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Identity Issues and Local Governance: Women's Everyday Life in the City

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This paper universalizes a particular dilemma. It presents a localized case of the appropriation and 'privatization' of urban public spaces in ultra orthodox communities in the Mea Shearim neighbourhood of Jerusalem in the name of religious identity. The basic dilemma that this paper ponders relates to the localized case presented: whether such a situation, which denies secular women's rights to some public parts of the city, can also be accepted as an expression of the daily religious practices of a distinct community. The first reaction of feminists to such exclusionary practices in the city might be negative, but discussing such issues in depth reveals the different meanings and implications of such situations that force one to deal with the sometimes contradictory meanings of the right to the city, and the contrasts inherent between these meanings. These dilemmas become more and more apparent in multi-ethnicized, multi-sacredized and multi-nationalized global urban spaces and will be part of the city governance's daily occupation, as diversity becomes an increasingly important issue in new global spaces.

This paper universalizes a particular dilemma. It presents a localized case of the appropriation and 'privatization' of urban public spaces in ultra orthodox communities in the Mea Shearim neighbourhood of Jerusalem in the name of religious identity. This action of secralization of the neighbourhood public spaces challenges and in fact may be seen as denying secular women's rights to use the city's spaces in that it constructs the neighbourhood as a modesty gated area. This is a localized example of universalized realities in multi-religious, multi-cultural and multi-ethnic urban spaces which have become homes for the extensive flows of trans-migrants who transform urban spaces into places of shared identity. The paper discusses a much broader reality in global urban spaces today where these multiple ethnicities, cultures and nationalities inhabit and appropriate the same public spaces sometimes in ways that other individuals and communities might find abusive. I discuss this universal phenomenon by focusing on the discourse between the individual right to

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the city and the group right to difference and how these sets of rights are expressed as a power struggle within local governance frameworks.

The idea of exploring the links between identity issues and urban management in the age of globalisation emerged during my field research, talking to residents of Jerusalem and London about their everyday experiences in these cities. This analysis is based on research carried out between 1999–2002 in which residents of London and Jerusalem were interviewed regarding their everyday experiences relating to comfort, belonging, and commitment with regard to the various categories of their environment: home, building, street, neighbourhood, city centre, city, urban parks (Fenster, 2004). People told stories about their lives in the city relating to these categories, and from their daily experiences we drew out our understanding on the gendered aspects of comfort, belonging and commitment in the city. The people interviewed represent both the 'majority' hegemonic, that is, the Jewish secular in Jerusalem and the white middle class English in London, and also the 'minority', the 'other', whether Bangladeshi immigrants in London or Palestinians in Jerusalem. This wide range of cultural expression and ethnicity revealed the multi-layered expressions of belonging, both in their formal structures as citizenship definitions and in their personal, intimate, private expressions in daily practices in the city.

Most women I talked to in Jerusalem, either secular Jewish or Palestinians, mentioned the ultra orthodox *Mea Shearim* neighbourhood as an area which they associated with discomfort, an area they avoid walking through because of the sense of threat there:

> It is very uncomfortable for me to go to Mea Shearim, it is hard for me to accept the authority of somebody who is extremist and rejects me from humanity. 'They' will not accept me in all of the cloth that I wear and I have to force myself to adopt their own identity and it is not comfortable for me. The same in churches or mosques. (Sarit, 50s, married with three children, Israeli-Sephardic,[1] Jerusalem, 22 April 2000)

> Mea Shearim is a less comfortable place for me. I can't dress the way I like . . . I like to walk there but . . . (Suzana, 30s, married with one child, Israeli-Jewish, Jerusalem, 13 July 2000)

> Mea Shearim is a place I avoid visiting. I don't dare because I feel that it is not only that I don't belong but it is like a gated place only to ultra orthodox [people] and only for Jews so I never went there and even didn't think of going. (Magda, 30s, single, Palestinian, citizen of Israel, 25 March 2001)

These experiences reflect the extent to which women's embodiment, clothing and representation become a trigger for the violation of citizenship rights, especially the right to the city. The right to the city as Lefebvre defines it (1991a, 1991b), asserts a normative rather than a juridical right based on inhabitance. Those who inhabit a city have the right to that city. It is earned by living in the city and it is shared between the urban dweller and the citizen. This concept of right to the city has within it two main components (Purcell, 2003): the right to appropriate urban space in the sense of the

right to use, the right of inhabitants to 'full and complete use' of urban space in their everyday lives. It is the right to live in, play in, work in, represent, characterize and occupy urban space in a particular city—the right to be an author of urban space. It is a creative product of and context for the everyday life of its inhabitants. The second component is the right to participation, the rights of inhabitants to take a central role in the decision-making surrounding the production of urban space at any level, whether state, capital, or any other entity which takes part in the production of urban space. As Dikec (2001) points out, it entails the involvement of inhabitants in institutionalized control over urban life, including participation in the political life, management and administration of the city.

