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Israeli security agents in the Old City of Jerusalem

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Abstract: Jerusalem is a city of extremes, where tourists and pilgrims come to see the sights and pray, but where violence is also a daily affair. In the square kilometer called the Old City, which is part of East Jerusalem and thus considered by the international community as occupied territory, the tensions accumulate as (Jewish) Israeli settlers move into houses in the middle of the Muslim and Christian quarters. In order to secure them, numerous cameras have been installed by the police that show all that happens in the narrow streets of the quarter and private security personnel are stationed on many roofs to watch the area. Furthermore, undercover police officers patrol the streets and at times check IDs of Palestinians. In this article, we focus on policing strategies that Israeli private and public security agents use to control this small and controversial urban space. We argue that the constant presence and movement of police, security personnel, and their surveillance technologies in and through the heart of the Muslim quarter should be analyzed within a colonial context and as a deliberate strategy to control and discipline the local population and to legitimize the larger settler project of the Israeli state. This strategy consists of different performances and thus relationships with policed audiences. First, their (undercover) presence is visible for Palestinians with the effect or intention of intimidating them directly. At the same time they also serve to reassure the Israeli settlers living in the Old City and when in uniform foreign tourists. Both Palestinians and settlers will recognize agents and other security arrangements through experience and internalization of the Israeli security mentality, while tourists see them only when in uniform. However, simultaneously, when undercover, their presence remains largely unseen for this third “audience”; the tourists who are not to be alarmed. By showing their presence to some while remaining invisible to others, security actors and technology “perform” for different audiences, manifesting their power within urban space and legitimizing the Israeli occupation.

Keywords: Jerusalem, Judaization, performance, policing strategies, public and private security

The Old city of Jerusalem is a place of extremes, where tourists and pilgrims come to see the sights and pray, but where violence is often just around the corner. As part of East Jerusalem, the square kilometer called the Old City is considered by the international community to be
occupied territory. Tensions in this part of the city accumulate as Israeli settlers continuously take over houses in the middle of the Palestinian Muslim and Christian quarters and elsewhere in the eastern part of the city. In order to secure these urban settlements and to keep “the peace” (i.e., to keep the local Palestinian population quiet) in this hotly debated space, public and private actors have established a range of security measures: they have installed numerous cameras, while private security personnel monitor the area from rooftops, and police agents continuously patrol the streets.

In this article we analyze how Israeli private and public security agents control this small and controversial urban space. The strategies used by Israeli security actors consist of at least three different relationships to different audiences, acted out through patrolling and surveilling the streets and through the active protection of settlers within the Muslim quarter of the Old City. While these strategies ultimately serve one main goal, which is to uphold the status quo of the occupation and Jewish dominance in this part of the city, they create different relationships with the policed populations, in which the visibility and invisibility of the security agents are crucial. We argue that these relationships, as part of the policing strategies, consist of the constant visible presence of police, security personnel, and cameras in the heart of the Muslim quarter of the Old City, which is intimidating to some and reassuring to others. At the same time, policing agents at times create an “invisible” relationship with (foreign) visitors to the city. This combination of relationships, we suggest, is part of a deliberate policy to both control and discipline the local population, while serving as a means of support and legitimation of the overall Israeli settler project in East Jerusalem.

Our first point of departure is then to situate these policing strategies within the colonial context of Jerusalem (Zureik 1979, 2011; Reuveny 2003). Only by analyzing the existing colonial relationships and power dynamics between Israelis and Palestinians in East Jerusalem and thus the Old City is it possible to fully understand the nature of this kind of policing. Our second point of departure is to analyze the policing strategies mentioned above as performances, in which visuality plays a significant role (see Cook and Whowell 2011; Diphoorn 2016). With this approach we attempt to make two contributions. First, we engage with the existing literature on policing and show in what ways it is useful or limited for a contemporary context of military occupation. Second, by using the concept of performativity, we show through an analysis of a very distinct case that not only is policing performative but how it can engage in different performances toward different audiences at the same time.

We start by briefly explaining the division of Jerusalem between East and West, providing background information on the Old City itself and on Israeli settlers moving into Palestinian parts of the city, further emphasizing the city’s settler colonial character. Then we will discuss some literature on policing before continuing to explore the strategies of Israeli security agents in the Old City, analyzing their (in)visible policing performances as tools of control and legitimation through the relationships they establish with the policed populations.

