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LOCATING THE CIVIC IN THE FRONTIER: DAMASCUS GATE

Wendy Pullan

This article focuses on one small but significant place in Jerusalem.¹ It is the area just north of Damascus Gate, where Old City meets New, and where the remains of the 1948–67 border between Israel and Jordan has been transformed into a hinterland for competing Palestinian and Israeli interests. The piece, derived primarily from site observations taken 2003–5, is an attempt to make visible the fractures and interactions of everyday life in this abrasive micro-scale. In order to remain as close as possible to the immediate and quotidian nature of the topic, conditions have been mapped (figure 1) on just one ordinary day—Tuesday 27 December 2005. Like a fly caught in amber, the article and its map offer a brief and partial view of one of the world's most contested sites. It focuses on small scale events that are normally overlooked in planning documents and political negotiations, but that nonetheless contribute in key ways to the spatio-political workings of the city.

Since the sixteenth century, the large Ottoman structure of Damascus Gate has been the most prominent entrance to Jerusalem, standing in the middle of the city's northern wall.² The landmark has provided a setting for a variety of civic functions—trade and commerce, casual meetings, political demonstrations, religious gatherings, transportation hub, security—typical of gateway squares in Middle Eastern cities. Most of these endeavours are still carried out there, and such is the level of activity and centrality of place for the Palestinians, that the observational assets of the old gate are fully exploited by the Israelis, whose army mans its towers and ramparts. A member of the Israel Defence Forces has become a familiar installation in

1. This essay is part of the ESRC—New Security Challenges project: "Conflict in Cities: Architecture and Urban Order in Divided Jerusalem" based at the University of Cambridge.

2. A gate has existed in this spot at least since the Romans; some remains are still visible below the Ottoman gate.



Figure 1. Damascus Gate triangle: mapped 27.12.2005 (Lefkos Kyriacou—Conflict in Cities) and photographed 23.07.2004 (Israeli Cartographic Centre, AR25 NO.9230) © Department of Architecture, University of Cambridge ESRC—New security challenges



Figure 2: North side of Damascus Gate
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the window above the main arch; seen from below as a silhouette, without individual characteristics, this soldier reads as a fixture of the occupation, placed to take good advantage of the panoptical features supplied by the gate (figure 2). The area bristles with the ocular cells of electronic surveillance equipment, but from the gate itself the anonymous human eye offers a more immediate level of penetration.

It has been argued by the Israeli architect Sharon Rotbard that from as early as the 1930s, rapid tower and wall construction, using modern techniques and organisation, has been seminal to the architecture of Israeli expansion, settlement, and surveillance.³ Yet, the wall and tower is a far older and more fundamental feature of urban centres, seen regularly in European and Middle Eastern gateways and, in addition to its obvious defensive attributes, it is found repeatedly in various symbolic modes that represent the town.⁴ It is not then surprising to find the wall and tower, in however a cursory manner, as part of an attempt to represent and recreate the urban entity in the spread of Israeli settlements. But, having moved out to the frontier, the wall-tower configuration has been actively re-established in the city, in the Israeli rekindling of the defensive aspects of Damascus Gate. This resonates in both the atavistic city wall and gate traditions of a more distant past, and for current meanings transposed from Israeli usage in the settlements. In Jerusalem, rather than the either/or of the Agambenian assertion that "Today it is not the city but rather the camp that is the fundamental biopolitical paradigm of the West"⁵, the both/and situation of city together with camp presents possibilities. In the latter, a primary element of the frontier is inserted into the centre of the city, and to what extent it acts as the dark underbelly of urban experience, will depend upon the strength and scope of other civic practices. After all, historically, the city-gate tradition clearly incorporated the needs of the frontier into the city. But in modern times we are averse to linking the two⁶, and unsurprisingly, at Damascus Gate there is discord between borderland and civic territories. The discrepancy is reflected in Israeli and Palestinian pursuits in the area; of the urban activities listed above, the Palestinians partake in all but one: security. However, for the Israeli soldiers and the few civilians who stray into the area, only that one is of real consequence. The spatial experiences of the two peoples are parallel but estranged, a situation repeatedly underlined by the way they inhabit the terrain.

