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IN THE NAME OF PLURALISM: FIGHTING THE (PERCEIVED) ULTRA-ORTHODOX PENETRATION IN THE BAKA NEIGHBORHOOD OF JERUSALEM

ABSTRACT

In Jerusalem the term pluralism recently received an alternative meaning – non-Haredi. Conflicts between the “pluralist” and the Ultra-Orthodox populations regarding the character of city neighborhoods are quite frequent. The focus of this article is one Jerusalem neighborhood – Baka – and the conflicts that occurred there around this issue in 2009–10. Neighborhood residents interpreted and framed the conflicts as opposition to Ultra-Orthodox penetration, but I argue, relying on ethnographic data analysis of two conflicts, that the main focus was the definition of the public space. As these conflicts involved Ultra-Orthodox and organizations, in the sensitive context of Jerusalem, framing them as anti-Ultra-Orthodox penetration was useful in mobilizing residents’ participation and in gaining wider legitimation and support. More broadly, based on my ethnography, I argue that residents participate in neighborhood affairs due to sentiments of belonging and commitment, thus creating the political format I term “neighborhood citizenship”.

INTRODUCTION

In August 2011 a local playground in Baka, a neighborhood in South-Central Jerusalem, changed its usual appearance. Several inflatable bouncers were placed in in the playground where a large picture of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson, the deceased rabbi of Chabad was displayed. Yellow chain flags with the word “Messiah” written on them and a drawing of a crown were also hung (the Rebbe is considered by his followers to be the Messianic king, even after his death, chosen by god to bring redemption to the world). Crowds filled this local public space, coloring it with unusual quantities of the black and white outfits of Haredi people. Many Haredi families attended, most of whom were not from Baka. Many local families, religious or secular, also came and entertained their children with some bouncing and cotton candy.

On regular days, Baka is not an Ultra-Orthodox (Haredi) neighborhood. It is a small neighborhood, in size and population: covering less than half a square kilometer with only an estimated 7,500 inhabitants. Baka was built in the late nineteenth century by

wealthy Palestinians, forced out during the 1948 war. The abandoned Palestinian homes were declared “absentee properties” and were re-populated by new Jewish immigrants from Muslim countries and post-war Europe, government employees, military veterans, and evacuees from the Jewish neighborhoods damaged in the war. The spacious houses were divided into small units, replacing the wealth of the past with human density and poverty. The 1967 war was a turning point for Baka as the new city borders turned it into an inner-city neighborhood. A new architectural trend that saw value in its historic, authentic “character”¹ attracted middle-class Israelis and a gentrification process began. When the demand for Baka properties grew, new buildings sprung up and even the poorly built housing developments of the 1960s were gentrified. From the 1990s, Baka became a prestigious neighborhood. It is currently undergoing super-gentrification – when the upper class pushes out the middle-class.²

The majority of Baka’s population today is religious-Zionist and secular. It is a “pluralistic” neighborhood in the sense of what “pluralism” had come to mean in Jerusalem: non-Haredi. The unique social composition of Jerusalem pushed residents to form unusual alliances. Thus, in Jerusalem, non-Haredi Jews, a group marked by great diversity, became a new social group, “pluralistic” in the sense of their acceptance of other people’s lifestyles, without trying to enforce their own.

During the time of my research (2008–13), Baka had experienced several local conflicts over various issues. What tended to motivate these conflicts, I argue, was a sentiment of threat. One threat was Ultra-Orthodox penetration. Another source was “the big money” – investors seeking large profits by building luxurious housing units, thus making Baka unaffordable for many and changing the composition of neighborhood residents. A third source was the Jerusalem Municipality’s plans for the neighborhood in terms of transportation or the future development of the area, which appeared to residents as contrary to their interests and harmful to their quality of life.

Neighborhood residents perceived these three sources as threatening the neighborhood's character, and acted accordingly.

Jerusalem is a contested city, divided – culturally and geographically – between three populations: Palestinians, Ultra-Orthodox, and “pluralist Jews”. All tend to see the others as threatening, while at the same time trying to expand their own “territories”. The public space, representing the social composition of a neighborhood and defining its future course, thus becomes a battlefield. In this context, even small acts like a Chabad-sponsored family event may have explosive outcomes. After all, it is Chabad's operational principal to “begin with one Jew at a time”, “meet clients where they are”, and “claim the street”.³ Their representatives go everywhere to spread their agenda, especially places that are non-Haredi, like Baka. Religious politics is often driven by fear and is deeply connected with space and with people's perceptions of what the public space could or should include. For instance, conflicts regarding women's veiling or minarets in Europe are driven by disagreements regarding the visibility of the public space and the fear that liberal inclusion would lead to Islamization.⁴

Through the ethnographic analysis of two local conflicts in 2009–10, I argue that the fear of Ultra-Orthodox penetration has been utilized to increase participation. Publicly framing a conflict as opposition to Ultra-Orthodox penetration mobilizes people to act, motivated by a desire to safeguard the public space and the identity of their neighborhood. I argue that participation in neighborhood affairs is motivated by people's sentiments of belonging and commitment. Such participation creates the political format I term “neighborhood citizenship”.

The next section describes the research methodology. I then turn to discuss the background of the “pluralist”–Haredi conflict in Jerusalem; the urban apparatus of Community Councils, unique to Jerusalem; Baka's Community Council and local activists; and the theoretical framework of this article, namely the concept of

“neighborhood citizenship”. The following sections address the two case studies: the conflict regarding the takeover of public lands in the neighborhood by an Ultra-Orthodox NGO and the conflict over the operation of a Chabad summer camp in the premises of Baka’s Community Council. I conclude by discussing the arguments.

