Neoliberal Globalization Meets Settler Colonialism:

The Case of the Jerusalem Light Rail

Hammad Jabr
Department of Geography, The University of British Columbia
GEOG 352: Urbanization in the Global South
Professor Priti Narayan
Teaching Assistant Vadivel Chinnadurai
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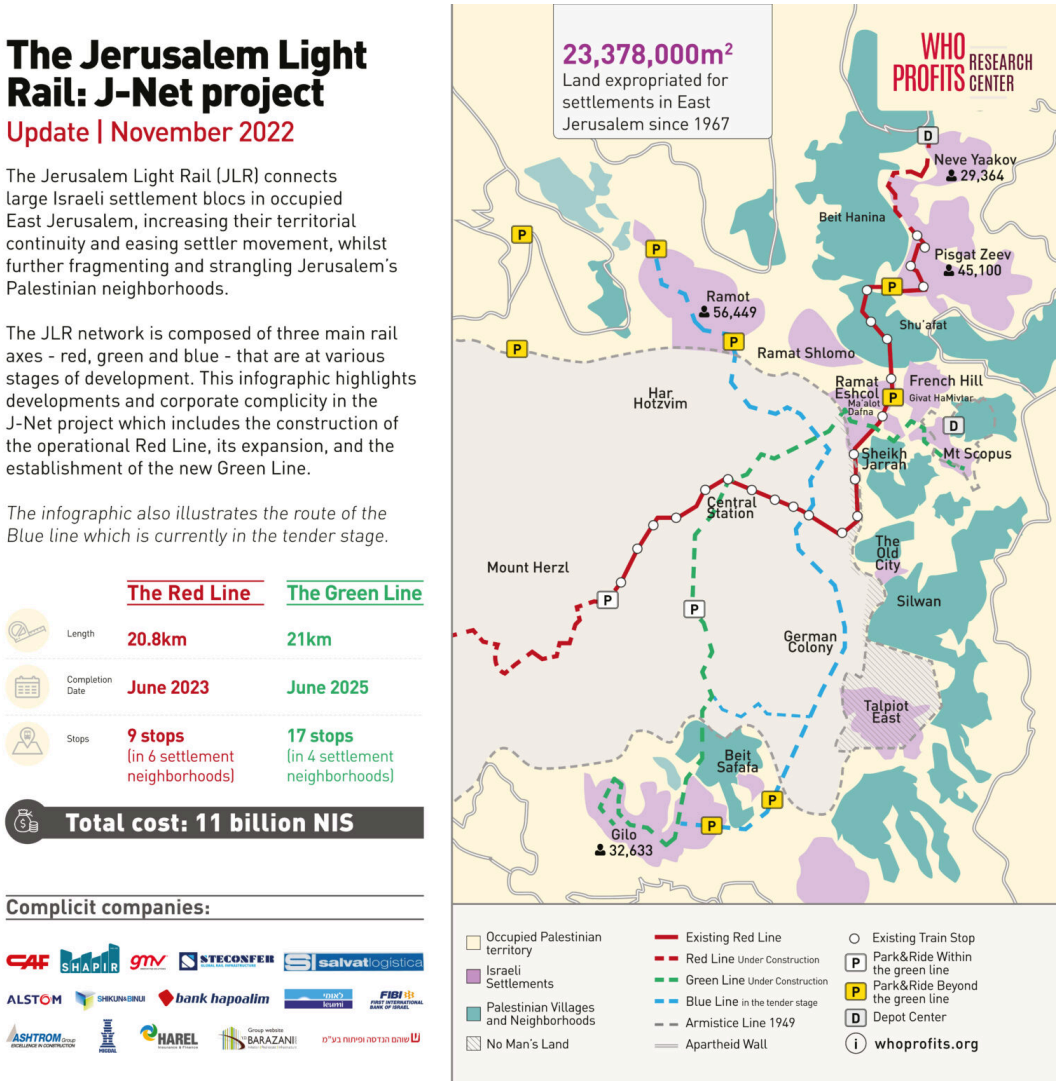
Hammad Jabr

