

## ANTI-THESIS

## The Violence of Infrastructural Connectivity: Jerusalem's Light Rail as a Means of Normalisation

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It is commonly claimed that infrastructures are so banal and taken for granted that they only become visible when they collapse or cease to function. Indeed, Rodgers and O'Neill termed the exclusion or disconnection of certain areas from infrastructural services "infrastructural violence". In East Jerusalem, where infrastructure has long been underfunded and Palestinian Jerusalemites are excluded from access to many urban services, infrastructure also became apparent as a political question when it *appeared* in the form of a new light rail connection - and even more so when this ostensibly useful

public service was attacked by residents. The violent disruption of the light rail, the article argues, called attention to the manner in which Jerusalem's light rail serves to normalize both Palestinian urban space and movements, thus feeding into an agenda of annexation. The expansion of infrastructural networks, and the resulting connectivity of previously marginalized areas, then, can also act as a form of violence rather than *atonement* for past neglect.

**Keywords:** Jerusalem, infrastructure, mobility, transport, occupation, light rail

### Introduction

At first glance, the Jerusalem light rail - whose first line was inaugurated only a few months before Casablanca's - might also appear to atone for a long period of infrastructural neglect. An East-West connection in a city where public transport was long segregated, it facilitated movement from marginalized Palestinian areas of East Jerusalem into the city centre. It similarly operated on registers of symbolism and affect reflecting a sense of modernity, progress, and comfort - one in which Palestinians were included, seemingly for the first time in half a century of Israeli occupation. And nonetheless, in the summer of July 2014, Palestinian residents attacked the light rail in a sensational manner, disrupting the operations of the tramway for two weeks (Baumann, "The Heavy Presence"). It is commonly claimed that infrastructures are so deeply embedded in our experience of the built environment and are so banal or taken for granted that they only become visible when they collapse or cease to function (Graham and Marvin; Graham and McFarlane 12). Indeed, the exclusion or disconnection of certain areas from infrastructural services has been termed "infrastructural violence" (Rodgers and O'Neill 401). In East Jerusalem, where infrastructure has long been underfunded (Margalit; Ir Amim;

ACRI) and Palestinian Jerusalemites – in particular those living in areas cut off by the Separation Wall (Al Khalili, De Leo and Dajani; Hammoudeh, Hamayel and Welchman) – are excluded from access to many urban services, infrastructure also became apparent as a political question when it *appeared* – and even more so when the ostensibly useful public service of the light rail was attacked by residents.

This violent disruption of the light rail, this article argues, calls attention to the manner in which the expansion of infrastructural networks can also act as a form of violence. Based on eight months of on-site research in the frame of my PhD research, I show how Jerusalem's light rail makes both Palestinian urban space and movements “legible” (Scott) in order to normalize this part of the city and its residents. As Palestinian circulations are integrated into the Israeli system of the city, they are aligned with the interests of the Israeli state. While the violence of the Israeli mobility regime has generally been located in the restriction of Palestinian movement (Hammami; Handel; Kotef), the argument here is thus that even an expansion of urban service provision facilitating movement might be seen as violent. This violence lies in the ongoing process of East Jerusalem's normalization

– not only in the common political parlance of maintaining relations with Israel, but in the Foucauldian sense. Following Foucault, normalization is an attempt to “reduce the most unfavorable, deviant” elements and “bring them in line with the normal” (Foucault 62). Rather than excluding and isolating Palestinians, the normalizing approach includes them in the system and, in incorporating Palestinian space and mobilities, minimizes their deviation to align them with the interest of state power.