It is intriguing that secular women living in Jerusalem, whatever their nationality, ethnicity, or religious identity, mentioned that they are discomforted in certain urban spaces because of their attire, especially as women in London did not talk about such experiences in their everyday life even though theirs is also a city which is home to multiple ethnic, cultural and religious communities. Obviously, tensions within multi-religious communities exist in many other cities (Naylor & Ryan, 1998) and sometimes these tensions have an effect on women's movement in urban spaces (Sector, 2002). However, this discourse represents a more complicated situation, while such sacralization of space denies the individual right of secular women to the city, it reflects the group right to difference claimed by the ultra orthodox.

This discussion must begin with a few clarifications on the concept of the 'right to the city'. The right to the city as Lefebvre interprets it is probably limited to a lesser or greater extent in many cases, and apparently it becomes more and more limited in many urban spaces around the world. In many cities, for example, co-operative workplaces, hi-tec offices, and office buildings in general become 'privatized' and thus 'forbidden' beyond the reception desks, and entrance to 'strangers' is always monitored and controlled with video cameras. This is especially so after the September 11th events in the USA, since when many 'public spaces' have become 'privatized', overruling the Lefebvrian interpretation of the right to the city and the right to use cityscapes. The 'right to dress' in public spaces is also controlled to a certain extent. Women and men might be arrested if they walk naked or in what is termed as 'improper' clothing in certain public spaces. In certain cities such as Utah, there are debates whether nursing mothers have the right to breast-feed their babies in public because of the notion of immodesty. And lastly, there is a large body of work, which shows that women sometimes voluntarily limit their mobility and movement in public spaces because of fear of sexual harassment or assault (Valentine, 1989; Madge, 1997; Pain, 1991).

Precisely because of these growing limitations of 'the right to the city' in the name of security, fear, religious and cultural norms, it becomes more and more important to discuss the tensions between these powers (religious groups, hi-tec, 'security' actors, or patriarchal norms in general) and individual rights to the city. I have chosen to focus the discussion in this paper on one specific example—the tensions between what might be argued as the group right to difference of a religious minority

vis à vis the individual rights to the city of other residents, in this case secular women. I also want to highlight the effects of these tensions between the different sets of rights on city governance.

The discussion on the ultra orthodox right to difference *vis à vis* the individual rights of secular women to the city in Jerusalem is incorporated within the wider context of Israel as a declared Jewish state, which faces constant conflicts on its social, cultural and political identity. It means that this is only one of the many tensions between secular and ultra orthodox communities in Jerusalem, many of which concern the public character of the Sabbath, the resting day for the Jews. While the ultra orthodox perceive it as a holy day and demand the prohibition of public activities in a much more extreme way than in the diaspora because of the holiness of the land of Israel (the halt of public transportation, the closure of shops, cinemas, theatre and other public activities on the Sabbath), the secular demand their freedom to use public spaces and public activities. Such tensions are expressed in violent fights and stone throwing at cars passing ultra orthodox neighbourhoods on the Sabbath, road blocks by the ultra orthodox near their neighbourhoods, or demonstrations against cultural activities on the Sabbath. Indeed, a large amount of research has been dedicated in the last few decades to these religious/cultural tensions between secular and ultra orthodox Jews in Jerusalem (Hasson, 1996, 2002; Hasson & Gonen, 1996; Shilav, 1997). However, while these scholars look in particular on the dynamics of 'spaces of conflicts' which were constructed between ultra orthodox and secular Jewish people and the various strategies adopted by each side to meet its goals, my focus here is on contradictory expressions of the right to the city, focusing on the gendered embodied aspects of these conflicts, which are missing in current research. I first elaborate on the historical background and the daily practices of the sacralization of public spaces in Jerusalem.