Both authors have done extensive fieldwork on Israeli security actors, consisting of (participant) observations and interviews. For this article we draw on observations of both authors, while most ethnographic data is provided by the fieldwork of Lior Volinz in the Old City of Jerusalem. We also use photographs to provide visual detail on the complex situation that exists in the Old City, where multiple security agents work and live within very close proximity.

Jerusalem

Its religious significance makes Jerusalem, and especially the Old City, extremely important for many. The Old City is surrounded by high walls and divided into Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Armenian quarters. While many Christians believe that Jesus was taken to the cross after walk-
ing along the Via Dolorosa and was buried in what is now called the Holy Sepulcher Church, it is mostly Jews and Muslims who claim to have a (religious) stake in the city’s history. Muslims believe that Mohammed came to pray at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and was taken to heaven from there; it is the third holiest place within Islam. Jews believe that King David lived there and assume that the holy of holiest in which the Ten Commandments given to Moses by God were placed exists where the Dome of the Rock stands today. Close by is the Western Wall, a remnant of the Second Temple, which is the holiest place of worship for Jews.

During the Six Days War in 1967, Israel occupied and subsequently annexed the eastern part of the city. This occupation made it possible for Israeli Jews to reach the Western Wall for the first time in many years, an event with significant symbolic power for the Israeli nation-state. Modern mainstream Israeli discourse tends to present Jerusalem as a united city, a city that was once divided but is no more. The main idea is that East and West are now one and that the city is whole again. Notions of an “undivided capital,” a “complete city,” and a “united city” are often used by the state and public alike, drawing on an illusion of a history of united-ness that was broken in 1948 when Jordan occupied it during the war but restored in 1967 by the Israeli military.

However, in practice, occupied East Jerusalem presents a very different reality from its Western counterpart. In becoming part of a “united city,” the eastern part of the city, a large area including many villages and farmland, also became part of the Occupied Territories under Israeli control and was formally annexed by Israel in 1982 (as opposed to the rest of the West Bank). Importantly, Jerusalemites living in the eastern part of the city did not automatically become Israeli citizens, but received a permanent residency permit, de facto treating those living in their own country as foreigners. This annexation, similar to the occupation of the rest of the West Bank and the Golan Heights in the north, is perceived as illegitimate by international standards. East and West Jerusalem are opposites in many ways: not only do Palestinian and Jewish inhabitants of the city have different rights as citizens, but an important distinction is also evident when looking at, for example, city services. In Jewish neighborhoods in East and West Jerusalem there is a clear investment in infrastructure; they have good roads, sidewalks, streetlights, and regular garbage collection. The Palestinian neighborhoods, however, are visibly neglected. There are no playgrounds, no sidewalks, no streetlights, and bad roads. Garbage often goes uncollected, the level of the public education system is relatively poor, and residents often lack adequate running water (see the reports by the human rights organizations ACRI and B’Tselem).

To emphasize the colonialist character of Jerusalem as a context for specific strategies of policing, it is important to look at Israel’s activities as an occupying entity. Since the annexation, Israel has been making considerable efforts to avoid a demographic dominance of Palestinians in Jerusalem and to increase the Jewish population, not only in the Western part of the city but also in its eastern parts (Yiftachel 1999; Zink 2009; Fenster and Shlomo 2011). These efforts to Judaize the city have involved the construction of the Separation Barrier or Wall through East Jerusalem, isolating it from the rest of the West Bank, land expropriation, the revocation of residence rights, and uneven division of the city’s budget between the two parts.

Another important state strategy in this regard, and relevant for our argument, is the support given to Jewish Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem. These settlers mostly live in big neighborhoods that are built especially for them on land expropriated from its Palestinian owners. However, there is also a smaller number who settle in the heart of the Palestinian neighborhoods of East Jerusalem with the assistance of one of several religious settlers’ associations. At the moment of writing, an estimated 2,500 Israeli settlers live in these so-called compounds. In contrast to the more pragmatic settlers who often live in other places across the West Bank, these are ideological settlers deeply convinced of their right to live in any part of Jerusalem for re-
ligious reasons. When walking through the Old City, one can easily identify these compounds by looking up from the narrow streets and spotting the Israeli flags that cover the roofs. One famous settler, who never lived in the Old City but who bought a house in the Muslim part in a deliberate political move, was the late prime minister Ariel Sharon.