METHODOLOGY

My long ethnographic fieldwork in Baka, during 2008–13, was possible due to my residency in the neighborhood then. In the course of my fieldwork, I conducted 100 formal interviews as well as many informal conversations, including neighborhood residents, community leaders, religious laypeople, merchants, architects, realtors, local politicians, and neighborhood activists. Many respondents belonged to more than one category. My respondents included 40 Western immigrants, from the US, France, and Britain, who immigrated from the 1960s until the present. The majority of them (33 out of 40) were Orthodox (non-Haredi), although of different backgrounds and levels of practice. Among my 60 other respondents, 34 were secular or traditional Jews, 21 were religious from different streams of Judaism, and four were non-Jews. The respondents were found from personal networks or through the “snow ball” technique.

Neighborhood residents were the majority of my respondents.

My respondents included 13 neighborhood activists and elected volunteering board members of the Baka Community Council and 6 employees; 5 local activists (not from Baka); 4 municipal-level politicians; 4 Jerusalem Municipality employees; and 3 members of the team that worked on Baka’s new master plan. I asked activists about their activism, motivations, and views. Interviews with local politicians and with Community Council employees and the Municipality mainly focused on their work.

I conducted numerous participant observations in contexts where representations of urban transformation, my research’s focus, could be found – synagogues, parks, streets, supermarkets, cafés, shops, schools, private homes, and community institutions. I

attended many meetings, public discussions, and community activities in the Community Council, the Municipality, and the Planning Authority and took an active role in Baka's Urban Forum, where issues concerning the neighborhood's public space were discussed and decided upon.

I sometimes entered these sites as a researcher, but generally gained access as a resident and activist. Most notes were written while I observed, in a notebook I carried everywhere, but when this was impossible, I made notes later. As my fieldwork was "at home", issues of reflexivity and subjectivity, which anthropologists have been debating for decades, were particularly relevant. I was not "a fly on the wall". My own positioning as a resident of the neighborhood, middle-class, secular, Israeli-born, mother of young children, and not the owner of my apartment, clearly influenced my research.

Anthropologists acknowledge that anthropological findings (or "truths") can only be partial, as they are delivered by individuals with unique positioning and worldviews.⁵ I did my best to include and represent as many voices as possible, in order to validate my analysis.

In addition to interviews and participant observation, I followed newspaper articles on issues related to my research in nationwide and local newspapers and conducted online netnographic research⁶ that included various email correspondence, Facebook discussions, and new immigrants' forums. I gained access to several mailing lists, sometimes as an active resident. Much of this information correlated with my "offline" findings while adding substantial data. The netnographic research proved particularly useful in measuring and analyzing residents' participation in neighborhood affairs, not just because activists discussed and organized their activities online, but because much of the activity itself was performed online.

FEAR AND LOATHING IN JERUSALEM

The fear of Ultra-Orthodox penetration is concrete for many Jerusalemites. The city's population in 2013 was just under 830 thousand inhabitants. Palestinians comprised 37% of the population, Ultra-Orthodox (self-definition) – 22%, and “pluralist Jews” (non-Haredi) – 41%. The Jewish population of Jerusalem (63% in total) included 35% Ultra-Orthodox, compared with 7% in the rest of Israel's Jewish population. The term “Ultra-Orthodox” binds together diverse populations with different levels of observation, appearance, ethnic belonging, and religious beliefs. Jerusalem's “pluralist” Jews (65% of the Jewish population) are also diverse, and include 45% religious or traditional Jews and only 20% secular.⁷ It is also diverse in terms of ethnicity, religious practices, values and beliefs, political views, and socio-economic status.

Spatially, the three major populations are separated into their own areas of the city. People know when they have entered the “other's” neighborhood by observing the public space that represents its character: the shops, streets, signs, architecture, and passersby's dress. The spatial status quo in Jerusalem is being breached as all groups penetrate other groups' spaces for permanent residency, thus creating social tensions. Palestinians penetrate Jewish neighborhoods,⁸ Religious right-wingers penetrate Palestinian neighborhoods,⁹ and the Ultra-Orthodox penetrate non-Haredi Jewish neighborhoods.¹⁰ The Ultra-Orthodox population is growing fast due to high natural increase. As the density of their neighborhoods is unbearable, they are constantly seeking to expand their living areas. The first neighborhoods to experience change in their demographic character are the ones closest to Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods. The methods of demographic turnover are sophisticated in achieving the goal of driving out non-Haredi populations. In recent years, such trends encountered resistance from old-time residents wishing to keep the neighborhood theirs. One such neighborhood, Kiryat HaYovel, became a symbol for resisting Ultra-Orthodox penetration. Several NGOs and

Municipality members backed and assisted neighborhood activists who fought this process, and it has currently come to a halt.

The Ultra-Orthodox population is perceived as a “threat” because they are trying to have their norms, lifestyles, and needs set the terms of the public sphere. They are passionate in practicing their religion and keeping the various mitzvot, with Shabbat being one such core mitzvah. In many Jerusalem neighborhoods there are roadblocks on Shabbat to stop cars from entering their streets and defiling the holy day. Another issue is that of modesty. Women cover their bodies as the prevailing norms dictate. The levels of body covering vary in different communities. Men and women conduct many daily activities separately – studying and praying and sometimes using public transportation or walking the streets. There are strict dress codes for both sexes that indicate religious affiliation with precision. Having large families, they require services of public institutions like schools and clinics. Restaurants and food merchants in an Ultra-Orthodox neighborhood must be strictly kosher to suit potential buyers.