Introduction

The City of Jerusalem, under Israeli occupation since 1967, is undergoing a process of annexation characterized by settler colonial policies and actions aimed at asserting and strengthening Israeli control over the city's eastern half (Abdou, 2021). Following the 1948 Nakba, Jerusalem was split into West Jerusalem with a majority Jewish population, and a predominantly-Palestinian East Jerusalem. Although Israel occupied East Jerusalem after the 1967 Six-Day War, it is not internationally recognized as Israel's territory (Haddad & Chughtai, 2023). The expansion of settlements in East Jerusalem, which are considered illegal under international law, involves the transfer of civilian populations into occupied territory, the displacement of Palestinians from their homes, and the erasure of their presence from neighbourhoods and lands (Abdou, 2021). Urban infrastructure has been a vital tool for asserting Israeli control over East Jerusalem, especially since there was no regulated Palestinian public transport system until 2004. In East Jerusalem, three open-air bus depots constitute the only central bus station (Nolte, 2016). Transportation as a form of urban infrastructure remains highly segregated for Israelis and Palestinians in Jerusalem, including the Jerusalem Light Rail (JLR), of which construction started in 2006 and opened in 2011.

This essay argues that the Jerusalem Light Rail is the socio-spatial result of a uniquely neoliberal settler colonialism situated within global flows of ideas, discourses, and international capital. The paper proceeds as follows: We start by discussing how the light rail functions as a *socio-spatial result* of settler colonialism, arguing that the JLR is a mechanism that facilitates the encroachment of Israeli settlers, surveillance, and state power more broadly into East Jerusalem. We then situate the JLR within contemporary global neoliberal capitalism, characterized by deregulation and increased international connections between firms and governments around the world. By doing so, we show how it is a product of global flows ideologically and materially. Specifically, we show how the JLR's discursive framing is informed by and plays off of globally hegemonic logics of 'modernity' and 'development, as well as Orientalism. Lastly, the paper will touch upon Palestinian resistance to Israeli control over East Jerusalem through violence and international campaigns targeting the JLR.

Figure 1: The Trajectory of the Jerusalem Light Rail



Note. From Who Profits Research Center (2022). *The Jerusalem Light Rail: J-Net Project.* https://www.whoprofits.org/publications/report/162?the-jerusalem-light-rail-the-j-net-project

The JLR as a socio-spatial result of settler-colonialism

To contextualize our argument that the JLR is a manifestation of a neoliberal type of settler-colonialism, we must first establish why the JLR is the socio-spatial result of settler colonialism in the first place. In terms of its spatial effects, the JLR acts as a "fact on the ground," (Ober, 2006, p. 442; Badarin, 2015) both symbolically and physically cementing the occupation into the built environment, within Palestinian territory. It strategically facilitates the annexation of East Jerusalem (Forman & Kedar,

2004). Hanna Baumann (2014) notes that "the tram serves to inextricably tie the East of the city (annexed according to Israeli law, but considered occupied by the international community) to the Israeli West" (p. 2). In addition, the JLR plans serve the needs of Israeli citizens who live in contested settlements on Palestinian territory, facilitating easy mobility between Palestinian areas in Jerusalem and the settlements (Baumann, 2018, p. 31).

This is how the JLR enables the further encroachment of Israeli settlers on Palestinian land: much of the construction of the tram "was carried out on occupied land" and, as Palestinians argued, the JLR "cements the presence of settlements in East Jerusalem, making their presence more permanent and perhaps irreversible" (Baumann 2014, p. 2). With this, claims to Jerusalem by Palestinians are foreclosed territorially as the JLR facilitates the movement of settlers into Palestinian areas (Salaime, 2016). The expansion of settlements through the light rail is heavily associated with the violence of settlers. Baumann cites a firsthand account of the violence that such settlers bring: "On Saturdays, armed settlers regularly come and puncture the tyres of our cars, or spray-paint slogans against Arabs onto them. People from the neighbourhood tried to chase them away, but next time they returned, they were armed, so no one did anything" (2014, p. 4).