**Figure 1.** A settlement in the Old City of Jerusalem (Photo by Lior Volinz)
Approximately 370 private guards protect these settlers in the Palestinian neighborhoods on a daily basis. These guards are paid by the Israeli Ministry of Housing, which spends a whopping $8,000 per settler per year on this type of security. This is a clear indication of the Israeli state’s active support for these illegal settlements. In addition to these private guards who are employed specifically for the protection of settlers, numerous police agents of different units can be found in the streets of East Jerusalem. The array of security actors in the Old City consists of Border Police (military conscripts with police authority), “blue” (regular) police, plainclothes police, and private security guards employed by the state. Blue police personnel can be found throughout the Jewish quarter and near the Western Wall, the most important Jewish site in the area. On the Haram al-Sharif or Temple Mount and at its entrances, one finds mostly Border Police officers, heavily armed and dressed in combat attire. Anyone entering the Western Wall plaza or the Temple Mount is checked thoroughly by private security personnel, and in the narrow streets surrounding this area one mostly encounters plainclothes police and private security personnel. Looking up, more private security personnel can be detected: these agents are stationed on the roofs of the Israeli settlements in the Old City.

Analyzing Jerusalem as a colonial city (and Israel as a settler colonial state for that matter) and thus acknowledging the asymmetrical power relations between Israeli Jews and Palestinians and the context of the oppression, exploitation, and dispossession of the latter by the Israeli state has two distinct goals. First, it embeds policing strategies within a power structure that is not found in a noncolonial setting. Policing and the provisions of (security)
services to citizens and noncitizens beget inherently different connotations within a colonial or settler colonial context. This view then allows us new insights into strategies of policing that regular contexts do not. Second, by positioning the policing practices within the wider settler colonial enterprise of the Israeli state, we can understand these practices within their underlying and often hidden political context.

Policing a colonial city

This security “assemblage” of various actors carries out the policing we analyze here. Our main argument is that policing strategies within the Old City of Jerusalem can be analyzed through their different (in)visible performances vis-à-vis different audiences. We contend that security agents in the Old City (and beyond it), especially those who wear plain clothes and thus are more difficult to identify, use a strategy that relies simultaneously on visibility and invisibility, on intimidation and reassurance. Security agents (police officers, soldiers, and private actors) are identifiable and thus visible for Palestinians, who expect them to patrol the streets and are at times forcibly reminded of their presence, and for settlers living in the Old City. Yet they often remain invisible to the tourists who flock to the Old City to see the sites and are much less accustomed to the security mindset of the local inhabitant (whether as a negative or a positive force).

We draw on different ideas from the literature on policing to make sense of this policing performance. Analyzing Jerusalem and its security actors within the context of a colonial city requires a somewhat different approach to policing. While the actions of security agents may resemble those in noncolonial contexts, in this case it is not criminals the police wants to deter or “regular” citizens they want to reassure. Instead, policing actions are directed toward the local Palestinian population within the small space of the Old City and intended to protect and reassure the (illegal) Jewish Israeli settlers while simultaneously legitimizing their presence.

Much of the policing literature seems to assume the existence of two types of citizens: those you need to protect and the criminals or terrorists. In relation to this assumption it emphasizes deterrence policing versus reassurance policing as two distinct strategies (Bahn 1974). The situation in the Old City is more complex, as we have tried to show above. Not only do both strategies take place at the same time, but the small, contested space in which security agents within a colonial context approach different audiences makes it quite unique. Moreover, not only is the citizenship status of both Palestinians and Israeli settlers debatable, as Palestinians are officially not citizens but residents, settlers are citizens who live in an occupied space and tourists fall outside both categories altogether. We develop the idea of colonial policing and place it in a contemporary context, in which policing is performed by a colonial entity (public and private) and there is a presence of a settler community and of a huge influx of foreign visitors. Following contemporary work on policing (Jones and Newburn 2006; Brodeur 2010), which employs terms such as “plural policing” or “policing quilts,” we employ a broader conceptualization of policing to include nonstate actors, such as private security guards and surveillance technology.

As noted above, two strategies stand out when looking at policing literature: reassurance and deterrence policing. Innes lays out the way reassurance policing is carried out today (2004, 2005; Fielding and Innes 2006). Drawing on the older work of Bahn (1974), he explores the phenomenon as one of high visibility patrols that “target … ‘signal crimes’ and ‘signal disorders’” (Innes 2004). The debate he departs from is one within Anglo-American police institutions about the role of the police as preventers and detectors of crime (deterrence policing) versus their involvement in the delivery of security. Reassurance policing arose from this debate on police reform, as an effort to communicate with those who needed to be protected (or secured) instead of dealing only with the criminal actors (Innes 2004; Millie 2010). Reassuring through
policing can be done in multiple ways, such as being present (in person or even just by leaving police cars within a neighborhood) and by establishing a relationship with residents. Bahn, as one of the first to promote such an approach, emphasized the importance of foot patrols by police officers to make the public feel more protected (1974; Innes 2004). Others have written about police visibility and its effect on feelings of safety (Povey 2001; van de Veer et al. 2012). In contrast, deterrence policing is often categorized as an aggressive form of policing that is geared toward criminal elements of society. These people are (presumably) deterred from committing crimes by strategies such as stop and frisk, as well as by cameras and the presence of patrolling officers: “They are perceived to communicate messages about the lack of opportunities to misbehave and/or the harsh repercussions of committing crime” (Cook and Whowell 2011: 611).