When non-Haredim visit Ultra-Orthodox neighborhoods, they are expected to honor the norms of the place, particularly in terms of modesty and respect for Shabbat. Many non-Haredim do not wish to comply with these rules. Mostly, they are afraid of becoming a minority in an Ultra-Orthodox neighborhood that does not tolerate a public non-Haredi lifestyle. Most Ultra-Orthodox people, on their part, are even less keen on sharing space with non-Haredim, as they wish to preserve their lifestyle undisturbed.

Since Ultra-Orthodox areas are overcrowded and costly, and as new housing units designated for Ultra-Orthodox are scarce, they are either forced out of the city, usually to less expensive towns in the occupied territories, or forced to move to non-Haredi areas and Haredisize them, which they often do in an organized movement.¹¹ Ultra-Orthodox penetration usually starts with institutions: yeshivas, schools, or kindergartens. Such institutions are either built on vacant land or replace other

institutions. Either way, it requires formal land allocations from municipal committees, and therefore the municipal politics, heavily dominated by Ultra-Orthodox power, has a crucial role in these processes.

Once an institution is established it attracts Ultra-Orthodox to the area. The fact that the Ultra-Orthodox, particularly Hassidic communities, have influential leaders, makes it easier for them to mobilize people to serve the collective good. Their rabbis might send a pioneer group to settle in a desired neighborhood, which might intentionally harass the neighbors in order to encourage them to sell and leave the neighborhood at this early stage, rather than postpone their decision and end up selling with great loss of value. Potential buyers would be other Ultra-Orthodox from the same community. In this fashion, one building after the other, they achieve a population turnover. Once the demographic change becomes fact, it forces the Municipality to allocate more institutions to serve the community. As this is a lengthy project, temporary institutions might sprout illegally to solve an immediate need, by turning private flats into synagogues, for instance, thus causing nuisance to other residents.

Due to lack of space, the Municipality often allocates existing buildings for Ultra-Orthodox institutions, thus replacing other institutions. Their educational institutions might replace formerly non-Haredi institutions that had lost their vitality. This forces non-Haredi families to move out and prevents new such families from moving in. The overall takeover of space would signal to non-Haredi residents that this place no longer belongs to them. Non-Haredi residents who take longer to leave might suffer financial loss due to decreasing housing values and lack of alternative buyers.¹²

Kiryat HaYovel served as a warning sign for some of Baka's residents, who wished to avoid such a scenario. This called for close attention to indications of Ultra-Orthodox presence or signs of their penetration. In 2009 the Municipality initiated a new master plan for Baka, as part of a larger municipal project, and residents were given a

chance to participate by forming their vision for the neighborhood. In March 2010, about 120 residents gathered at a public assembly in order to produce a written vision. Those who attended were mostly Israeli gentrifiers and veteran Anglo immigrants. The written vision they produced focused on issues of preservation of neighborhood architecture, social heterogeneity, communal atmosphere, and pluralism.

My interviews and participant observation reveal that when Baka's residents said that they wanted the neighborhood to remain "pluralistic", they meant that they wanted it to remain non-Haredi. The vision responded directly to the sources of threat that residents have already encountered in former battles (Ultra-Orthodox penetration, "the big money", and the Municipality), and served as guidelines for the battles to come. It also provided activists with an important source of legitimation. The part of the vision that stated that Baka should remain pluralistic was influential in struggles against what residents interpreted as Ultra-Orthodox penetration. Two such cases form the empirical basis for this article.

THE POLITICAL ARENA IN JERUSALEM

Several actors comprise the political arena in Jerusalem, on the municipal and on the local levels. The political structure of Jerusalem includes the mayor and the City Council, comprised of 31 elected members (including the mayor). Local elections take place every five years. While the Palestinians of East Jerusalem are not Israeli citizens, they are still permanent residents of Israel eligible to vote and be elected in local elections (but not in the general elections). Yet, they boycott the local elections for political reasons. The City Council therefore includes Jews alone, who are only 63% of the city's inhabitants. During the research years, the City Council included 12 Ultra-Orthodox (39% of the Council). The current City Council (2013–18) includes 14 Ultra-Orthodox (45%). The over-representation of the Ultra-Orthodox allows them great power and influence. The political and social agendas of Council members are significant in the policies in

promoting decisions that benefit their voters and are in accordance with their own lifestyles and values. Naturally, professional municipal employees are also highly influential by way of implementing policies, or failing to do so.

Jerusalem also has an additional political structure, unique to this city – Community Councils, a type of local governance, which is a self-management framework at the local level.¹³ The ideas of local governance started in Britain during Thatcher's rule.¹⁴ It is based on voluntary activity of local residents that allows them greater involvement and influence. Local governance means a transfer of powers from the elected local authorities (e.g., municipalities) to other organizations (e.g., Community Councils).

The Community Councils model began in Jerusalem in 1993, during the long tenure of Mayor Teddy Kollek. They are a collaboration between the Community Centers established in Jerusalem in the 1970s, which provided services, and the Neighborhood Administrations, established in the 1980s, that focused on civic participation. They were to finance civic participation, which require resources, from funds received from the public in exchange for the services provided by the Community Centers of which there are currently 30 in Jerusalem in each of the sectors: Palestinian, Ultra-Orthodox, and general.