### Crossing Lines

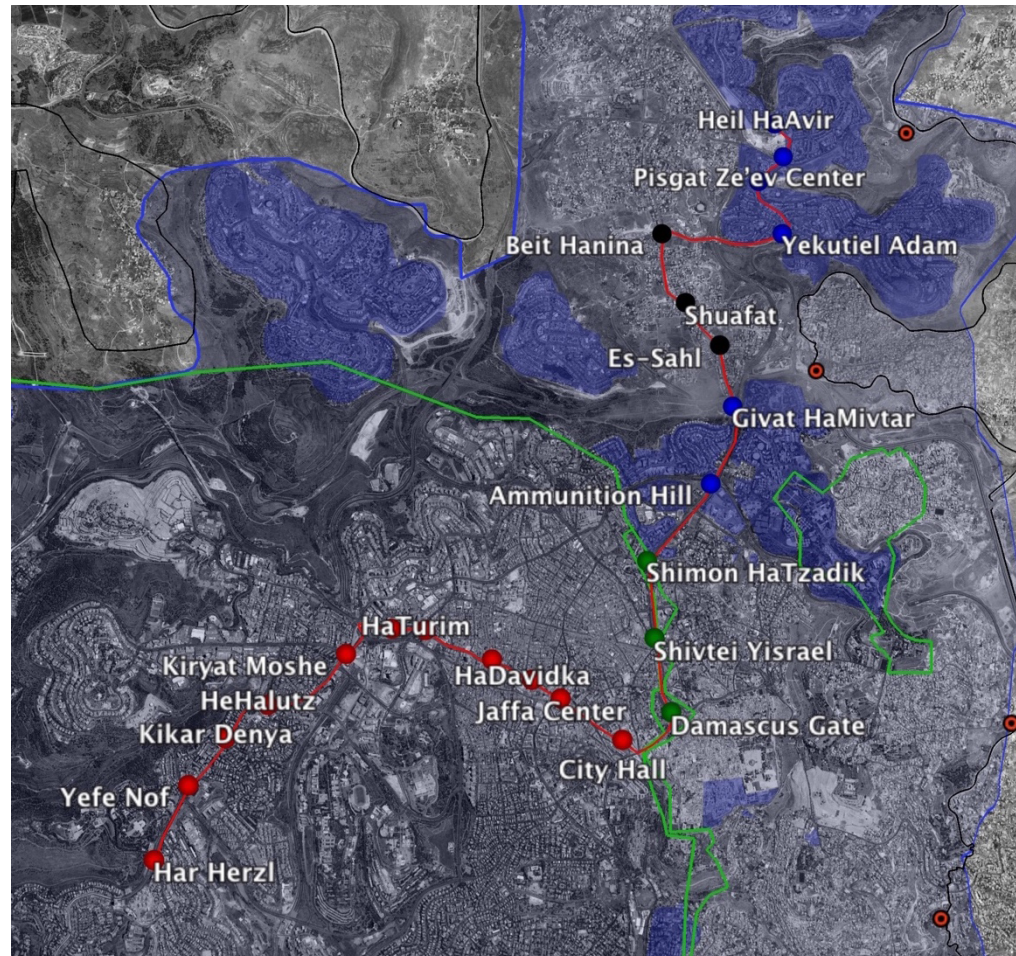
The first line of the tram (the Red Line), which was completed in 2011, links the settlement of Pisgat Ze'ev to the administrative and commercial center of West Jerusalem. Along its 14-kilometre, 23-stop route from the northeast of the city to Mount Herzl in the southwest, it makes five stops in Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, three in the Palestinian neighbourhood of Shuafat (one on the border to Beit Hanina), and three just on the Green Line (see Map 1).

The planned expansion of the Red Line, as well as a planned second and third line, will connect some of the most populous settlements in the north and south of East Jerusalem to the city centre, giving cre-

dence to the allegation that the tram's routing is at least partially motivated by bolstering the annexation of East Jerusalem. Thus, the Palestinian leadership views the light rail project as cementing the occupation by serving settlements and as deepening the annexation of East Jerusalem (Barghouti). The physical linkages established by hard infrastructure, however, are only one aspect of the light rail's normalizing effect. Beyond merely connecting in functional terms, linked mobility flows also function on symbolic registers, which even operate through the bodies of those moving. The light rail instils a sense of familiarity with Palestinian spaces that were previously out of bounds to Israelis and thereby lays the groundwork for appropriation of those spaces. Its ability to facilitate a temporary, securitized presence of settlers in a Palestinian area may be more powerful than the obduracy of its tracks; its ability to reconstitute Palestinian behaviour in public spaces may have further-reaching implications than a physical link alone.