As emphasized above, both concepts can be used when analyzing Jerusalem but should be enriched by ideas that incorporate a distinct colonial context. While not explicitly calling Jerusalem a colonial city, Dumper (2013: 1250) chooses to analyze it as a divided city where “the legitimacy of the existing political authority is in question” and that is “controlled by a polity or ethnic/national group that promotes a chauvinist ideology.” He draws from policing literature in postconflict cities where policing goes through phases of stabilization after a conflict has ended and different kinds of law enforcement strategies after stabilization have been achieved (Dumper 2013: 1248–1249). He then argues—correctly, we believe—that in so-called divided cities “the stabilization phase is greatly protracted” (Dumper 2013: 1250). We understand this to mean that instead of understanding policing as law enforcement, during such “stabilization phases,” which in Jerusalem seem to have a chronic character (Vigh 2008), policing takes the form of aggressive measures to accomplish peace and quiet after the conflict has ended and thus to pacify and discipline (minority) groups that pose a threat to this peace. Although we would not characterize the situation of Jerusalem as postconflict, the idea of a protracted phase of stabilization is useful. The occupying power of Israel is geared toward the normalization of the occupation, and security agents work toward the containment of potential unrest and violence. The policing activities of these agents emphasize the intimidation and pacification of Palestinians, rather than law enforcement. Furthermore, as previously noted regarding other cases of colonial or imperial policing, policing strategies are highly militarized in the Old City of Jerusalem. After briefly exploring policing as performance, we will incorporate these ideas in our description of the different relationships within the police strategies below.

Strategies of policing performance: (In)visibilities

We have opted to analyze policing in Jerusalem as a set of performances aimed at different audiences. Cook and Whowell (2011) insightfully call for an analysis of policing as an embodied performance, and we think the case of Jerusalem fits well within this perspective. By drawing on Butler’s work on performance, they and others (e.g., Diphoorn 2016) call for a more qualitative approach to policing, taking into account the specific ways that security actors perform their strategies of deterrence or reassurance (Cook and Whowell 2011: 617). Below we draw on their ideas to analyze the relationships that make part of policing strategies in the Old City performances that communicate messages to different audiences simultaneously. An in-depth, ethnographic look at the performance of policing helps move us beyond an analysis of formal policing strategies to understand the actual effect policing might have on the ground.

To elucidate the picture in the Old City of Jerusalem, we begin with a short ethnographic description by Erella Grassiani of a day walking through the Old City with a colleague in late 2014. We observed several different security actors, such as private security guards at the entrance to a settlement compound and on the
roofs of several other settlements, border policemen and women on the Haram al-Sharif and blue police on the Western Wall plaza. At one point we encountered three agents in civilian clothing who were patrolling the narrow streets of the Muslim quarter. As we saw them several times, they attracted our attention, especially because we were on the lookout for all types of security personnel. We decided to follow them to see if they would lead us to the Israeli settlements in the quarter, assuming they were private guards. Then we saw the (what we presumed to be) guards showing very intimidating behavior: the male agents stopped some young men on the street and asked them for their IDs; the agents stood very close to the youngsters, their faces almost touching theirs. At one point they grabbed a young man by his neck and dragged him out of view. When we asked the local onlookers who those people were, they said: “mista’arvim [undercover police officers “pretending” to be Arab], they only get the young kids,” referring to the daily occurrence of such surveillance in the quarter and the intimidation of youngsters.

In addition to the presence of a plethora of security agents that can be identified, a few important issues come to the fore here that are exemplary for seeing policing as performance. First, the act of stopping and frisking young men is a performance of presence and of mobility restriction used by security agents within colonial contexts (Zureik 2011). Without reason young men are made to stop, sending them a message that the police is always present, holding power. Second, this stopping and especially the demand to show their IDs can and has been analyzed as a form of surveillance, a tool of Israel’s matrix of control and as an instrument of colonial power (Lyon 2011; Tawil-Souri 2011), which is also a specific performance of power.