The municipal vision regarding the establishment of Community Councils resulted from the Municipality's desire to expand participatory democracy, to increase cooperation between the Municipality and residents, and to encourage residents' participation. The balance of power between the Municipality and the Community Councils does not allow them complete independence: the Councils maintain close ties with the Municipality, as they have to mediate between the Municipality and the residents on many issues. They are also highly dependent on the Municipality in terms of budget. The Councils consist of two entities – board members, democratically elected

neighborhood residents who serve in their jobs voluntarily, and paid employees. The managers are always paid professionals and must cooperate with the chairperson of the board, a volunteer resident. Councils provide services to residents and represent them in the Municipality and other bodies. The latter activity is done in collaboration with residents' forums.

BAKA'S COMMUNITY COUNCIL AND LOCAL ACTIVISTS

The Baka Community Council includes six neighborhoods in Baka's vicinity. During the time of the research, elections to the board took place and drastically changed its composition. While Baka (one of six neighborhoods) was previously over-represented with 8 out of 12 board members, it could only have 3 out of 9 representatives in the 2011 elections. Among Baka's representatives before the elections, 6 out of 8 were old-time *Mizṛabi* residents (Jews originating in Muslim countries), which did not reflect the neighborhood's social composition. Baka's elected representatives in 2011 included a veteran Ashkenazi (from European descent) religious woman who had already served as chair of the board, and two men who were previously active on Baka's Urban Forum. Both were Ashkenazi gentrifiers, one religious and the other secular.

Baka's Urban Forum was very active during my research. It convened sporadically as needed and discussed urban issues that affected this neighborhood and decided on the course of action in the matter. There were many changes in its composition, as regular participants moved out of the neighborhood and new members joined. The age of participants ranged between 35 and 70. Most permanent members, about 20, were men; the number of women increased when particularly burning issues were on the agenda.

Members were generally highly educated professionals. Although most worked, they had relatively flexible work hours and could devote time for public activism. Most active members were Ashkenazim who moved into the neighborhood from the early

1970s, as part of its gentrification. They all owned the apartments where they lived. Activists comprised secular and religious equally. Baka's population included about 25% immigrants from Western countries, mainly from the US, France, and Britain. A significant number, beyond their proportion in the population, were native English-speakers. These were more veteran immigrants who spoke good Hebrew. There were no French activists. All non-Anglo activists were born in Israel, but only a minority in Jerusalem. They acted out of deep sense of belonging, attachment, and commitment to the neighborhood and because they thought people should take responsibility for where they lived. Most had a long history of political and civic participation in different settings and on various issues. They all believed that citizens could influence their neighborhood and city, and that such influence called for active involvement.

Only a small percentage of the public participates in public affairs. The research in the field of political participation explicitly states that such participation is more common among affluent residents,¹⁵ the more educated, people in their middle ages, and men.¹⁶ These findings are consistent with the profile of Baka's activists. Thus, cultural capital not only determines how people participate (how they "do politics"), but primarily – whether they participate at all.

NEIGHBORHOOD CITIZENSHIP

Baka becomes a "place" thanks to social relationships that residents have with each other. For many, it is a community and they have a deep sense of belonging to the neighborhood. This belonging creates commitment to place and willingness to act in order to ensure that the neighborhood keeps its character. Belonging and commitment have much to do with interests and NIMBYsm (Not In My Back Yard), and are related to issues of ethnicity and class. A sense of belonging combined with a commitment to

protect what residents see as theirs, create the political format I term “neighborhood citizenship”. Thus, residents effectively become *citizens* of their neighborhood.

The neighborhood citizenship in Baka is a part of the worldwide change in the perception of citizenship, from citizenship based on duties (such as voting) to citizenship based on commitment and ongoing activities. Such a perception makes people look for different and more direct ways to influence policy.¹⁷ It is because people no longer trust their leaders to decide what is best for the public, and look for ways to participate in the decision-making process.

In Israel, formerly a more collective society with a sense of statism, the fragmentation of society led most groups to promote their own interests. Residents’ grassroots participation produces neighborhood citizenship. Citizenship, unlike belonging, requires a certain degree of activity and participation.¹⁸ Neighborhood citizenship is always in the making, evolving around the particular manner of residents’ participation in local affairs. It does not replace other forms of citizenship, below or above the State, but exists parallel to them. However, it is distinct from the more researched form of local citizenship in the sense that while local citizenship addresses the city level, neighborhood citizenship addresses a level further below.¹⁹

Current literature in Political Science seems more interested in the local level, perceiving democracy as an everyday praxis that “regular” people do all the time, in their places of work and education or in their neighborhoods. The literature on small-scale and local democratic practices – from the Netherlands,²⁰ Brazil,²¹ Britain,²² and the US²³ – reflects a growing interest from researchers around the world in explaining the locally-based civic participation processes that they identify. Democratic practices at the neighborhood level are related but also distinct from the municipal level. Neighborhood citizenship refers to local governance institutions (like Community Councils) or to political organizations in the neighborhood, not to the municipality. This citizenship

evolves differently in different neighborhoods, due to the “mediating role” of place.²⁴ Different places experience different threats, problems, and forms of participation, according to their populations.

Neighborhood citizenship is a small-scale democratic practice²⁵ – politics with a small p that is mainly concerned with residents’ quality of life.²⁶ However, the issues arising in local conflicts often deviate from small p politics and concern “major” policy issues that belong in the realm of politics with a capital P. Such is the case for the religious politics discussed in this article that goes beyond Baka and concerns the religious and political relationships between Ultra-Orthodox and secular. Politics with a capital P is by no means more important than politics with a small p, rather these are two spheres operating simultaneously. Small p politics concerns the implementation of major policies in residents’ everyday lives.

