, clearly seen by the enclaves of inhabitants surrounded by physical boundaries that further detach them from the contested city. This contradicts the affirmation of the right to use the centre of the city, as inhabitants are dispersed throughout a periphery that is constantly being reshaped to accommodate their housing needs and basic public services. Although there is a false sense of choice of space and housing rights, the reality confirms a centralised effort of internally displacing residents to peripheral areas of uncertainty and permanent temporariness, allowing inhabitants to experience a 'false' realisation of their 'right to the city'.

The idea of re-thinking the Lefebvrian concept in terms of residual urban spaces that are formed by this accumulative process seems highly necessary in the case of the East Jerusalem periphery neighbourhoods. Here, it is essential to conclude that the weak urban sustainability of such residual spaces emphasises the denial of the 'right to the city', and so, such residual spaces are means of oppression aimed at weakening East Jerusalem Palestinian inhabitants' status and existence.

Massive urban development engenders different urban dilemmas in terms of the quality of the urban fabric and in the provision of basic services. This process of forced dislocation entails weakening Palestinian inhabitants' status to mere permanent residents rather than citizens in a quest to appropriate land without appropriating the people on that land. At the same time, 'the separation wall' in Jerusalem is another important factor that deprives Palestinian Jerusalemites of the 'right to the city' by underlining the segregation process. As a matter of fact, Palestinian Jerusalemites not only face physical barriers that limit them from exercising their 'right to the city' but also are legally excluded from practising that right. It is clear that the Jerusalem municipality does not want plans that would enable the Palestinian population to grow, develop and improve in East Jerusalem. Therefore, Palestinian Jerusalemites are kept in a temporary, unstable situation in the surrounding and deprived neighbourhoods, far away from the 'old city'. In essence, this sounds like Lefebvre's argument: 'the "right to the city" would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the "marginal" and even for the "privileged")' (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 34).

It is worth highlighting that, even if Lefebvre does not offer a completed and self-contained alternative or solution to current threats on urban enfranchisement,

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he imagines and advocates for an opening to new urban politics, with a focus on the shift of power from capital and the state towards urban inhabitants (Purcell, 2002). At the same time, Lefebvre's trumpeting of 'the right to the city' is not simply a call for human emancipation and widespread social justice. It is a cry for a renewed access to urban life, as well as a plea to proactively create the urban conditions that make such achievements possible (Davis & Hatuka, 2011). But in our case study, all these arguments appear very far away.

In fact, with no positive socio-political conditions available today for Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem, the 'right to the city' can never be achieved by urban dwellers and users, but rather, can only be used by the hegemonic ruling state and the power of capital. Without a central role for inhabitants to control and express their needs and make their voices heard, reaching the right to participation and appropriation seems like a far-fetched goal. In other words, the 'right to the city' cannot be maintained if the right to housing is missing (Sadri & Sadri, 2012), but also if the right to move or reside is strongly conditioned by the occupation. These conditions pose enormous limits to the use of the concept of 'the right to the city' in our socio-political context, even if we tried to deal with this theoretical challenge as a good opportunity to reflect and discuss our case within a wider global arena.

In fact, from one side, it has been useful to analyse more deeply how the 'right to the city' can be implemented to restore the distorted social fabric and engage contested cities and the inhabitants of them in a proactive and constructive realisation of their own 'right to their city' (Khamaisi, 2007; De Leo, 2013). Also by considering the participation process in Kufr Aqab in the light of Lefebvre's words:

> . . .in practices the ideology of participation enables us to have the acquiescence of interested and concerned people at a small price. After a more or less elaborate pretense at information and social activity, they return to their tranquil passivity and retirement. Is it not clear that real and active participation already has a name? It is called self-management. Which poses other problems. (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 145)

But in the context of such prolonged occupation and citizenship deprivation, will inhabitants realise and assert their right or will they drift further away from acknowledging and attaining it, and therefore cause irreversible damage to their identity, urban space and social interactions? How can these 'stubborn realities' (Yiftachel, 2006a, p. 213) of lawlessness and continuous abuse of power be a place of empowerment for inhabitants to claim their own right to the city?

At the end of this exciting intellectual exercise, our general recommendation is the essentiality to develop theories based on south-eastern perspectives (Yiftachel, 2006a) able to help us in such kinds of urban dilemmas of colonial and post-colonial conditions, far away in space (and not only in time) from the Lefebvrian 'right to the city'.

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Notes

1. Since 1948, the city was divided between west and east parts under the Israeli and the Jordanian rules respectively. In 1967, Israel occupied the rest of West Bank and East Jerusalem from the Jordanian rule.
2. For further information: http://www.nad-plo.org/etemplate.php?id=59.
3. Since 1967, Israel has revoked the residencies of over 14,000 Palestinians who have not complied with this law, by living outside of the elastic municipality borders (JLAC, 2012).
4. The total area of East Jerusalem is 70.5 km^2, by which 24.5 km^2 (35%) are expropriated for Israeli settlements, 15.48 km^2 (22%) are zoned for green areas and public infrastructure, 21.35 km^2 (30%) are unplanned areas, and 9.18 km^2 (13%) for Palestinian construction (OCHA, 2011).
5. Kufr Aqab neighbourhood is not the only area affected by the separation wall. The wall extends from the south of Anata Village towards the northwest and excludes from East Jerusalem the Shu'fat Refugee Camp and the Ras Khamis and Dahiyat As Salam neighbourhoods, all of which are actually located within the municipal borders of the city.
6. Most Palestinian Jerusalemites have to date renounced from participating in the municipal elections, as they do not recognise the occupation, and wish to avoid granting legitimacy to the Israeli occupation.
7. See: http://eng.bimkom.org/.

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