The movement of settlers into Palestinian land had less of a precedent before the JLR. One neighbourhood, Shuafat, "was also once off-limits to Jewish Israelis, like much of Palestinian East Jerusalem. Hamdi, a longtime Shuafat resident, recalled: 'Israelis used to be afraid to even drive down our main road. Jewish taxi drivers wouldn't take you here'" (Baumann, 2014, p. 4). Part of the JLR's effect in creating urban space to facilitate settler colonialism is the "[instilling of] a sense of familiarity with Palestinian spaces that were previously out of bounds to Israelis," thereby laying the groundwork for "appropriation of those spaces" (Baumann, 2018, p. 31), enabled by the demarcation of 'Israeli' space and by securitization through the tram's infrastructure.

The JLR's infrastructure in East Jerusalem resembles its infrastructure in West Jerusalem, with Hebrew advertisements in both halves of the city, and similar platform decoration styles. It is distinct from its surroundings in Palestinian neighbourhoods, such as Shuafat, which look "alien" in comparison (Baumann, 2014, p. 4). Along the

JLR's route in Shuafat, architectural elements also visually align the space with West Jerusalem (Baumann, 2018, p. 34). Securitization measures are in place to further ease settlers' apprehensions about entering Palestinian spaces: "Drones were used for the first time for policing purposes in Jerusalem [...] ostensibly to identify individuals attacking the tram" in addition to other "means of protection and surveillance [...] to securitize the tram" (Baumann, 2018, p. 33), such as the armed Israeli security guards. By using infrastructural and architectural elements of the JLR and by securitizing it with guards and surveillance, the tram makes Palestinian areas safer and more familiar, "known and navigable" to Israeli settlers. According to one testimony, "Now settlers from [nearby settlements of] Neve Yacov and Pisgat Ze'ev come [to Shuafat] just to park their cars without having to pay for a parking meter, and get on the tram here. They feel safe because now they know the area from riding through it everyday, and because of the armed Israeli security guards that are always standing on the platform" (Baumann, 2014, p. 4). Thus, the JLR is a manifestation of Israel's settler colonial expansionist agenda through urban infrastructure, seeing as it is 1) built on occupied territory to connect Israeli areas to Palestinian ones, 2) is securitized, and 3) made to look familiar to settlers so they feel safe enough to enter. As such, it correspondingly brings settler violence to Palestinian areas.

The JLR also has the effect of normalizing Israel's occupation. As the existence of the light rail forces Palestinians to take it out of pragmatism (Baumann, 2018, p. 34), it incorporates them into the Israeli system, thereby minimizing Palestinian resistance and "[bringing] them in line with the normal" (Baumann citing Foucault, 2018, p. 31). Another factor of the JLR's normalizing effect is the Jerusalem municipality's efforts to depict the light rail as a symbol of diversity as a part of its urban branding plan, given the co-presence of settlers and Palestinians on the tram (Baumann, 2018, pp. 31-34). Jerusalem Transportation promoted this "coexistence" agenda to convince one of the companies criticized for partaking in the JLR project because it was on occupied land that it was a peaceful project (Baumann, 2018, p. 32)—this narrative thus directly obfuscates the occupation. It is for these reasons that Baumann argues the JLR "[presents] the city as open, normal and unified and [uses] circulation as a means of depoliticizing and normalizing the occupation of East Jerusalem" (Baumann, 2018, p. 36). As the following sections explore, the depoliticization of a tram facilitating settler

colonial expansionism allows for worldwide investments into this colonial project, requiring groups to actively politicize the JLR in order to resist Israeli occupation.