3. "Wall and Tower (*Homa Umigdal*): The Mold of Israeli Architecture", in *A Civilian Occupation. The Politics of Israeli Architecture*, eds., Rafi Segal and Eyal Weizman (Tel Aviv: Babel, London and New York: Verso, 2003), 39–57 (46, *passim*). Indeed the panopticon is regularly used with respect to the Israeli settlements, for example: *ibid*, 50–51; Eyal Weizman and Rafi Segal, "The Mountain, Principles of Building in Heights", also in *A Civilian Occupation*, 79–96 (86); Anselm Franke, "Territories", in *Territories* (Berlin: KW Institute for Contemporary Art, 2003), 10–4 (12).

4. Most obviously, in the close linkage between the Roman army camp and town; see for example: Earl Baldwin Smith, *Architectural Symbolism of Imperial Rome and the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956); Günter Bandmann, *Early Medieval Architecture as Bearer of Meaning*, tr., Kendall Wallis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). In the local context of Israel-Palestine, the images of fortified towns on the sixth-century Madaba Map are standard representations; see: Michele Piccirillo and Eugenio Alliata, *The Madaba Map Centenary*.

On the north side of the gate is a large triangle, part of the 1948–67 no-man's land; today its three sides are defined by Israeli West Jerusalem, Palestinian East Jerusalem, and the Palestinian Old City to the south (figure 1).⁷ Despite considerable debate and planning attention, this area has remained an urban void, much of it having succumbed to a wide and rapid inner city motorway, that most profound of dividers.⁸ Known as Road 1, this thoroughfare fills the west side of the triangle with six lanes including tunnels. In its speed and intensity, it has become the de facto border between Israel and Palestine in central Jerusalem.⁹ Like many urban areas that find themselves on borders, the nearby Israeli residential neighbourhood of Musrara is oriented away, back into itself, and protected by a series of new stone walls. Cars whistle by, but it is rare to meet anyone on foot. This hinterland is not mirrored on the other, Palestinian, side of the triangle where ad hoc car parks, taxi stands, and casual market traders intermingle with the remains of a commercial strip, that developed as a wholesale outlet in the 1930s, and still relies upon its proximity to Old City *souk* accessed through Damascus Gate (figure 3). Much of the triangle's terrain is rough and uncared for; it is difficult, sometimes impossible, to negotiate on foot, and even the areas that have been refurbished are inordinately studded with obstacles like fences, stone bollards and police barricades. Despite the strange combination of dereliction and control, the Palestinian side is open and surprisingly active, where shoppers and drivers vie with carts and porters amidst those just passing time. And while it must be pointed out that many men lounge about the pavements because of Palestine's distressingly high level of unemployment, and indeed, some of these figures constitute the remains of what, in less caustic times, was an informal labour market, there is still something reassuring to find that this area, against all odds, is capable of supporting such a lively and varied pedestrian life.

Although some Israeli pedestrians from West Jerusalem neighbourhoods follow a route across Road 1 and along the Palestinian shops fronts to Damascus Gate, in order to visit the Jewish holy sites in the Old City (figure 1), few spend time in Palestinian territory, making soldiers and border police on duty the main Israeli contingency.¹⁰ These patrols occupy locations which provide good surveillance, but, except for the area directly outside the gate, they stand removed from most of the Palestinian population, favouring open positions that present fewer surprises and offer



Figure 3: The east side of the triangle-view from Palestinian Musrara to Damascus Gate
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a fence or bollard to lean upon, sun in winter, shade in summer. Palestinians who pass into this area are often stopped to have their Israeli-issued identity cards checked; low-ranking soldiers stationed in the immediate gate area stop civilians and bring them to their colleagues in the "Israeli enclaves", slightly removed from the gate, for further checking and interrogation.¹¹ The choreography varies according to anticipated threats and emergencies, and both Jewish and Muslim holidays precipitate a more intensive Israeli regime. But most of the time, the mobile check posts articulate a consistent inner city boundary between Palestine and Israel (figure 1). On the whole, the anxious everyday dominates the area; the most mundane of activities are carried out under constant surveillance and the minimal exchange between Israelis and Palestinians is usually edged with some level of unease or distrust.¹² The

5. Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* tr., Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 181. *Travelling through the Byzantine Umayyad Period* (Jerusalem: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1999). The Roman wall and gate tradition enters Islamic architecture through reinterpretation in the early palace architecture of Palestine and Syria.