Many find involvement on these issues on the local level more possible, accessible, and meaningful. As Vivien Lowndes argues, people naturally participate in the local sphere more than on the national level, because the former has a more immediate impact on their lives.²⁷ They participate in order to influence and shape their surrounding and do so in any way that suits their character, way of life, and worldviews, and which they see as effective in promoting the issue at hand. Baka’s active residents wish to influence the local agenda setting and to shape the future character of their neighborhood, particularly when they think it is threatened.

CASE STUDY 1: THE CONFLICT OVER THE TAKEOVER OF PUBLIC LANDS BY HELEV HAARETZ, A HAREDI NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

The high demand for real estate in Baka from the 1990s onward left very few open spaces. Many desired the few temporarily vacant spaces. One such space was a public “brown” space at 14 Gideon Street. The color brown in master plans means a plot intended for public buildings. The original plan was to build a *mikveh* (ritual bath) there,

but later the Municipality built kindergartens instead. The plot, still an open space in 2009, was near other public buildings and open spaces. These included a school, children nurseries run by the Community Council, another open space that used to serve as a community garden, a sports field and playground, and an old but active *mikveh*.

That *mikveh* was on the top floor of a building, whose bottom floor served the non-profit organization *Helev Haaretz* (translated: The Fat of the Land). *Helev Haaretz* was operated by a Sephardi Haredi known in Baka as Rabbi Yair Ben-David who was never actually ordained as a Rabbi. He was not part of the established Haredi parties, such as *Sbas*. His organization aided religious youth at risk and the needy, but also ran after-school clubs and summer camps, both designated for children from the nearby area, usually from strong socio-economic background. Among *Helev Haaretz*'s supporters were wealthier Anglo residents of Baka, and not just Haredi and/or Sephardim.

Ben-David received permission to use this public building from the Municipality 20 years previously. He had good contacts in the Municipality and still had powerful people there backing him up. In 2009 he expanded his presence from the main building to its immediate surroundings by building a small closed and fenced petting zoo on private property intended for development. The territory he invaded is to become an extension of the existing playground, as part of the public assignment that the entrepreneurs of a building project planned there agreed to do. Ben-David's invasion risked this future development.

Shortly after the petting zoo, he expanded further, to the plot at 14 Gideon Street, across the street. That October, a high and locked fence was erected there. Upon enquiring who was behind it and for what purpose, eventually discovered that Ben-David was behind it. He wished to turn the empty plot into a community garden, and cultivate it in cooperation between his organization and the nearby School for Immigrant Youth.²⁸

Although Ben-David did not go through the formal municipal bureaucratic channels necessary for the purpose of land allocation, he did however, receive permission from the head of the Municipality's Social Department, who most likely ordered the building of the fence too. He also received support from a friend, an old-time resident of Baka and at the time a board member in the Community Council. Although Ben-David was supported by this board member, he did not request formal approval from the Council, as required.

This episode created a local drama. Residents were furious at Ben-David's appropriation of public lands without notice and disregarding regulations. They accused the Community Council, which strongly claimed it knew nothing about it, and that the one board member in question had acted on his own behalf. Residents, as well as the Community Council, sent angry letters to the general manager of the Municipality, the comptroller, and the mayor, demanding explanations and actions. Finally, in December there was a meeting onsite attended by the head of the Social Department, high-rank municipal employees, the heads of the Community Council, Ben-David, and several residents.

I attended the meeting fraught with friction where accusations were thrown at each other. Running the meeting, the head of the Social Department announced that the meeting would continue in the Community Council offices, away from the furious residents. There, they reached an agreement to cut the high fence by half, keep it unlocked, and divide the land between Ben-David's organization, the School for Immigrant Youth, and the Community Council, allowing each of them to cultivate their own plots. The Jerusalem mayor later approved the agreement.

Residents were deeply unsatisfied by the outcomes. They lambasted the events of 14 Gideon Street that typified the Municipality's caving in under Ultra-Orthodox pressure and disregard of rules and regulations.²⁹ In April 2010 on Israel's Independence

Day, residents who tried to enter the garden at 14 Gideon Street encountered a locked fence, contrary to the agreement. One resident wrote an angry email to neighborhood activists, “Pay attention to this insolence: An Ultra-Orthodox organization is trying to prevent neighborhood residents from using the community garden and celebrate Independence Day!” Ben-David’s organization locked up the garden because they were Ultra-Orthodox and therefore were anti-Zionist, opposed to the existence of the State of Israel. Judging by his external appearance, Ben-David was Ultra-Orthodox, yet, according to his friend on the Community Council’s board, was “open-minded” and even “served in the army”.³⁰

A resident told me in a May 2010 interview:

I’m afraid of the Haredization of this neighborhood. Sometimes I see Ultra-Orthodox people here and I drive them out. I tell them “get out of here”. *Helev Haaretz* is an Ultra-Orthodox base with a desire to extend. I can see its imperialism. 14 Gideon Street is an excellent example. I don’t see the danger as immediate, but there’s no doubt we should stand guard if we don’t want Baka’s character to change.

I argue that the focus of the conflict over 14 Gideon Street was the issue of public space, how to use it, by whom, and for what purposes. By taking part in shaping the neighborhood’s public space, residents could determine the future of their neighborhood. The fact that they were not allowed to participate in this process made them feel powerless and run-over. The process of land allocation in this case was done covertly and improperly. The fact that it involved an Ultra-Orthodox organization caused this outburst. Ben-David’s ability to get what he wanted and the support he received from high-rank people were interpreted by residents as another example of Ultra-Orthodox power and influence over the Municipality. Ben David’s “imperialist” aspirations were interpreted as an attempted Haredization, which must be fought.³¹ Although this was not a Haredization in Kiryat HaYovel style and although it was not a classic Ultra-Orthodox-secular conflict, activists nonetheless chose to apply and use the Ultra-Orthodox threat in this conflict.