Sacralization of Public Spaces

Historical and Political Background

The segregated character of Mea Shearim (Hebrew for one hundred gates) was already determined in 1874 when it was established as one of the first neighbourhoods built in west Jerusalem outside the walls of the old city. Its founders, members of the ultra orthodox community, set up clear rules to maintain its religious identity and homogeneity. For example, they decided that residents would not sell or rent their flats to non-ultra orthodox Jews, let alone non-Jewish people (Ben Arie, 1979), which means that the neighbourhood has been characterized from the outset as a 'ghettoized space', a reflection of the strong religious identity of its residents. The distance of the site from what was then the city centre (in the old city) and from any means of public transportation is another 'ghettoized expression' of a neighbourhood which aimed to keep its religious identity and maintain its distinctive lifestyle (Ben Arie, 1979).

It is important to emphasize this historical background as it highlights the distinctive character of this group within the ultra orthodox community. The residents of Mea Shearim represent a more conservative and extremist view point than other ultra orthodox communities, a view point which perceives secular lifestyle, especially in the holy land of Israel, as illegitimate according to their interpretations of Jewish traditions and norms. Moreover, the ultra orthodox community in Mea Shearim does not accept the sovereignty of the state of Israel and does not perceive itself as part of the citizenship discourse which entails specific duties to the state (for example, men do not take part in Israel's compulsory military service). Moreover, within the framework of their religious way of life there is no room for individualism, let alone principles of democracy, equality and participation in civil 'secular' activities. It is a highly hierarchical and patriarchal society in which authority and power are determined according to family connections and degrees of knowledge of the holy books. But this declared denial from citizenship duties does not prevent them from taking a very active role in local politics, especially the religious leaders of the community who are involved in negotiations with the municipality over their local interests. Their leaders also acknowledge the importance of their votes both for the government and the municipality, and make sure that all their members do realize their right to vote,[2] and gain significant power in the city council government coalitions.

This practice of spatial segregation and political involvement exists in many other ultra orthodox Jewish neighbourhoods in different cities around the world. Even today, ultra orthodox communities usually choose remote sites as their preferred locations. For example, Kiryat Joel, a Satmer[3] town in New York State, was established in the 1970s at a distance of 70km from the city centre, to protect the residents from 'external influences' and allow the children to grow up away from the influence of drugs and crime (Mintz, 1994). This geographical isolation created the 'shtetl type' of life, free from the immorality and profanity of urban life (Valins, 2003). Using Young's (1998) terminology of 'ideal city life', these communities actually practise the principle of 'living together as strangers', which means to live as part of modern life but as a separate group. They are becoming what Kymlicka (1998) terms as religious sects, such as the Amish or other Christian sects in the USA and Canada. These groups have been granted exemption from the usual requirements and duties of citizenship such as military service or compulsory education for children. Likewise, the ultra orthodox can be seen as a religious sect exempted from Israel's compulsory military service. At the same time, they run their own cultural and educational systems, and create their own educational curriculum which omits topics such as citizenship, mathematics, secular history and other areas of education which are compulsory in the general education system in Israel. What distinguishes these examples from Mea Shearim is that Mea Shearim has become a central location while most of the others are still isolated. However, in spite of this proximity to the city centre, certain areas of Mea Shearim are still managed by its residents as isolated, ghettoized and sacred spaces, especially towards women (Shilav, 1997; Braun, 2004).

Modesty Walls

Mea Shearim's gendered ghettoized character has a clear visual and spatial expression. Large signs hang at the two main entrances to the neighbourhood in Mea Shearim Street—the neighbourhood's main street—and also in the entrances to the small allies and shops located within the neighbourhood. These signs pose a clear request in Hebrew and English. Sometimes the message in Hebrew and English is similar sometimes it is slightly different:

> Please do not pass our neighbourhood in immodest clothes.