6. As with our justified horror in the targeting of civilians in war.

7. The Old City has four quarters, Muslim, Christian, Jewish

and Armenian, as well as the Muslim religious precinct, the Haram al-Sharif. Damascus Gate marks the border between Muslim and Christian Quarters, both of which are mostly Palestinian.

8. Various plans for the area have been proposed by Israelis; see, for example: David Kroyanker, *Jerusalem Planning and Development 1979–82* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, 1982), 4–6; 35–9; idem, *Jerusalem Planning and Development 1982–5. New Trends* (Jerusalem: The

Jerusalem Foundation and the Jerusalem for Israel Studies, 1985), 77–81; Moshe Safdie, *The Harvard Jerusalem Studio. Urban Designs for the Holy City* (Cambridge, Mass and London: MIT Press, 1986), 140–85; idem., 'Jerusalem: United City, Two Sovereignties', in *The Next Jerusalem. Sharing the Divided City*, ed., Michael Sorkin (New York: Monacelli Press, 2002), 268–91, esp. 286; 289; Moshe Margalit, 'Building in the Seam Area. Road Number 1', (Jerusalem, Jerusalem Municipality and the Ministry for Transport, 1992) (Hebrew).

Palestinians have not been involved.

9. Investigated in: Wendy Pullan, Philipp Misselwitz, Rami Narallah, and Haim Yacobi, "Jerusalem's Road 1: An inner city frontier?" (forthcoming).

10. Street interviews carried out in February 2004 by "Conflict in Cities" revealed very few Israelis in the area; those interviewed were there mainly because of transportation needs and a few used the shops.

situation escalates quickly in the event of an attack or suicide bombing in West Jerusalem when further military personnel and barricades spring into place at predetermined key points. At the same time, the news of the attack is passed amongst the Palestinians by word of mouth and a rush of mobile phone calls, and they, the Palestinians, quickly recede from this border area into less exposed parts of the city. The scenario may be seen as a particularly tangible update of the statement made by Philadelphia's mayor, following the urban riots of the 1960s, that: "From now on, a state's borders run inside its cities."¹³

One recent strain of scholarly thought has predicted the "end of geography", where, in an increasingly globalized world, distances are broken down and borders have become irrelevant.¹⁴ Zygmunt Bauman has substantially modified the idea to suggest that the means to benefit from such distance is actually a social product, where "length varies depending upon the speed at which it may be overcome."¹⁵ At Damascus Gate the prerogative for speed and distance has a strong literal component that is less governed by social exigencies than by ethnic and national affiliation. Scale plays a major role: Road 1 is large and fast, with tunnels and well engineered curves so that (Israeli) vehicles can bypass this juncture of the two Jerusalems with no more than a quick glimpse of the city wall and some distant markets.¹⁶ For those (Palestinian) drivers who make the turn off Road 1 into a single small roundabout in East Jerusalem, it means quickly grinding to a halt to join the traffic stalled by pedestrians, carts and police blockades. There is a quick shift into the crowded and narrow streets of the Palestinian city where no new road has been built since the 1960s; here is segregation by road engineering.¹⁷ If the space and scale of Road 1 expedites remoteness, Damascus Gate is a gatherer of small, slow and primarily pedestrian experiences of the local and the everyday. Between the two, the middle ground or a place of common experience is absent; but borders, on the other hand, are most evident. Road 1 and its accompanying infrastructure form a hard border and the incommensurability of the urban experiences reinforces that division in every way.