Although the improper process of land allocation would have been a sufficient cause for a battle, by stressing that it was done by an Ultra-Orthodox organization it mobilized people to participate and gained larger support. Although Ben-David had been a part of Baka's landscape for more than two decades and received support from various groups of residents, as a Haredi activist he was depicted as an invading outsider threatening the "pluralistic" character of the neighborhood.

CASE STUDY 2: THE CONFLICT OVER THE OPERATION OF A CHABAD SUMMER CAMP IN THE PREMISES OF BAKA'S COMMUNITY COUNCIL

The conflict over the operation of a Chabad summer camp in the premises of Baka's Community Council began in June 2010, when residents saw pamphlets advertising this summer camp in Baka. The pamphlet stated that the summer camp was to take place in the premises of the Community Council. It was not the first year that Chabad operated their summer camp there. However, the reaction was fiercer because it followed the *Helev Haaretz* episode, which contributed much to the fear of Ultra-Orthodox penetration into Baka and portrayed it as an actual source of threat. The *Helev Haaretz* episode also gave rise to residents' increased criticism of the Community Council. Baka's residents, anxious to keep the neighborhood "pluralistic" character (meaning non-Haredi), decided to act against the Chabad summer camp on the Community Council's premises.

Residents demanded explanations from the Community Council. The head of the Council explained that it tried to organize its own summer camp in its premises but failed, as registration was low. As the Council needed money for its regular activities, the management decided to allow Chabad, a "paying customer" that approached them with such request, to rent the premises and run its own summer camp there. This started yet another conflict in Baka framed as anti-Ultra-Orthodox penetration.

Chabad's pamphlet clearly illustrated their agenda. The summer camp's name, for starters, was "Messiah Soldiers". The pamphlet also stated that they would divide the

children into two separate groups – boys (referred to as “soldiers”) and girls. It also made clear that “The management reserves the right to expel a soldier if he behaves in a manner inappropriate to the summer camp’s environment.” This served as weapons in the hands of neighborhood activists who believed that this Messianic religious group had no place in a “pluralist” neighborhood.

Chabad is a global Messianic movement.³² Its agenda is to reinforce Jewish practices among Jews around the world and it does so by reaching out to Jews wherever they are.³³ When it operates outside Israel, it mainly hopes to get Jews closer to Judaism, but when it operates in Israel its agenda is to promote a religious lifestyle. What Chabad does in order “to meet clients where they are” and “claim the street”,³⁴ is to offer its services cheaper than the market prices for similar services, and this way get more people to participate.³⁵ This was also the case for the Baka summer camp, which was remarkably cheaper than other summer camps in the area. This offer was attractive for many parents who struggled financially with arrangements for their young children during the long summer holidays, while they had to work. For some, the “cost” of exposing their children to Chabad’s missionary agenda and contents and its ultra-religious customs and practices, was a small price to pay, while for others it may even have been an added bonus.

Shortly before Chabad advertised its summer camp in Baka, a similar episode occurred in the nearby neighborhood of Gonenim, where the local Community Council also allowed Chabad to operate a summer camp from its premises. Massive pressure from residents and local politicians in that neighborhood prevented that summer camp from taking place. Baka’s residents tried to achieve similar results. They started by writing emails to the Community Council demanding it to call-off the summer camp. By including many residents in the correspondence, those who wrote the emails hoped to raise awareness and gain large support. The first email was titled “Messiah Soldiers are

coming to the neighborhood: Who determines the character of the neighborhood?”³⁶ It explained the nature of the issue and stated that allowing Chabad to operate on the Community Council’s premises was against the principles of pluralism and tolerance, which the neighborhood’s vision, written by many residents, promoted. Baka’s activists argued that the Council must not allow a missionary organization to set foot in its premises, as the Council should represent and advocate the principles of pluralism and of religious tolerance, and not compromise this for money.

Following a response from one resident who wrote that he did not think it problematic to let Chabad have its summer camp there, as long as the Council did not allow it a permanent “settlement”, another resident wrote, “We have to stop this thing, as these righteous men will not suffice in a summer camp. See the case of the petting zoo in Gideon Street. For them, an occupied territory shall not be returned.”³⁷

A clear link between the two events – the episode in Gideon Street and the Chabad summer camp – was made. The fear, expressed in this email, was that just like *Helev Haaretz’s* successful takeover of public space, Chabad too could gain permanent access to the Community Council by operating a summer camp in its premises on a regular basis. The email suggested that if residents wished to prevent this from happening, they needed to act before facts were established, meaning before the summer camp took place.