### The Appeal of Normalization: Modernity and Tolerance

The co-presence of different groups on the tram has been used to construct the light rail as a symbol of a modern and cosmopolitan metropolis (Nolte and Yacobi).



- West Jerusalem
- Settlement
- Green Line
- Palestinian neighbourhood

**Map 1:** Locations of Light Rail stations and the route of its Red Line since 2011. Courtesy of the author.

In seeking to convince Alstom, one of the CityPass members criticized for taking part in an infrastructural project on occu-

ped land, that the light rail was a peaceful project, a briefing by the Jerusalem

Transportation Masterplan argued that the light rail transit

has the potential of bringing various population groups closer, promoting peaceful co-existence, and thus setting Jerusalem as a role-model of coexistence in the Middle-East. (Jerusalem Transportation Masterplan 2)

This view, echoed repeatedly (Alstom), aligns with observations made in a report the municipality commissioned from Richard Florida's Creative Cities Group, which sees "diversity" as "one of Jerusalem's strongest assets" but argues that the city needed to become more "tolerant" by encouraging the "blending" of different groups (Creative Class Group). Palestinian acceptance of the tram was thus sought through extensive community outreach work through schools and mosques, but also through the use of Arabic signage and announcements, neither of which can be found on other Israeli public transport. It also emerged from the affective and atmospheric appeal of the infrastructure itself. Operating on the level of "fantasy and desire," as Larkin argues, "infrastructures create a sensing of modernity" and make aspirations emotionally real (Larkin 332-4). The futuristic, silver train with its streamline silhouette

stands in compelling contrast to the historic cityscape through which it passes, an image of progress difficult to disavow. For Palestinians, being offered a high-quality urban service by the municipality, and being included in this showcase project, was unusual and unexpected. They noted the level of comfort of the JLR, with the unimpeded movement of the train resulting in an embodied sense of modernity, what Sheller refers to as a “co-constitution of motion and emotion” (Sheller). The old buses of the East Jerusalem bus companies were described as loud, hot, rattling, and often stuck in traffic. The light rail, by contrast, was air conditioned and moved smoothly and quickly, providing an undeniably more comfortable experience (see Figure 1).

### Normalization and Security

In addition to projecting an image of harmonious shared space, Palestinian usage of the light rail was also aimed at protecting the infrastructure and the Jewish passengers on it, as the former CEO of the light rail operator noted (Interview with Former CEO, CityPass). Here we see how security thinking and normalization are intertwined: rather than exclude dangerous elements, as disciplinary power does, normalization in a security-based system integrates dangerous elements in order



Figure 1: The Jerusalem Light Rail on its route along the Green Line, 2014. Courtesy of the author.

to minimize risk (Foucault 65). In addition to cancelling out the dangers of Palestinian opposition by compelling East Jerusalemites to partake in the light rail project, a broad range of more conventional means of protection and surveillance were put in place to securitize the tram (Interview with VP Projects and Consulting Services, MTRS 3, 31 July 2014). Drones were used for the first time for policing purposes in Jerusalem, flying

along the Shuafat main road and adjacent areas, ostensibly to identify individuals attacking the tram (Interview with CEO, Bladeworx). As the light rail became the site of increased incidents of violence during 2015, Jerusalem’s Israeli mayor, Nir Barkat, visited Beit Hanina in October 2015 to investigate “ways of restoring security to the light rail line in that area of the city,” carrying a handgun converted to an assault rifle (Hasson). What might be

called the militarization of civilian infrastructure takes place on two levels here: On the one hand, the light rail and the passengers on it are the object of securitization. On the other, the train itself, as well as the ridership, also have a strategic purpose in line with a territorially expansionist Israeli agenda in the conflict over in Jerusalem.