This request regarding modest clothing refers to women only for it is written in Hebrew, a gendered language, which distinguishes between feminine and masculine. The signs also specify the exact meaning of modest clothing:

> Modest clothes include: closed blouse, with long sleeves,
> long skirt, no trousers, no tight-fitting clothes

These specifications do not leave any room for individual interpretations as to the meaning of 'modest' as it is culturally constructed. And thus, there are very detailed specifications related to the appropriate ways to cover all parts of women's bodies. At the bottom of this sign there is a specific request using again the feminine gender in Hebrew. In English it says:

> Please do not disturb our children's education and our way
> of life as Jews committed to God and his Torah

The Hebrew version of this sign emphasizes the sacredness of the neighbourhood:

> Please do not disrupt the sacredness of our neighbourhood and
> our way of life as Jews dedicated to God and his Torah

It is interesting to notice the different gendering in Hebrew and English, which is probably because of the different target groups that these signs address: either Israeli women or tourists of either gender. The signs in Hebrew are more explicit about the sacredness of the place, probably because the conflict is internal, among Jewish groups rather than with people from outside Israel, such as tourists. The sign ends with mentioning 'the neighbourhood residents' as those who signed this request.

Lately, similar signs in Hebrew only have begun to appear in shop entrances as well and again ask women:

> Please enter my shop with modest clothes only

And here, too, the specifications of modest clothes are mentioned as well as the request for women not to destroy the sacredness of the neighbourhood. The recent practice with shop entrances signifies the extremist tendencies of maintaining modesty in the streets of Mea Shearim by those who live in the neighbourhood, but also by those who are not necessarily members of the community: shopkeepers who display these signs to show the local residents that they follow the strict rules of modesty, so that it is appropriate for them to use the shop. The reasons for displaying these signs in the streets and shop entrances have to do with the sacredness of the Land of Israel as the promised biblical land in the eyes of the ultra orthodox. This holiness necessitates practices of modesty and dress not only by ultra orthodox women but by secular women as well, because women's modesty is a very basic rule in the religious Jewish lifestyle (Shilav, 2004, personal communication). These practices can be seen as symbolic 'border guards' which help to identify people as members or non-members of the community. Women's dress is often one of the major signifiers of such border constructions (Yuval-Davis, 2000). Women's dress (Muslim or Jewish) indicates the body and its covering as an expression of dominant ideologies and representations either of 'Muslim women' (Dwyer, 1998) or 'Jewish women' and also as sites of contested cultural representations.

Other signs in Mea Shearim are targeted towards mixed groups passing through the neighbourhood. Because of its unique religious and spatial character, the neighbourhood has become a popular place for visitors and tourists, partly because tourists are interested in the explicit cultural symbols of its seclusion—the street signs. Visitors used to walk around the neighbourhood in mixed gendered groups, a practice which again destructs the religious norms of sacred spaces. In synagogues, for example, men and women sit in separate spaces, a practice that ensures that there is no contact with women's impurity during menstruation:

> GROUPS passing through our neighbourhood severely
> offend the residents. PLEASE STOP THIS
> [emphasis supplied]

One interpretation of these signs is that they demonstrate the gated nature of the neighbourhood with 'modesty gates' or as its residents phrase it: 'modesty walls'. These walls construct the boundaries of the religious and cultural identities of its residents and transform its main streets into sacred spaces, which in fact exclude secular women who do not follow the strict rules of clothing, and mixed gendered groups who disobey practices of modesty and impurity. However, such signs can also be interpreted as part of the politics of the identity of the community, which struggles against 'intolerance of difference' in modernity (Kong, 2001). Moreover, these signs may express the 'right to difference' of ultra-orthodox women themselves who feel more comfortable in such a 'gated' space, in which their own modest dress is a norm rather than the exception they feel it to be in other secular public spaces in Jerusalem (Fenster, 2004).

As such, these signs serve as a defence against 'inappropriate' dress and lifestyle, which contradicts the group's norms and standards of behaviour. Such a construction of public spaces as sacred is contested in any case (Kong, 2001) mainly because sacred is a 'contested category' as it represents hierarchical power relations of domination and subordination, inclusion and exclusion, appropriation and dispossession (Chidester & Linenthal, 1995, p. 17, cited in Kong, 2001).

A sacred place is constructed by appropriation of a property, politics of exclusion, maintaining boundaries and distancing the inside from the outside (Kong, 2001). As Sibley mentions (1995, 1999), forms and norms of exclusion are not only the practices of the majority against the minority but also the practices of the minority against the majority, as the case of Mea Shearim demonstrates.