Intimidation: Showing presence

The first performance we want to analyze is “showing presence,” which Grassiani (2013) identified in her former research on Israeli conscripts in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Breaking the Silence (2010) has also collected numerous testimonies by Israeli (ex-)soldiers that emphasize the centrality of this strategy. Within the Israeli military, the strategy of showing presence is grouped under “terror prevention.” Often it does not only entail walking around and patrolling but also includes more aggressive methods such as nightly arrests or house invasions without any real suspicion or threat driving the operations. Many soldiers interviewed said that the sole idea behind such acts is to show “who is the boss” (ba‘al habait). The fact that both military and police or private security use this strategy is not coincidental. As the relations between the military, police, and private security industry are very close and direct, this strategy is exported and circulated.

When security agents in the Old City use it, the idea behind “showing presence” remains the same. As shown in the ethnographic description above, security agents intimidate Palestinians, especially the young ones, and hereby also other residents into complying, into staying put and not raising their voices. It is an aggressive and intimidating performance that tries to discipline the occupied population into refraining from protesting the Israeli settlements or the military occupation at large. Security agents’ performances are further aimed at maintaining the spatial segregation between the diminishing Palestinian space and the growing Israeli-Jewish space in the Old City. In an interview, a Palestinian resident from an influential family in the Old City bemoaned that “Of course we’re used to them [Israeli Security agents] blocking the streets sometimes. But I remember when I was a child we could walk freely, play throughout all the quarters … My children were already harassed when visiting the Jewish quarter or near settlers’ house, the number of which really boomed in the 1980s. Now it is my grandchildren that need to suffer barriers and checkpoints when they walk to the store or when they return home from school.”

The increasing loss of access to public space, whether through police barriers or through
informal practices of intimidation, is directly linked to the growing presence of security agents in the Old City. Their public display of power complements Israeli settlers’ demarcation of space: the fluttering Israeli flags, Israeli guardhouses, surveillance cameras, and patrols of undercover Israeli policemen all contribute to Palestinians feeling insecurity and alienation from larger parts of the Old City.

Of course, this does not mean that all forms of resistance disappear (Zureik 2011: 35); protests are organized, settlers inside the Haram al-Sharif are met with resistance, both physical and verbal, while some of the tourist shops are filled with key rings in the colors of the Palestinian flag and t-shirts with critical anti-occupation slogans. Palestinian residents, furthermore, employ a variety of coping mechanisms and daily negotiations of security practices. Many of the shop owners in the Old City have installed their own surveillance cameras (which are occasionally seized by Israeli security agents), in order to be able to counter frivolous Israeli police claims against them. Other Palestinian residents insist on traversing the Jewish quarter on their way to East Jerusalem’s southern suburbs, despite the enhanced risk of Israeli security agents’ violence, detention, and intimidation. The determination of Palestinian residents in the face of the plethora of Israeli security agents is fueled by both the religious and the national significance of Jerusalem, as well as by the residents’ daily concerns for their livelihood and legal residency status.

The Israeli policing strategy in the Christian and Muslim quarters is obviously visible to Palestinians living in the Old City, who have become accustomed to the presence of different kinds of security agents roaming the streets. Security agents not only partake in an effort to Judaize the Old City; they embody the process. The security agents, even when not in uniform, can then be recognized through a specific way of walking and dress. As the photograph below (taken during the observation described above) shows, they are dressed in civilian clothing, but their clothing is very specific to security personnel in Israel. When one knows the style, one can easily recognize the wide, casual clothes they wear in plain colors while not carrying any bags. Their walk is confident; they obviously know where they are going and walk with the ease of people who know they are in control. The Palestinians understand what is being communicated to them through this policing performance.

Furthermore, while some of the security agents are able to speak Arabic, they often choose to speak Hebrew to the Palestinian residents of the Old City instead. In an interview with a Palestinian shop owner, the elderly man argued that the Arabic-speaking Druze policemen often communicate only in Hebrew in order to assert control, intimidate the Palestinian residents, and avoid suspicion from their Jewish colleagues, asking, “Why don’t they speak Arabic with us? If they would agree to speak Arabic it would help defuse some of the tensions, but instead now many of us see them as worse than the Jewish policemen.”