Beyond the fact that incorporating Palestinians' everyday public transport use into the Israeli system enables increased control over their movements, the light rail also assimilates East Jerusalem's urban space with the city's west. James Scott has shown how state power seeks to simplify local knowledges, practices and spaces in order to make these more "legible" from the centre and facilitate their assimilation into its own administrative apparatus (Scott). Visually aligning the space along the JLR with West Jerusalem by introducing architectural elements along the route, the light rail has made Shuafat (see stops marked in black on Map 1) more legible and expanded the comfort zone of Jewish Israelis who previously would not have entered Palestinian neighbourhoods (Baumann "Enclaves, borders, and everyday movements"). Thus, the tram has made the area accessible to settlers and other Israelis both in a spatial and in a

metaphorical sense. Even the temporary, mobile presence of passengers on a train can have a cumulative effect of altering the character of a neighbourhood, a type of gradual encroachment that results in a *new normal* (cf. Bayat). Promoters of Jewish-Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem note a "strengthened presence" of Jews in East Jerusalem thanks to the light rail (Municipal Councilmember Arieh King in Wishart). As the means by which settlers move through (and into) hitherto inaccessible spaces, the light rail itself has become the frontier - one which had to be securitized to ensure its effectiveness. Thus, seemingly innocuous public transportation infrastructure, which unusually also served Palestinian Jerusalemites, has had the effect of increased surveillance, and ultimately, increased Israeli presence in East Jerusalem.

Enhanced ease of movement, then, is also associated with more Israeli control over, and surveillance of, Palestinian movements. If we follow Foucault in understanding the manner in which things should circulate (or not) as essential to how sovereignty is exerted over a city, we come to view security as more than a side-effect of freedom of movement, or the state response of excessive freedom hav-

ing gone awry. Enabling "freedom of circulation" is in fact a *form* of security (Foucault 49, 64). The seemingly contradictory approaches of facilitating Palestinian movement and securitizing it are thus two aspects of the same logic. On the one hand, the *uniqueness* of Jerusalem's cultural diversity is highlighted as part of the municipality's urban branding strategy. On the other, the Israeli mayor also insists that Jerusalem is a "*normal city*", its frictions and occasional outbursts of violence merely reflecting the same challenges faced by other cities of the "free world" (Barkat). This dual approach serves to both commodify the presence of Palestinians and to obfuscate the city's particular situation of prolonged occupation while legitimizing securitization. The light rail plays an important role in advancing both narratives.

### Disrupting Infrastructural Circulations

Despite being presented as a beneficial urban service that brings different residents of Jerusalem together, the JLR seems to not have instilled a sense of belonging or gratitude in its Palestinian passengers. If anything, passengers related a quiet sense of resentment about the fact that pragmatism forced them to partake in this Israeli institution. While the train eased the everyday com-

mates of an estimated 14,000 Palestinians per day (Jerusalem Transportation Masterplan), and close to half of all East Jerusalemites took the train at least occasionally (IPCC), Palestinian attitudes toward the train remained ambivalent. Some residents supported a full boycott, others expressed concerns with regard to their personal safety, or an unwillingness to pay for tickets in what they perceived as a colonial enterprise.

Following a slow increase in acts of violence by radical settlers along the Shuafat main road, in the summer of 2014, the violent murder of a teenage boy from a well-known Shuafat family sparked clashes in the neighbourhood, during which the light rail became the target of collective outrage. During three days and nights of thorough destruction of the es-Sahel and Shuafat Center light rail stops, young Palestinians clashed with police and border guards, throwing rocks, Molotov cocktails, and fireworks. Protesters began by breaking security cameras at the stations, then smashed and burned station shelters, signage, ticket machines, signals, and traffic lights. The rubber lining of tracks was set on fire and underground wiring was melted by a Molotov cocktail which exploded inside a manhole. On the final night of confrontations, Palestinians

brought in heavy machinery to cut down three electricity pylons supplying the train.

Palestinian residents as well as Israeli observers noted that the light rail was attacked because it had become the most visible symbol of the municipality, and thus the Israeli occupation, in Shuafat. An occupier's infrastructure, especially if it makes inroads into a previously inaccessible area, can become the very "embodiment of colonial experience" (Masquelier 829), of territorial appropriation. When the incorporating effects of the light rail had been exposed through the rise of settler violence, Palestinians' initial ambivalence toward this comfortable new means of transport turned to outrage. The attacks on the train's infrastructure undermined its practical function of making Shuafat accessible, and, on a symbolic level, served to demarcate the neighbourhood as unsafe for Israelis yet again, reversing the sense of legibility previously achieved through Israeli interventions in the urban space. As reliable infrastructure is seen as a sign of a well-functioning political order (Barry), the disruption of those infrastructures is an exposure of the weakness of that political order. Here, it also exposed as untrue the argument by which the light rail was justified: that Palestinians were happy to give up their sovereignty for bet-