This practice of control and surveillance and the determination of clear boundaries of forbidden and permitted as a means to maintain the sacredness of a space is not new. It actually signifies ancient Judaism and harks back to the spatialized institutionalization of the Second Temple and the structuring of private and public space at the individual day-to-day level (Valins, 2000). It also relates to norms and orders of acts prohibited on the Sabbath, which concern the transfer of objects between different spatial locations, especially between what is defined as private and public. In a way such institutionalization of religious and social order exists in ultra orthodox neighbourhoods today in many cities around the world, expressed these days in the construction of the Eruv (Hebrew for mixture) (Valins, 2000). I will elaborate on this point in the next section. Here I wish to present the argument that even if such boundaries reflect norms and identity constructs of the ultra orthodox people and their right to (group) difference, they might contradict the (individual) rights of women and men of other religious identities to the city.

The Right to the City, the Right to Difference and Urban Governance

As already mentioned, the situation described in the previous section illustrates the discourse around Lefebvre's (1991a, 1991b) terminology of the right to the city and the right to difference, and the tensions between universal citizenship and group difference (Young, 1998). This discussion takes several directions; first, the right to the city and the right to difference; second, individual rights and group rights; and third, the extent to which such discourses can be incorporated in the policies and politics of local governance.

Many academic works have incorporated the notion of the right to the city in their analysis of urban everyday life (Kofman, 1995; Kofman & Labas, 1996; Yacobi, 2003; Fenster, 2004; Purcell, 2003; Dikec, 2001; Cuthbert, 1995; Mitchell, 2003). This analysis is usually integrated in the discussion of new forms of citizenship that challenge the traditional, hegemonic, nation-state forms of this notion. These new forms of citizenship refer not only to the legal status of citizens provided for them by the state, but also to membership and belonging within a community and the tactics and practices to claim citizen rights. Citizenship is viewed as continuously negotiated

through everyday practices (Sector, 2004). These new forms of citizenship challenge capitalist power relations and their increased control over social life (Purcell, 2003). They also challenge the static 'top down' analysis of citizenship and present an approach to citizenship as a spatial strategy which includes certain definitions of belonging, identity and rights (Sector, 2004). As Purcell (2003) indicates, these processes entail rescaling, re-territorializing and reorientating of both economy and forms of citizenships. In this context of political and economic restructuring, the Lefebvrian construction and meanings of 'the right to the city' can be interpreted as a form of resistance to traditional structures of citizenship. It is a normative phrasing of citizenship and its resisting nature begins with the fact that the right to the city is based on inhabitance; that is, those who inhabit in the city have the right to the city as opposed to other forms of membership that are determined by nation-state citizenship. The right to the city or the right to urban life which is based on inhabitance entails two main rights: 'the right to appropriate' urban space or 'the right to use' urban space and 'the right to participate' in the production of urban space (Purcell, 2003). As already mentioned at the beginning of this paper, these normative rights encompass not only rights to resources but the right to be the author of urban space, the right to belong in the city and to contribute to it, to all its inhabitants, citizens and dwellers.

Side by side to these sets of rights, Lefebvre indicates the individual 'right to difference' or the right to be different which involves the right of individuals not to be classified into categories by the homogenizing powers but to maintain their own difference (Dikec, 2001). Moving the discussion to group identity and rights, can we discuss the right to difference of the ultra orthodox as a group right, and the practices of 'modesty walls' as its expressions? In other words, is the 'group' unit rather than individual a valid component in the discussion of the right to difference? Young (1998) assures the political importance of the concept of 'social group' as the unit which motivates and mobilizes social movements such as the women's movement, gay movement or elders' movements, more than exclusively class or economic interests. However, she avers that group identity should be understood in relational terms and although social processes of affinity and separation define groups, they do not always give the group a substantive identity because each of the group members possess multiple identities besides the 'group identity': 'There is no common nature that members of a group have', she asserts (1998, p. 273). However, she argues that the inclusion and participation of everyone in social and political institutions sometimes requires the articulation of 'special rights' that meet the needs of the group's difference. Here she mainly refers to 'oppressed groups' such as women, gay communities, elderly people, or in general groups who suffer from exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, violence or harassment. Can such conditions be related to the position of the ultra orthodox in Jerusalem? Perhaps so in their eyes, but some would argue that these terminologies of group oppression better apply to secular women. Kymlicka's (1998) definition of 'religious sects' as groups which demand exemption from civil society because their norms contradict