A different performance given by security actors is to “play” with their visibility and degree of intimidation in the streets. This is done on both a collective and a personal level. While the Muslim quarter is usually dense with security agents, the deployment of policemen and their tactics can change according to the occasion. During Jewish holidays, when the number of Jewish-Israeli visitors to the Old City sharply increases, more patrols are seen in the street and ad hoc barriers are set up throughout the Muslim quarter, restricting Palestinian residents’ movement. Police presence can also be deliberately reduced or concealed. During the Friday Ramadan prayers in June 2015, the Muslim quarter swarmed with over 300,000 pilgrims from all over the Occupied Palestinian territories. Rather than welcoming the one-day visitors with armed security agents upon their arrival in the Old City, the Israeli police and border guards retreated to the outskirts of the Muslim quarter, allowing Palestinian ushers to direct the pilgrims on their path. Thus confrontations were avoided; by choosing not to show themselves, Israeli security agents
allowed the Muslim quarter during Ramadan to temporarily return to its residents and visually transform into a Palestinian religious and national hub. This shows how the visibility of the Israeli occupation in the Old City can be determined not only through questions of sovereignty but also by the daily maneuvers of police commanders and private security guards.

Security agents also show their presence through small-scale performances and practices. As can be seen in the photo below, a female undercover agent is wearing her gun outside her shirt. She can easily hide her weapon again by covering it with her shirt, thus constantly “playing” with her (in)visibility. The ones for whom these agents are visible, the Palestinians, know
their faces already. They are part of the audience that is supposed to become aware of these performances, without these forces disturbing the public/touristic space of the Old City.

Within policing literature we could call this aspect of the strategy deterrence policing, where the police tries to deter criminals from carrying out illegal activities (Cook and Whowell 2011). However, we would argue something else is happening here: the police is not trying to deter criminals but local civilians who can be guilty only of living within the Old City. The strategy thus points much more to a performance of intimidation, aimed at convincing people to keep quiet in their own homes and neighborhood. We interpret it as part of a national strategy whose objective is to make daily life as difficult as possible in the hope people will leave the Old City to the Jewish minority. Such Judaization in Israel, and Jerusalem specifically, is part and parcel of the settler-colonial character of the Israeli state (Yiftachel 1999, 2006; Zink 2009; Middle East Monitor 2009).

The police officers who patrol the streets of the Old City, however, are not always undercover and often, especially on Fridays when tensions rise with the Friday prayers on the Haram al-Sharif, shows themselves in full force. The function of wearing combat gear, as the border police units do, is again a different performance with its own distinct goals. Besides serving to protect the agents, it is a clear sign of the militarization of policing activities that blurs the difference between military and police actors. As is shown in the photo below, these police officers patrolling the Old City can almost not be distinguished from soldiers. They carry full equipment; bulletproof vests, helmets, and other body armor and are heavily armed. Their presence in the narrow alleys of the Old City, especially in the Muslim quarter, is very intimidating. These officers are also in charge of controlling all entrances to the Haram al-Sharif, where they limit Muslims’ access to their holy site based on instructions of the Israeli police, which are subject to daily changes. During periods of political...
unrest many worshippers are barred from entrance—access is then often determined by age (only men over the age of 40 or 50 are allowed) and gender. Some Palestinians are placed on blacklists that ban them from the holy site completely. On several occasions in June–July 2015, hundreds of women who traveled the length of the country to pray in al-Aqsa were barred from entering and were left arguing with the policemen for hours. When they initially tried to enter, the officers were instructed to take away their identification documents, which they intended to keep till the ladies departed the Old City. This prevented the worshippers from trying their luck at another entrance, as they did not have their IDs at hand. The same militarized policemen also lead incursions into the al-Aqsa Mosque during confrontations with young Palestinian men: they do not hesitate to fire rubber-coated bullets, tear gas, and stun grenades when attempting to disperse the crowd.

The Muslim quarter is a densely populated space, with many people hurrying down the road to do shopping and go about other daily activities. As Dumper (2013: 1255) writes, patrolling by such forces in East Jerusalem can also be seen as “an assertion of sovereignty, an exercise in ‘flying the flag’ that can be seen a deliberately provocative.” This aggressive, militarized policing thus underscores the main goal of the strategy we are discussing, which is to pacify the Palestinian population. These provocative practices in the Old City can have dire consequences, as the violence that broke out in the autumn of 2015 indicates.