The JLR and the world

United Jerusalem

At the national scale, the Jerusalem Light Rail serves as a "fact on the ground" which legitimizes the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem. At the municipal scale, its role is more specific—the JLR is a projection of the Israeli utopian geographical imaginary of a 'united Jerusalem' (Yacobi, 2012) into urban space. 'United Jerusalem' is a colonial discourse that portrays the ideal future for the city as being a unified entity with a Jewish Israeli demographic majority, whereby the city's western and eastern halves are politically united under Israeli rule, with a significant Jewish population living in settlements in East Jerusalem (Klein, 2005; Barghouti, 2009; Baumann, 2018). Upon the full realization of 'united Jerusalem,' Palestinians do not altogether *leave*—although they are intentionally kept as a demographic minority—but rather live in 'peace' with Israelis on the Israelis' terms (Chiodelli, 2013). Palestinians must become formal Israeli subjects, and, like "Arab" citizens of Israel today, be stripped of their national identity as Palestinian.

The localized colonial imaginary of 'united Jerusalem' operates along logics of modernity, developmentalism, and Orientalism. Following Jennifer Robinson (2006), 'developmentalism' here signifies "a political investment, and the institutional promotion of development as a way of improving life in poor countries" (pg. 4). Developmentalism is a discourse with Western provenance. It presupposes a teleological hierarchy of progress (Roy, 2014), understood to be universal, with the West at the top. In a postcolonial historical context, Western developmentalism reproduces the colonial logic of the 'white man's burden' (Escobar, 1995) to justify intervening in the global south. These are done for the ostensible purposes of 'helping' the global south 'modernize and develop' (Hart, 2001; Horner, 2019), but in reality, they are meant to reproduce a colonial relationship of dependence (Nkrumah, 1965). A distinction should be made here between the developmentalism of the West and that of the postcolonial world. While postcolonial leaders like Kwame Nkrumah or Jawarhalal Nehru in the global south did subscribe to the idea of hierarchical, developmentalist progress, they

sought industrial development in their countries for different the purposes of 1) legitimizing their rule, 2) consolidating national unity, and 3) protecting their states against Western neo-imperialism or neo-colonialism (Kapoor, 1985; Silver, 2015). Western developmentalism, by contrast, is highly interventionist.

'United Jerusalem' discourse can essentially be understood as a localized product of this Western-style interventionist developmentalism and Orientalism. From the Jerusalem Municipality's point of view (the Israeli government of West Jerusalem), the site of developmentalist intervention lies just across the Green Line. 'United Jerusalem' discursively produces the Israeli as modern, developed, and part of history, who possesses these qualities because the Palestinian—the Israeli's opposite—is ontologically primitive, ahistorical, and underdeveloped (Nolte & Yacobi, 2015; LeVine, 2005). Following the logics of Orientalism, 'united Jerusalem' discourse understands the Palestinian as incapable of development or progress without the Israeli, who, without urgent intervention, will give into their inherently irrational violent nature. Thus, in order to avoid Palestinian violence, the Palestinian must be brought into the Israeli fold—Palestinian land must be expropriated, and *de facto* Israeli control over East Jerusalem must become *de jure*.

Urban planning in Israel is used, to an unusual extent relative to other states, as a tool with which to realize geopolitical and territorial ambitions (Jabareen, 2010). Since the adoption of "Jerusalem Master Plan no. 2000" (Tatarsky, 2016) in 2009, 'united Jerusalem' discourse has become ingrained within the city's official urban planning practices. This has enabled the physical production of the normative, colonial geography of 'united Jerusalem' to occur through formal, official channels. The Jerusalem Light Rail is one such physical product—in fact, as Haaretz journalist Nir Hasson (2014) observes, it is "the most salient symbol of the city's unification under the wings of normalization and technology." 'Unification' in this context is unification under the 'united Jerusalem' paradigm, while 'normalization' signifies general acceptance of Israel's colonization of East Jerusalem among Palestinians, Israelis, and the world alike. The Jerusalem Municipality's city planners and government officials praise the light rail for creating "an atmosphere of progress, convenience and efficiency in *Israel's* largest city" (Jerusalem Transportation Master Plan, n.d., emphasis added). Interestingly, the largest city within Israel's internationally-recognized boundaries is Tel Aviv with a