some of the group's religious practices, can be useful in this discussion. Sometimes he argues these demands for exemption are indeed a form of withdrawal from the larger society but some of them show a desire for integration. For example, says Kimlicka (1998), Orthodox Jews wanted to join the US military but needed an exemption from the usual regulations so that they could wear their yarmulkes. This practice can be seen as an example of a group right to difference, which expresses a will to integrate in civil life and duties. Following this line of thinking, can we then interpret the 'modesty walls' as an expression of the ultra orthodox's desire to integrate in the sense that these 'walls' are more symbolic than physical, or is it a struggle against intolerance of the modernized secular with women's modesty practices as the price paid for this struggle. Moreover, we can also challenge the municipality's role in this struggle. That is, do municipalities adopt the Lefebvrian standpoint of the right to the city and then prohibit practices of 'modesty walls' in the city as they deny women the 'right to use' the city, or is this practice a part of a group identity and right to difference in maintaining privatized public spaces as sacred that should be respected, especially in an era when the Lefebvrian right to the city is denied, in the name of security, for example?

Relating to this matter, Benvenisti (1998) argues that the claim for religious autonomy or the sacralization of space is justified only if it doesn't contradict fundamental norms and state legislation. As he argues, the formulation of such a 'religious ghetto' is acceptable as long as it is based on cultural and religious preservation principles and heritage necessity. This is the case of the ultra orthodox, argues Benvenishti, as much as the claims of the Aboriginals in Australia, the First Nations in Canada and the Sami in Scandinavia to maintain their traditional life. The only problem Benvenisti sees is in the fact that such norms, which create exclusion, can harm women's rights. The solution Benvenisti suggests is to allow such principles of autonomy of these communities to take place but without offending the rights of the majority. Similar debates have been discussed elsewhere (Fenster, 1999a, 199b) regarding planning procedures for ethnic groups such as the Bedouin in the Negev. There the particularistic cultural-religious identity of the male Bedouin perpetuates women's subordination by dictating norms of modesty and seclusion. Modernist— professional planning which is intolerant to such identity-related issues actually designs Bedouin towns in such a way that women cannot use public spaces because of the danger of abusing their modesty in the eyes of men. For example, modernist planning assumes high population density level, the construction of one main urban centre for the town, zoning regulations which separate residential and economic areas, forcing Bedouin women to work outside their tribal-affiliated neighbourhoods. These principles enhance the chances of unwanted meetings between women and men of different tribes and threaten women's modesty (Fenster, 1999a, 1999b). The discourse concerns these expressions of 'intolerance of difference' in modernist planning when the design of Bedouin towns is made according to universalist modernist approaches, a practice which in fact worsens the already-subordinated

situation of Bedouin women by putting more restrictions on their daily freedom of movement in the town, including going to work.

If we look back at the women's narratives presented at the beginning of the paper, they emphasized that they found their treatment to be offensive in terms of their right to the city, which was violated by the patriarchal power of the modesty walls. How do the politics and policies of the municipality deal with such a discourse between the right to difference of a group and the right of use of individuals? And does this right to difference, which entails the construction of privatized spaces as sacred, occur in other cities? The next section tackles these issues.

The Right to the City and Urban Governance

In order to deal with such contradictory notions of individual gendered rights to the city and group rights to difference, I first wanted to understand the municipality standpoint regarding the 'modesty signs'. I talked to the Chief of the City Enforcement Department at the Jerusalem Municipality, a department which deals with enforcing municipal by-laws, including those concerning licensing for street signs and businesses. I asked him about the legality of the signs hanging in the streets of Mea Shearim. He stated that in general the municipality is very rigid in enforcing municipal by-laws by imposing licensing for street signs and businesses. But in Mea Shearim, he said, it is different. Although the signs there are illegal as they were not approved and licensed by the municipality, the municipality's workers cannot enforce the law. The Chief of the City Enforcement Department defined this area as 'outside the law and outside enforcing the law' (interview, 20 July 2003). He explains the difficulty to enforce this by-law in Mea Shearim due to lack of labour power. He says: 'Even if we take down these signs they will put them up again'. This in fact reflects the struggle of the ultra orthodox group to establish its politics of identity and community by challenging the sovereignty of the municipality and perhaps its 'intolerance to difference'. It also expresses the Mea Shearim group's lack of recognition of the sovereignty of the municipality. But this is probably also an expression of the municipality's implicit politics (meaning policies that are not clear and public) not to interfere with these practices, probably because of local politics and power relations within the municipality's council. The Chief of City Enforcement Department admits that if such signs restricting movement had appeared in secular neighbourhoods, the municipality would have reacted forcefully against the practice. Thus, in spite of their illegitimate status, these signs still hang in public spaces, transforming the neighbourhood into a gated one.