ter services and freedom of movement. Palestinians were aware of the image of progress projected by the tram, which has lent legitimacy to expropriation. Residents rejected the light rail, then, because they perceived it as an advancing colonial frontier rather than the "urban revival" mechanism with the potential to become "a promoter of coexistence," as it was billed by the municipality (Jerusalem Transportation Masterplan 2-3).

### Conclusion

After half a century of occupation, much of Palestinian East Jerusalem is disconnected and excluded from the city at the same time as infrastructural incorporation advances (Dumper; Shlomo). This paradox of concurrent exclusion and incorporation is traceable to Israel's unresolved relationship to its Palestinian subjects more broadly (cf. Azoulay and Ophir; Robinson). Rather than a form of atonement for past neglect, however, we should see the connections forged by infrastructures such as the light rail within the context of Israel's settler colonial project.

Due to the obduracy of their materiality, infrastructures become facts – often irreversible ones – that then delimit the decisions that may be made in the future, even the possibilities that might be envisioned.

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While urban planning and official government policy in Jerusalem has consistently aimed to constrain the possibilities of a Palestinian-determined East Jerusalem since 1967, the provision of services benefitting Palestinians, including the facilitation of their movement, is a new development. More than a *cementation* of the occupation through hard infrastructures, however, the daily routines, neighbourhood characteristics, institutions and even bodily comportments that are altered in their wake may contribute significantly to the increasing inextricability of the city. The visual alignment of East Jerusalem, advanced by the light rail, serves to project a unified city by erasing difference and making Palestinian space legible and thus governable. Smooth movement across intra-urban boundaries offers the embodied sense that the city's divergent parts are part of an organic, coherent whole. Shared spaces project an atmosphere of tolerance, presenting the city as open, normal and unified and use circulation as a means of depoliticizing and normalizing the occupation of East Jerusalem, while also advancing its annexation through physical movement. Travel behaviour is altered through disciplinary systems and surveillance – but also through registers of fantasy and desire, forging mobile subjects who come to

embody Israeli norms in order to partake in new mobilities.

Understanding infrastructural service provision in this way, then, expands the existing understanding of “infrastructural violence” (Rodgers and O'Neill 401). Rather than only at work when residents lack access to urban networks, we see that infrastructure can also have violent effects when new connections are established. It might be argued that the ethno-national conflict over territory at work in Jerusalem makes Jerusalem an exceptional case with regard to the violent effects of infrastructural expansion. Yet in less overtly contested cities, too, improving marginal areas' access to the city centre may not necessarily lead to reducing urban exclusion or inequality. It may serve to normalize newly connected neighbourhoods, leading to increased state intervention or displacement through gentrification (Grube-Cavers and Patterson; Lin and Chung). The danger for marginal groups that stems from creating access channels for dominant groups, the “tyranny of proximity” (Edwards 424), is thus at work outside of (settler) colonial or conflict settings, too.

The way in which we perceive and understand infrastructures tends to be medi-

ated by imagery of modernist optimism. We believe, as Larkin notes, that “by promoting circulation, infrastructures bring about change, and through change they enact progress, and through progress we gain freedom” (Larkin 332). Yet we have seen that increased connectivity and circulation is not necessarily associated with more freedom. Connective infrastructures, while enabling movement, also entail the limitation of possibilities: circulation is fixed along certain routes and thereby precludes other options of the “indefinite series of mobile elements” (Foucault 20) that make up the city. The way mobility is organized in the city is thus not merely reflective of current power relations, it also actively shapes the politics of the future by delineating the field of possibilities within which city dwellers' lives can be lived. The short-term improvements to the quality of life through upgrading of infrastructure, opening up connections between previously isolated neighbourhoods, and easing movement across the city come at the price of incorporation and loss of autonomy – foreclosing future possibilities for the city.

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