population of 474,000—Jerusalem becomes the largest city only if its two halves are understood to be a part of Israel (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2016; Jerusalem Institute, 2019). Thus, the Jerusalem municipality conceives of the light rail as an infrastructure uniting Israel with a territory that they understand already as Israel, but which needs infrastructural intervention to be fully integrated into Israel. By connecting East and West Jerusalem, the JLR represents an incursion of the colonial 'united Jerusalem' imaginary into Palestinian spaces, an infrastructural component of a normative vision of Jerusalem that is modern, unified, uncontested, and Israeli.

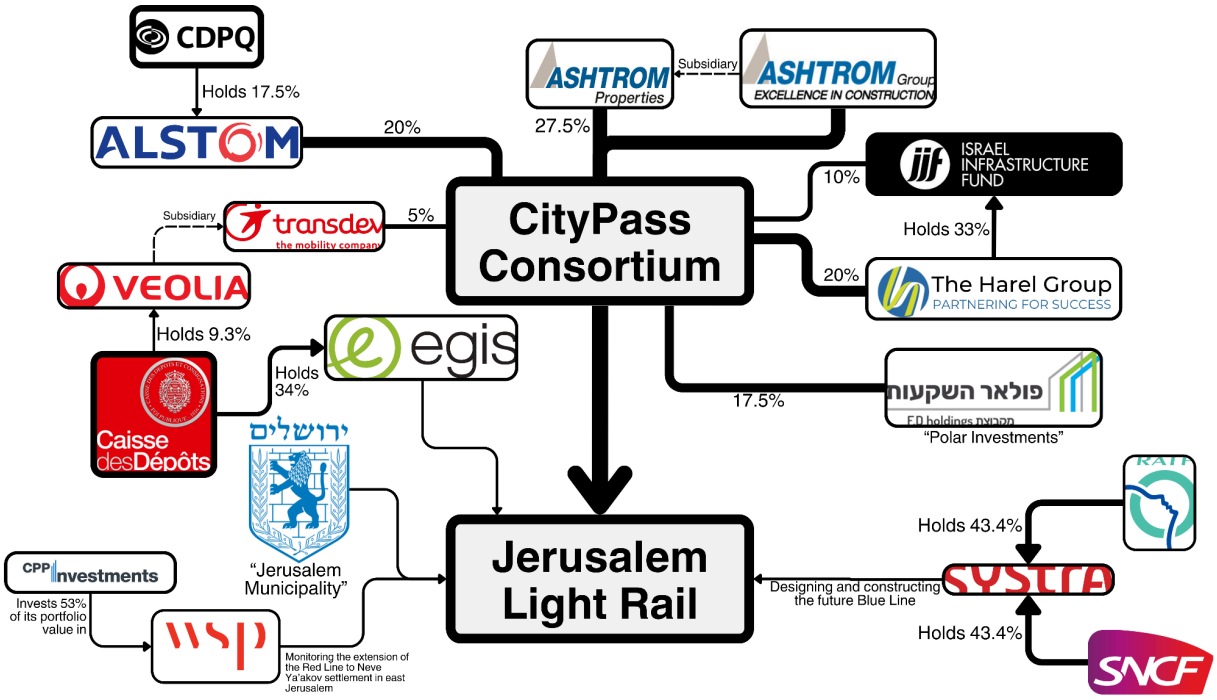
Capital flows

The JLR is a product of the "contingent and multi-centric mesh of interactive processes" (Olds, 2001, pg. 19) that constitute neoliberal globalization. As we have seen, discourses of normative 'modernity' and 'progress' circulating at the global scale interact with local political realities, national imaginaries, and normative visions of space to produce the Jerusalem Light Rail as a "space-related practice" (Nolte & Yacobi, 2015, p. 29) of Israeli settler-colonialism in East Jerusalem. Excavating the complex logistical interconnections involved in the JLR's planning, administration, and implementation reveals that its materiality is also deeply embedded in the entangled networks of the global economy. The Jerusalem Light Rail, far from being a locally-bound project, is in fact produced by multiscalar, multinational flows of resources, knowledge, and capital. In other words, the light rail is just as much a product of the neoliberal global economy as it is a set of spatialized discourses.