At Damascus Gate, not only Road 1, but two other urban projects have been introduced by the Israeli municipal planners: an amphitheatre in front of Damascus Gate, and, just to the west along the city wall, a park consisting of long rows of palm trees and water channels. The park is unused;



Figure 4: Palm tree park patrols
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dust blocks the drains and rubbish has been dumped into the rills. There are a number of possible reasons for this: first of all, it is unused by Israelis and tourists to Israel who normally do not venture into this Palestinian area.¹⁸ The park is shunned by Palestinians who are unwilling to frequent an Israeli urban initiative on their territory. Moreover, the palm tree alleys conveniently aid the long view of the police patrols down to Damascus Gate, and the Orientalist aesthetic created by full-size coconut palms imported into this relatively cold hill city is either irrelevant or offensive to some. The amphitheatre in front of the gate is an older structure from the early 1980s to ease the level change down from the street, and to provide a view of the historic portal for

11. Israel allows only those Palestinians with Jerusalem ID cards to be in Jerusalem. An interview with the Border Police (Jerusalem, 8 February 2004) provided general information, but the respondent was unwilling to elaborate on tactical details. The comments here are based upon observations made by Conflict in Cities 2003–5.

12. Confirmed by street interviews carried out in February 2004 by "Conflict in Cities". Most Israelis interviewed expressed unease or fear; those who felt safe said they relied upon the soldiers stationed nearby.

13. Quoted in: Paul Virilio, *City of Panic*, (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005), 15.

14. Noted by Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization. The Human Consequences* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 12–3.

15. *Ibid.* 12.

16. Road 1 links the centre of Jerusalem with suburban settlements; its direction and flow is geared to Israeli traffic, and connections with Palestinian Jerusalem are minimised.

17. On the Israeli neglect of municipal services in Palestinian Jerusalem, see: Meir Margalit, "A Chronicle of Municipal Discrimination in Jerusalem", (Foundation for Middle East Peace, 2006), www.fmep.org/analysis/articles/a_chronicle_of_municipal_discrimination_in_jerusalem.html

18. Since the beginning of the Second Intifada in 2000, tourist numbers have been low. Tourists to Israel are generally steered away from Palestinian areas; for a Palestinian view of tourism in Jerusalem, see: Shadia Touqan, ed., *Jerusalem. Heritage and Life* (Jerusalem: Welfare Association, 2004), 122.



Figure 5: Transient tea kiosk
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tourists, while they listen to briefings by their guides. It too does not fulfil its intended purpose. Such imposed theatricality is overly self-conscious, and is clearly not of interest to the Palestinians, who already suffer from too much scrutiny. Both park and amphitheatre were regarded as city beautification projects, planned in the 1970s and 1980s with the declared aim of opening up views to the city wall and gate.¹⁹ Whether intended or not, the vistas have metamorphosed into surveillance aids, and for the Palestinians the projects have become fixtures of the occupation, both by association and by function.²⁰

The palm tree park is colonial in intent and manifestation. As it is not rooted into the everyday exigencies of the area so as to foster any level of civic participation, it can only contribute to the frontier scenario of the gate area. It is a no man's land. The amphitheatre is in a more critical location, and a Palestinian boycott of this space would mean relinquishing access to the gate. Instead, Palestinians use the area to accommodate market spill-over, with umbrellas for shade and the amphitheatre's steps acting as display areas for the sale of herbs, shoes, cheap pots and pans, sweet cakes, CDs, and other goods (figure 2). The scene is permeated by a loose theatricality appropriate to any market, and although some level of Israeli acquiescence is necessary for such commerce, the Palestinian traders have rendered the amphitheatre as planned to be irrelevant.²¹ Traditional city-gate conditions have reappeared in the palimpsest of this casual market. Nearby, other transient market stalls, unlicensed taxi stands, and roving tea kiosks also contribute to the urban scene (figure 5). A number of these enterprises are regularly closed by the Israeli inspectors, but then pop up again a few weeks later and a few metres away from the former spot. This cat and mouse scenario is not surprising when seen in the context of another related but more drastic situation in residential areas where the Palestinians, perpetually denied building permits, construct their houses illegally; some have been, and more will surely be, demolished by the Israeli authorities.²² The combination of desperation in the face of ongoing deprivation, and resistance to the occupation in one of the few non-violent ways available, presents the city with an altered urbanism, where minimal but persistent events continue to define parts of the topography and take on more significance than would normally be assigned to such simple activities. While not wishing to be foolishly optimistic about the possibilities of such minor urban engagements, it is worth mentioning that the Palestinian commercial strip has not been replaced, as proposed,