Another expression of the construction of boundaries and borders in Jerusalem is the blocking of roads on the Sabbath. In certain neighbourhoods, there are special barriers that are put on the road during the Sabbath. These barriers have no 'identity'. They are not police barriers, nor municipality barriers, but barriers without specific marks. I noticed one day that during the Sabbath (the time of the Sabbath is marked by a siren) that someone from the community put the barrier on the road.

In addition, special signs, official ones, are also put at the entrance to this street which inform that there is no entry to the street during the Sabbath. This is another action which can be defined as 'semi-legal'.

Does this practice of sacralizatiion of public urban spaces also reflect group identity and the right to difference of ultra orthodox in other cities in Israel and abroad?

In other cities in Israel, such as Tel Aviv, there are certain neighbourhoods populated by ultra orthodox communities but which display no explicit exclusionary signs. There are signs in the city of Benei Brak for example, a city with a majority of religious[4] residents, but these signs are less offensive and perhaps less exclusionary. Shilav (1997) analyses the management of ultra orthodox cities in Israel in relation to the extent to which the ultra orthodox communities themselves are flexible or tolerant to the 'other', mostly secular, groups, or people with less rigid religious practices living with them. For example, in Beitar Ilit, one of the ultra orthodox cities in Israel,[5] the municipal authority is not tolerant towards the 'other' from the community itself, in this case the youth.[6]

The sacralization of public spaces is also unknown in cities outside Israel where ultra orthodox communities live, such as in the USA, Canada and Britain. This is perhaps because they live in isolated areas and do not need to protect themselves from outside 'negative' influences. Moreover, in New York City and State where there is a concentration of ultra orthodox communities in Brooklyn and in Kiryat Joel, Orange County, those communities are very active politically and ensure they benefit from the 'affirmative policies' of federal government. They claim to be discriminated against on economic bases because their religious beliefs do not permit them to work on Saturdays. They use the sovereign mechanisms of the nation-state and, for example, appeal to the court arguing that they are entitled to receive benefits, as they can be considered to be cultural rather than religious communities. This means that the ultra orthodox in the USA use legal tools to gain their rights to difference, but within the legal framework (Shilav, 1997).

The ultra orthodox communities in Britain represent another example of how their right to difference is practised within the legal framework and with no violation of women's right of use in the city. These communities live mainly in Manchester and London. In Manchester they consist of 90% of the city's Jewish community. There they express their needs for segregation and the marking of clear boundaries between themselves and the rest of the 'world' (Valins, 2003). However, this does not include control over women's clothing, but of living in homogeneous communities as an act of security. Another spatial religious practice of the Jewish community in Britain is the construction of the eruv: 'a complex device consisting of posts and wires, which is able to change the classification of space (from public to private)' (Valins, 2000, p. 576). It's purpose is to circumvent the prescription against carrying on the Sabbath beyond one's own home, that is, in public spaces, and determining an area with telephone utility lines as part of 'the private' which then makes it possible to carry without violating the Sabbath restrictions. By that, eruv in fact eases Sabbath

restrictions, especially for the elderly, infirm, and parents with young children.[7] But as Valins (2003) argues, the construction of such boundaries, although not so visible, within the context of modern or post-modern urban spaces and the surrounding secular population makes the determination of such practices politically and religiously fraught. This is especially so among the secular Jews who fear that such boundaries would create a Jewish ghetto similar to those before the Second World War. Nevertheless, the community members practise this spatial difference within the legal framework of the nation state or the municipality requirements and they submitted first a request for planning permission. They obeyed civil and municipal by-laws and asked for legal permission to establish spatial changes that resulted from their own religious identity of difference. By doing that, no right of use in the city and its public spaces was denied.

Conclusions

The paper aims to discuss a broader reality in global urban spaces today where multiple ethnicities, cultures and nationalities inhabit and appropriate the same public spaces in ways that other individuals and communities might find abusive. I have discussed this universal phenomenon by focusing on the discourse between the individual right to the city and the group right to difference, and how these sets of rights are expressed as a power struggle within local governance frameworks.