Administratively, the JLR exemplifies neoliberal urban governance because a public-private partnership—a very complex, multiscalar, and globally-embedded one at that—serves as the framework by which its execution is carried out. As the name suggests, the public-private partnership model of urban governance involves a partnership between the local government and private firms to direct and implement projects, especially infrastructure and built-environment developments, that are usually understood as the responsibility of the private sector. According to David Harvey (1989), the dominance of the public-private partnership in cities across the world signifies a global paradigm shift from state-led "managerialism" to a style of urban neoliberalism he calls "entrepreneurialism." This transition largely corresponded with

the more general paradigm shift in the global economy in the West and much of the global south in the 1970s and 1980s—a shift away from Keynesianism and towards a Friedmanite neoliberalism defined by massive, multiscalar deregulation and privatization. The JLR's public-private partnership comprises a group of companies known as the 'CityPass consortium,' assembled by the Jerusalem Municipality to implement the project (Bassok & Georgy, 2002). Firms in the consortium include both Israeli companies like Ashtrom Construction and the Israel Infrastructure Fund, as well as global firms like Alstom and Veolia (BDS Movement, 2016). These latter two are both French infrastructure companies with "institutional investor" shareholders. Institutional investors are essentially trusts made on behalf of a government to responsibly invest taxpayer money into projects and firms that will incur positive returns (Çelik & Isaksson, 2014). The Quebecois government, through its institutional investor *Caisse des dépôt et placement du Québec*, or 'CDPQ,' holds 17.5% of the shares in Alstom (CDPQ, 2020; Gueugneau, 2021). Alstom itself holds 20% of the CityPass consortium's available capital (Railway Technology 2011). As such, the Israeli Jerusalem Municipality is partnering with a French firm that is mostly private but has 17.5% of its shares held by a subsidiary of the government of the Canadian province of Quebec, all with the aim of implementing a fact on the ground that projects the settler-colonial imaginary of 'united Jerusalem' into space. This is but one example of how the colonial project of the JLR, through the CityPass consortium, is embedded in complex, multinational and multiscalar global networks, and transcends multiple dimensions of 'public' and 'private.'

Figure 1: The Jerusalem Light Rail, CityPass consortium, and global flows



Note. Data compiled from:

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Politicizing infrastructure through resistance

In the context of this paper, violence is defined as direct action that attempts to disrupt, destroy and reclaim physical, social, and political spaces governed by infrastructure projects such as the JLR. This includes acts of dismantling, damaging, or burning infrastructure so as to hinder its functionality, and to call attention to the JLR as a fact on the ground that undermines Palestinians' visibility and agency within Jerusalem's urban landscape (Nolte, 2016), instead of a benign, inherent infrastructure (Guo, 2021). Seen as a symbol of connectivity and progress for Israelis, for Palestinians, the JLR is a focal point for discontent and resistance; it is the site that constitutes their non-belonging to Jewish Jerusalem, and which renders them neglected and contained (Lee, 2011; Rokem & Vaughan, 2018). In this sense, the JLR's strategic placement in East Jerusalem underscores its significance in Israel's efforts to assert control over contested territories (Jabareen, 2010). For Palestinians, the JLR is not a depoliticized physical infrastructure. Palestinians politicize it as a tangible manifestation of Israeli occupation and annexation. Consequently, acts of resistance against the JLR are not merely expressions of dissent but deliberate efforts to challenge Israeli dominance and reclaim agency in shaping Jerusalem's future (Nolte, 2016). Attacks on the JLR, whether through vandalism, protests, or violent acts, serve as symbolic gestures of defiance against the narrative of 'united Jerusalem' under Israeli control. By targeting the JLR, Palestinians aim to disrupt the illusion of normalization and highlight the underlying tensions and injustices perpetrated by Israeli policies (Baumann, 2014). For example, after the killing of 16-year-old Mohammad Abu Khdeir, a Palestinian from Shuafat, a relatively affluent neighbourhood on the northern outskirts of Jerusalem, clashes occurred between Palestinian youth and Israeli security forces in East Jerusalem. The unrest led to over 178 protests across Shuafat alone. As part of the protests, Palestinians attacked the three Jerusalem Light Rail stations in Shuafat—the only three that served Palestinian areas of East Jerusalem. Hanna Baumann (2014) writes of the event: "Every conceivable surface of tram shelters and signage has been smashed, ticket machines dismantled, stones pulled out of the newly-laid pavement to use as projectiles, train tracks set on fire. During the third night of clashes, protesters attempted to cut the tram's electricity poles" (p. 1). Thus, attacking the rail stations as a result of the targeted