Another form of pressure on the Community Council was the recruitment of a member of the City Council, Pepe Alalo from the left wing secular *Meretz* party. Alalo was at one point the deputy of Mayor Nir Barkat, and was also a resident of a nearby neighborhood, one of the six neighborhoods comprising Baka’s Community Council. Alalo emailed the manager of Baka’s Community Council and asked him to keep Baka free (meaning free from religion) and pluralistic and not harm the existing status quo by allowing Chabad to take part in the Community Council’s activities.³⁸

Following these virtual forms of pressure, the Municipality addressed the matter. The head of the municipal Social Department (who had a role in the former conflict too) ordered the Community Council to reach a formal decision on the matter. The Council called a special meeting for 14 June and invited a couple of active residents as well as the organizer of Chabad's summer camp. The discussion was tempestuous. Some board members, veteran *Mizrahi* residents of Baka, attacked the secular activists, telling them that they did not represent the neighborhood and that Chabad offered a fair opportunity for the less economically fortunate residents of the neighborhood. The neighborhood did not belong to these activists, they said, but to all its residents, some of which were poor, and some were even Ultra-Orthodox. The summer camp's organizer clarified that he was organizing the camp at his own initiative and not on behalf of the Chabad movement, but that the camp would promote Chabad's agenda, which he agreed was missionary.³⁹ He also ran a Chabad center in Baka and was part of the Messianic group of Chabad. Yet, he was only associated with Chabad, and did not enjoy the formal support and recognition of the movement. Since he promoted Chabad's agenda, used its symbols, and acted as an integral part of the movement, the formality of his status and the nature of his association with Chabad were irrelevant.

Finally, the Council decided to allow Chabad's summer camp to take place that summer, as time was pressing and canceling the camp would have harmed those who had already registered. However, in future years it would not allow Chabad, or people who promote its agenda, to run camps on the Community Council's premises.

The decision to hold the summer camp that year fuelled the conflict. Some activists hung posters all over Baka, with a photo of the Lubavitcher Rabbi stating "He is not my Messiah". The poster also explained that Chabad was working in every direction, social and public, in order to change Baka's character and other neighborhoods in the

area. It called upon residents who wished to keep their environment pluralist and open, to join an initiative calling to protect Baka from any missionary activities. It also called the Community Council to act upon its core principles: serve and represent the residents of that area by not allowing Chabad on its premises, as it did not represent the neighborhood and did not serve it, but rather promoted its own agenda. This conflict created yet another crisis of trust between residents and the Community Council.

In the following year, 2011, Chabad tried to rent the Community Council's premises again for its yearly summer camp, but this time it was turned down. Although the pressure was unsuccessful in 2010, it proved successful afterwards and Chabad's summer camp did not become an established fact. Instead, the Community Council managed to run its own successful summer camps. Chabad did continue to operate summer camps in Baka, but in 2011–12 did so from a different, privately owned, location.

However, on Passover 2013 Chabad managed to rent the other premises of the Baka Community Council (Beit Lazaros), located in a more deprived and religious neighborhood (the Talpiot projects). Once again Baka's secular activists mobilized to stop Chabad operating from a public space but were unsuccessful as Beit Lazaros was managed by an independent NGO that cooperates with the Baka Community Council whose manager and enjoyed independence. An article published on this battle in *Yedi'ot Achronot* newspaper explains why the former battle was effective in preventing Chabad from renting the premises of the Community Council in Baka, but not in Talpiot.⁴⁰

This conflict was more of a “pluralist”-versus-Ultra-Orthodox conflict, and here too it was mostly about determining and shaping the neighborhood's public space. Although Chabad had operated in Baka before and has a center there, the conflict was not about their mere existence in Baka or their wider activities. At the core was that the summer camp was to take place on the premises of the Community Council, a public

institution that should reflect the way of life shared by most neighborhood residents. Although activists did not approve of Chabad's presence in Baka in general, they only fought against its attempts to set foot in Baka's representative institutions. This, I would argue, is due to the importance of the public sphere, and community institutions in particular, in determining the neighborhood's character and its future. The neighborhood's vision helped legitimize these battles and make them clear, focused, and easier to fight. It was harder to mobilize people to fight the other activities Chabad performed in public places: the above mentioned party in the local park, their yearly Lag Ba'omer street parades, or the "mitzva tank" they place near the park from time to time to attract children inside to hear about Judaism in return for sweets. Here too, neighborhood activists, inspired by the vision of safeguarding "pluralism", used the fear of Ultra-Orthodox penetration in order to mobilize participation and gain support.

In Jerusalem, the term "pluralism" had come to mean non-Haredi. It replaced the exclusive term "secular", which did not include Jerusalem's large religious and traditional population. The inclusive term "pluralist population" reflects the new alliance between the secular and religious residents. This unique coalition, particularly manifested in the work of the *Yerushalmim* NGO, does not exist elsewhere in Israel. It is driven by fear from the continuous Haredization of Jerusalem and a religious coercion that would further drive away the "productive populations" of the city (a commonly used term referring to those who work and pay taxes – non-Haredi). The fear that the Ultra-Orthodox vision for Israel and Jerusalem particularly, is its transformation into a religious place run by their own leaders is not merely imagined by "pluralist" Jews, but also based on previous public declarations by Ultra-Orthodox leaders.⁴¹

The Municipality, under Mayor Nir Barkat and his coalition, thought it right to reinforce the spatial separation between Ultra-Orthodox and others. It did so by protecting non-Haredi neighborhoods from becoming Haredi, through administrative

decision-making in issues of land allocation for instance. While this was not always successful, as the Ultra-Orthodox community enjoyed great power in the City Council, it was (and still is) the overall guideline. This is also reflected in the battle against the Chabad summer camp. Residents turned to municipal politicians and professionals, who intervened because the Community Councils and their premises are part of the municipal apparatus and by definition should reflect and represent the neighborhoods' characters.

Although the framing of this conflict included the term "pluralism", residents' interpretation of the meaning of pluralism varied. Some, like several board members, thought that a "pluralist neighborhood" meant a diverse neighborhood, in which there was room for everybody, including the Ultra-Orthodox. Their interpretation undermined the Jerusalemite use of the term "pluralism". They exposed its non-inclusive nature, as a dichotomous term that envisioned two conflicting groups in the classic us/them fashion, and contrary to what pluralism generally meant.