Reassurance by being there

Settlers and other Israelis living in and/or visiting the Old City of Jerusalem also recognize these security agents. Settlers see undercover agents walking through the alleys on a daily basis and are actively involved with security personnel who provide them and their children with an escort as they walk through the Muslim quarter. Private security guards pick up Israeli-Jewish children in the morning from

**Figure 5.** Police officers in the Old City (Photo by Lior Volinz)
home and take them to school on foot; on the way back they wait for the children to finish their classes and escort them back home. The security guards thus need to be skilled both as armed guards and as nannies. Security guards direct the children (up to 12 at a time) through the crowded narrow alleys and ask them to refrain from talking with the Palestinian residents or stopping in a local shop to buy sweets. They attempt to minimize the children’s exposure to their neighborhood, both because the parents expect this and to prevent any altercations. Not only the settlers are reassured by the security agents roaming the streets: foreign and Israeli tourists, while mostly not recognizing undercover agents, can also be reassured by (uniformed) police officers while visiting the sites and markets around the Palestinian quarters.

It should be noted that not all Israeli-Jewish settlers in the Old City are the same: there is an important difference between the ultra-Orthodox Ashkenazi settlers (nicknamed in Arabic Busbusim) and the Jewish nationalist settlers (in Arabic Mustawtenin). The former, who are perceived as passive agents in the settlement enterprise, are subject to both curiosity and ridicule from the Palestinian residents. The latter, perceived as instigators of dispossession and violence, are overwhelmingly treated with hostility and contempt. The Busbusim, although private security guards protect their compounds, oft en choose not to use the security escort services offered by the state. Instead they walk the streets quickly, oft en looking down as if to minimize their presence. The nationalist settlers, in contrast, are almost always escorted by at least two guards and often provocatively display Israeli flags and semimilitary attire.

Reassurance policing is one of the aspects of these security agents’ strategy (Bahn 1974; Innes 2004), which, as explained earlier, aims at communicating reassurance to citizens through the presence of police officers in plain sight. The police officer or private security agent is in a way standing between the criminal and the innocent citizen who demands a safe living environment and is thus performing his/her role of protection. Again, the situation in the Old City is not compatible with the exact way this kind of policing is usually defined. Although in this classic scenario there are two sorts of citizens, the “good and the bad,” in the case of Jerusalem this distinction is problematic. The settlers who are reassured and secured are (internationally speaking) illegal residents of the Old City while being Israeli citizens and thus are part of a colonial system that has been trying to increase Jewish Israeli presence in the city. As explained earlier, Palestinian residents who are seen as the main threat by the security agents are not citizens but have permanent residency status, which means they have fewer rights than full citizens and are more vulnerable.

Then there is a third “audience” in the Old City, which consists of tourists. They, by definition, are neither residents nor citizens but visitors. For them there is even a special Tourist Police Squad in the city, and its commander was quoted in the Jerusalem Post as saying, “This is our main goal—to make tourists feel as secure here as any place in the world. The best situation is that they won’t need us, that they will notice we’re around, but won’t feel Israel is more unusual than any tourist site in the world.” This quotation strengthens our point here and shows that in Jerusalem’s Old City, the tourist becomes one of the audiences for whom the police performs. Framing the presence of security forces as “securing you against terror” is geared to reassure the tourists. As one traveler wrote on a travel blog: “Jerusalem has always been a volatile city and its best if you are always aware of your surroundings. It was a young women with an uzi across her chest as she herded a small group of school children through the streets that reminded me there could be danger.” Another commented: “It safe, well patrolled and still many people enjoying it.” In these messages it becomes clear how an armed security officer can give a message of alertness and protection to a tourist walking by.

One can also recognize this visible reassurance policing when looking at the private security guards stationed on many roofs. To the
Intimidation, reassurance, and invisibility

naïve outsider walking through the streets of the Old City these men stationed high in the sky surrounded by Israeli flags and cameras may be invisible, but for the settlers these security guards are indispensable in their efforts to enlarge the Jewish presence in the Muslim quarter. In addition to the presence of agents and cameras, a new surveillance measure was introduced in the summer of 2014 when tension and riots broke out. The Israeli police used a “spy balloon” to watch the streets. One of the photos above shows both a security guard and a camera beside him on top of a settlers’ compound.

Israeli-Jewish settlers’ movement throughout the Old City is both enabled and delimited by the security agents who accompany them. Settlers are reassured that the private security guards by their side will protect them as they walk around the Palestinian quarters; at the same time, the daily interaction between the settlers and the security guards produces mobility patterns that reflect both security needs and personal convenience. The security guards always accompany the settlers along the quickest and most direct path to the nearest “Jewish” or “safe” space, whether it is another compound, the Jewish quarter, or the tram stops by the gates of the Old City. Settlers can face reluctance on the part of the security guards if they divert unannounced from their usual path into “dangerous” Palestinian space. Yet the political demands of the settlers to show their presence are ultimately always reflected in an increase in the number of Israeli security agents. When settlers organize protests, or during Jewish holidays, the movement of Jewish-Israeli settlers is secured by policemen barring Palestinians from walking the streets and by maintaining a complete segregation between the different residents of the Old City.