killing of Palestinians is simply an attack against the occupation. The destruction of the tram stops in Shuafat as a form of "violence" reflects Palestinian's resistance to the JLR infrastructure; their resistance to 'united Jerusalem,' a means to vocalize their presence and reclaim their political agency, and to assert their right to the city in Jerusalem.

But to disrupt settler colonialism in the neoliberal era, resistance can and should go beyond local efforts. Palestinian contestations of the JLR as a fact on the ground of occupation and colonial 'united Jerusalem' have also targeted the global linkages which support and produce it. This led to corporations and institutions complicit in the construction, design, and implementation of the JLR becoming targets of international Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) campaigns. Veolia, a CityPass consortium member that helped build the Jerusalem light rail system that held the exclusive right to operate it, became a significant focus of BDS activism in Europe and the United States. After months of lobbying and awareness-raising by the 'Derail Veolia' campaign, the company began to lose out on major European deals (Abunimah & Ziv, 2018). By the end of 2013, the pressure had led Veolia to accrue a staggering debt exceeding $20 billion, with its investment rating reduced to junk status (Harvey, B., 2015; Barkat, 2020). Notably, Veolia's debt load almost precisely equaled the value of all its lost contracts, failures to win expected new contracts, and voluntary withdrawals from bidding.

Conclusion

The JLR is one of the many tools that Israel has deployed and continues to deploy in order to reinforce and strengthen its settler-colonial agenda in Palestine. Being forcefully integrated into the physical and political landscape of East and West Jerusalem, the JLR is presented as a project of technological 'modernization' and 'progress.' However, this essay has argued that the JLR is not merely a benign, depoliticized transport system, but also a socio-spatial construct shaped by and contributing to the dynamics of a distinctly neoliberal settler colonialism within Jerusalem. Additionally, in its local context, the JLR is only 'modern' because of the Orientalist epistemic production of the 'backwards' and 'static' Palestinian 'other.' The JLR effectively serves as an instrument by which the Jerusalem Municipality can realize the normative geography of 'united Jerusalem,' seeing as it facilitates Israeli annexation

and control over the city's Palestinian east. The strategic placement of the line and especially of its stations has facilitated greater Israeli settler encroachment into Palestinian neighbourhoods, underlining the asymmetric power dynamics that favour Israeli interests and severely limit Palestinian autonomy and visibility on Palestinian land. The light rail also exemplifies the concomitance of local colonial ambitions with global capitalist flows, revealing how in settler-colonial contexts, urban planning and infrastructure projects perpetuate and legitimize occupation. Moreover, the portrayal of the JLR as a symbol of peaceful coexistence and modernity masks the ongoing displacement and marginalization of Palestinians, effectively silencing their claims and rights to the city. In response, Palestinians politicize the occupation's infrastructure, whether they are in Jerusalem directly attacking the physical representation of the occupation or coordinating international campaigns to undo the web of flows and interconnections upholding Israeli colonial projects.

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Hammad Jabr

yay you made it to the end meow :3 thank you for reading our paper :p