Figure 6: Israeli soldiers
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with "a high-class shopping lane",²³ and instead a more appropriate piece of widened pavement, storefront parking, and street furniture have been supplied. With good reason, any Israeli intervention is likely to be resented, but clearly some more than others are particularly destructive to Palestinian culture and to city life in general. It is also fair to point out that in terms of the urban everyday, even Israeli soldiers must come down from the top of the gate, if they wish to actually check any Palestinians. On the street corners, the soldiers' palpable boredom, so much like that of the unemployed Palestinians, while not an equaliser, at least puts them into the same territory of confrontation (figure 6).

Conflict is an integral factor of the urban condition, and especially in a city like Jerusalem it is foolish to believe that it can be removed. Rather, it

19. David Kroyanker, *Jerusalem Planning and Development 1979–1982*, (Jerusalem Committee, 1982) 6.

20. Such transformation may also be found in the suburban settlements built after the 1967 war. Rachel Kallus calls the Jerusalem neighbourhood of Gilo "a potential fortress [that] has found itself turned into a real one", "The Political Construct of the 'Everyday': The Role of Housing in Making Identity", in *Constructing a Sense of Place*, ed., Haim Yacobi (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), 136–61 (136).

21. Interviews with market traders, carried out by Conflict in Cities, November 2005.

22. Demolition of houses without building permits are widely documented; for example see: <http://www.icaad.org/eng/faq.asp?menu=9&submenu=1>; www.btselem.org/english/Planning_and_Building/Statistics.asp; www.amnesty.org.uk/action/israel/demolitions.shtml

23. *ibid.* 19.

is important to question whether contested space can in any way contribute to urban praxis. At Damascus Gate, the Palestinian attempts to keep alive basic everyday activities, reaffirms not just their own identity, but also reinstates in small ways the civic over the frontier. Paul Virilio has used the term “unwitting urbanist” with respect to the power of memory of the city dweller.²⁴ It is a useful term, and one that, in view of the Palestinian experience at Damascus Gate, can be stretched to include not just remembrance but also a latent activism. In this, participation can be found through the most fundamental and pertinacious forms of presence.

ARCHITECTURE MINDS THE GAP: BERLIN'S FRAGMENTED URBANISATION

Francesca Ferguson

At the heart of Berlin Mitte, the former East German “Palace of the People’s Republic” stands “voided”: its interior stripped of asbestos and reduced to skeletal forest of steel supports, its 1970s orange-tinted glass facade gleaming in the sunset. The iconic TV tower on Alexanderplatz seems to protrude from its roof like an antenna. A huge neon-sign crowning the building spells out ZWEIFEL: “doubt”. The empty car park in front of the building is punctuated by a small archeological dig revealing the foundations of the 18th century Berlin Schloss that had been declared a symbol of bourgeois decadence and demolished by order of the socialist GDR government after the war. The demolition date for what remains of the “Volkspalast”—the people’s palace, as it has recently been dubbed—has been set by the German Bundestag. Blotting out yet another strong reminder of the GDR from public memory is high on the federal political agenda. There are few images more symbolic of Berlin’s current urban condition.

The Volkspalast has become the most central of locations for strategies reminiscent of Archigram and Cedric Price: a tactical icon, it has spawned a number of initiatives amongst contemporary architects, artists and designers to turn it into a site for spectacular short-term concerts, clubs and

24. Paul Virilio, *City of Panic* (London: Berg, 2005), 7.