While serving as reassurance for these settlers and easing their movement, the Palestinian residents perceive the security agents and especially the police cameras that are everywhere as intimidating through the restrictions thus imposed on their movement. For example, a Human Rights report described how Palestinian women sometimes covered their head even within their homes because they felt watched all the time.10 Police officers restrict the movement of Palestinians by putting up barriers, locking stores and houses, and stopping and frisking passersby.

The policing performance we discuss here is then one of communicating a sense of security and safety for a very specific audience while enabling its movement. What one (occupied) audience perceives as aggression and intimidation and limiting its movement, another (occupying) audience perceives as reassuring and liberating.

Invisible policing

The third relationship within the policing strategies of Israeli security agents is related to their invisibility. Due to the fact that many security agents work and patrol wearing plain clothes or work in places out of sight (on roofs for example), most tourists will not recognize them as they sing and pray along the Via Dolorosa or buy souvenirs in the many shops. Tourists are not, as the settler and Palestinian audiences in the city are, socialized to recognize and register all the different security agents around them, and therefore their tourist experience is not compromised. This is a convenient way for Israel to hide its occupation and the settler enterprise from foreign visitors while carrying it out under their very eyes. As mentioned above, if the tourists do recognize security agents, they most likely feel more protected. However, most will not notice them.

The performance of policing here is one of invisibility. By not being seen and thus by not communicating directly with this audience tourists are kept safe, happy, and ignorant. This is important, because tourism is imperative for the Israeli state—economically, but also because it creates a sense of normality in an abnormal situation. When tourists can safely roam around an occupied city without the feeling of danger or of an immense security apparatus, they can ignore and/or deny the occupation, which in
turn legitimizes it. The colonial element of the power relationship remains invisible, together with its actors.

Conclusion

By analyzing Jerusalem as a colonial city and policing as performances, we have tried to show how different policing strategies by different security actors in the Old City are part of a larger national strategy to Judaize the city through the support and legitimation they give the Israeli settlement enterprise. We expanded on existing notions of policing, in particular deterrence and reassurance policing (Bahn 1974), by taking them into the realm of a colonial space. We hope to contribute to the debate on different forms of policing, first by analyzing policing strategies in Jerusalem as inherently colonial in order to bring to light the different power structures and the often hidden political implications of this policing. We looked at colonial policing in the specific space of Jerusalem, where not only security agents are present but also a settler community, an occupied people, and tourists. In this space, the audiences that should be protected and reassured or that should be deterred are very different from those audiences to which the more classical approaches to policing are geared. Second, we analyzed policing strategies as performances (Cook and Whowell 2011). Through this approach we identified several different strategies of policing that involved performances through which the security agents “spoke” to different audiences in different ways simultaneously. The way this “speech” was interpreted by these audiences was a result of specific experiences, socialization, and internalization of security ideologies.

In our analysis, we identified three different kinds of policing performances. The first one aims at intimidating the Palestinian residents of the Old City while severely restricting their movement. Second, the presence of these security agents, public and private, are aimed at re-
assuring both the settlers living in the Old City and the tourists who visit the sights. Private guards protect settlers and enable them to feel safe and move relatively freely through the Muslim and Christian quarters of the city. The third performance we discussed revealed how security is often invisible to foreign visitors to the city, further enabling the occupation to remain invisible and become normalized.

By looking at these strategies or performances of (in)visibility that communicated intimidation or reassurance or remained invisible, we have attempted to show how in the Old City of Jerusalem these policing strategies look like and shape the urban landscape. By using such strategies within the space of the Old City, these security agents (re)establish their power over the Palestinian population and legitimize their presence. Their (in)visibility confirms the occupation as a given; Palestinians are controlled, the settlers are kept in place and reassured, the tourist can continue to enjoy the space without worry.

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Notes

3. It is estimated that there are approximately 200,000 settlers in East Jerusalem. See http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_ej_settlements_factsheet_april_2012_english.pdf, accessed 29 September 2015.
6. This behavior is not only triggered by the surrounding Palestinian space but also has religious and/or gender connotations.

References