The case of Mea Shearim represents an extreme example of an ultra orthodox community, which because of its desire to maintain 'pure' and 'sacred' ghettoised spaces acts illegally by constructing symbolic gates at the entrances of the neighbourhood. But in fact, this extreme example can serve to explore the growing difficulties in managing cities, which house people of multiple identities that sometimes possess contradictory needs and interests.

The basic dilemma that this paper ponders relates to the localized case presented: whether such a situation, which denies secular women's rights to some public parts of the city, can also be accepted as an expression of the daily religious practices of a distinct community. The members of this distinct community are the city's residents with their own set of rights to the city and their struggle to maintain religious identities. The paper does not provide a clear-cut solution but aims to expose the multiple implications of such a situation. The first reaction of feminists to such exclusionary practices in the city might be negative, but discussing such issues in depth reveals the different meanings and implications of such situations that force one to deal with the sometimes contradictory meanings of the right to the city, and the contrasts inherent between these meanings. These dilemmas become more and more apparent in multi-ethnicized, multi-sacredized and multi-nationalized global urban spaces and will be part of the city governance's daily occupation, as diversity becomes an increasingly important issue in new global spaces. One of the major challenges of city governance nowadays is how to respect both individual and group

rights while maintaining the right to freedom of movement in the city for women and other groups.

Notes

[1]   In order to position the interviewees' narratives within their identities, they were asked at the end of the interview to position themselves in terms of their cultural and ethnic identities.

[2]   Because of the high percentage of their vote (almost 100%) and the relatively low level of secular voters in Jerusalem (30–40%) they usually elect majority representatives in the municipality and have much more power than their relative ratio in the population.

[3]   Satmar is one of the ultra orthodox Hasidic Jewish groups which live in Orange County, near New York State. Hasidim are the followers of an eighteenth century pietistic movement. The major Hasidic groups include Belz, Bobov, Ger, Lubavitch and Satmar. Their names typically derive from their town of origin. Each group is led by a religious leader (a *rebbe)* (see also Valins, 2003; Mintz, 1994).

[4]   As already mentioned before, the ultra orthodox groups in Israel are not homogeneous and each represents a different degree of tolerance towards secular groups.

[5]   There are three cities in Israel where the large majority of the population is ultra orthodox with small number of secular residents (Benei Brak). In two of them there are almost no secular people (Beital Ilit and Imanuel).

[6]   Youth is perceived as an age group in transition who might threaten the norms and values of the community and the authoritarian power relations. Some of the community's 'guards' make efforts to control such an imbalanced situation by organizing special assemblies entitled: 'Assemblies for strengthening modesty'. In such assemblies the males are called to take responsibility for their household members including their children and wives. Social encounters in public spaces or buses are considered problematic, and therefore women are called upon to make sure that they are dressed modestly. Moreover, social sanctions are reinforced upon women who do not follow these rules. Shilav's (1997) interpretation of such conduct is that there is no security or trust of the leaders of the community in their people's abilities and willing to obey religious norms.

[7]   'The Sabbath of the Jew is a very special time of the week. From Friday evening just prior to sunset until Saturday evening when the stars begin to appear, a spirit of calm and restfulness descends which contrasts with the fast pace of daily weekday life. For the traditional Jew, the Sabbath, like all other aspects of life, is defined by a complete set of legal guidelines which describe the 'do's' and 'don't's' of the day. Among the restrictions accepted by traditional Jews are the prohibitions of carrying objects from public domains to private domains and vice versa, and the carrying within a public domain. By public domains are meant non-residential areas including streets, thoroughfares, plazas ('open areas'), highways, etc. By private domains are meant residential areas such as homes and apartments, i.e. enclosed areas, and areas which are surrounded by a 'wall' and can be deemed to be 'closed off' from the surrounding public domains. Within these latter areas, one is permitted to carry. The purpose of an Eruv is to integrate (the Hebrew word 'eruv' means to mix or join together) a number of private and public properties into one larger private domain. Consequently, individuals within the Eruv district are then permitted to move objects across what was, before the erection of the Eruv, a public domain-private domain boundary. Thus, one may then carry from one's home to the sidewalk and then, for example, to someone else's home' (quoted from www.bostoneruv.org, where there is an elaboration on the ancient history of the Eruv and its current practices in US cities).

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