CONCLUSION

Belonging is a significant issue in both of the described conflicts, as well as in other conflicts that took place in Baka during the research years. Belonging is tightly linked with space, as one always belongs to something, a particular place. The ethnography from Baka shows how important the public sphere is to people's sense of belonging. People demand to participate in shaping their immediate surroundings, as the public space reflects the character of the place and affects its future character. As Luke Desforges and co-authors argue, "Active citizens act for and within place-based communities and they are defined by place-based community."⁴² Being defined by a place-based community also means that when people recognize themselves and the community of which they are part in the public space of where they live, their sense of belonging increases. When they do not recognize themselves there, they might feel estranged.

The main focus of the conflicts described above was residents' demand to shape the public space, in light of what they saw as signs of Ultra-Orthodox penetration into that space. The conflicts were framed in terms of anti-Haredization because in Jerusalem the fear of Haredization tends to successfully mobilize people. In the examples provided it helped generate legitimation and support and encouraged people to participate. It also went along with the neighborhood's vision. Public space is the "display window" of a place. People make assumptions about the character of a place based on the appearance of the public space. The streets, shops, people's appearance, architecture, local institutions, green spaces, cleanliness, and so on.

What does a "sense of belonging" actually mean? As John Shotter argues, for people to have a sense of belonging to place, to feel "at home" there, they must live in a community which they sense as being "ours" rather than "theirs", a community in whose construction they participate. They should feel invited to participate by virtue of who they are and feel that their efforts are welcomed and treated seriously. They should not feel they need to struggle to have their voices heard.⁴³ Belonging is a positive sentiment that motivates people to become active citizens.

Baka has been slowly gentrifying since the late 1960s and its population is heterogeneous. It includes various social groups of different ethnicities, levels of religiosity, political views, socio-economic status, levels of income or education, and number of years in the country and in the neighborhood. Heterogeneity, as appealing as it may be for many of Baka's residents (and even mentioned in the neighborhood's vision), also has its down sides, as the relationships between the various groups are fragile and tend to heat when conflicts arise. The public space, so vital in determining the neighborhood's character, accelerates existing social conflicts. As demonstrated throughout the article, the reasons for the acceleration of local social conflicts, particularly between the more secular gentrifying activists and the veteran *Mizrahi*

residents, were their different interpretations of the term “pluralism” and their different readings of what could be considered as Ultra-Orthodox penetration and whether this should be treated as a negative thing.

The active residents’ sense of belonging to Baka and their commitment to it led them to participate in neighborhood affairs in the hope to influence local affairs. When people feel that important decisions, which can influence their quality of life, are made behind closed doors without transparency, they become angry and distrust the system. The “system” in the cases analyzed here was the Community Council and the Municipality. A sense of belonging to place enhances a sense of commitment, while belonging and commitment together create the political format I term “neighborhood citizenship”. By being committed to determine the character of their neighborhood, residents became *citizens* of that neighborhood.

Local activism makes extensive use of new media. Such media is useful in recruiting activists and effective in distributing and gathering information. It is also useful in creating active citizenship. People can state their opinions and feel that they have contributed without even leaving their house. Even the most passive activism enables people access to information on issues that might affect them, and provides an opportunity to participate. My ethnography from Baka shows just how such participation is done, both online and offline: how people gather information, distribute it, recruit others, convince, disagree, attack, and protest. Small acts that people do locally evolve into a broader trend: an active and involved public demanding responsibility over its life.

While neighborhood citizenship differs from local (or urban) citizenship as the neighborhood and the Municipality may have conflicting interests, neighborhood citizenship is nonetheless linked to the municipal level. Baka is a part of the urban fabric of Jerusalem. Like other neighborhoods, it is affected by municipal decision-making,

urban trends, and current affairs. In relation to local battles, municipal actors are always present when residents oppose them or try to recruit them, cooperate with them, or depend on them for information or ruling. The Community Councils in Jerusalem form a bridge between residents and the Municipality and become another political level to consider. They may enhance or limit residents' actions and their ability to influence.

There is a close link between neighborhood citizenship and public space. In fact, as argued by Beauregard and Bounds,⁴⁴ the public space is essential for the creation of such citizenship. Local citizenship emerges in the public space because that is where daily activities occur and where people discuss things that concern them. Democracy is rooted in the public sphere, and develops there. The citizenship that emerges in the public sphere – in public places as well as in cyberspace, aims to promote public participation, and yet it is exclusive by nature. It excludes those who for various reasons have difficulties attending public meetings, those who lack technological literacy, and those who are not fluent in the native language.

The Community Council, a body that should enhance participatory democracy and approach all local residents, is non-exempt from exclusion. Its employees set the dates and times of meetings, obviously never suited for all. Moreover, in the lack of other sources of information, their ability to reach out to participants is inevitably limited to the lists of people they already know and who had participated in their activities before (although this list is continuously growing). They also rely heavily on the Internet to disseminate information, and thus operate, if not out of malice, in an exclusionary fashion. Moreover, in meetings, discussions are often biased, as not all voices enjoy equal influence. Residents with higher cultural capital and long-term activists are more influential as they tend to express their opinions often and confidently and as others listen to them and tend to accept their opinions.

The conflicts described dealt with one of the major points of friction in Israeli society today – the Ultra-Orthodox population and its relationships with the broader society and with the State. What triggered these conflicts were spatial expressions of this issue and power struggles over the distribution of and control over public resources. Social frictions, I argue, are always place-related, and their core is in the public space and the struggle to define it.

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