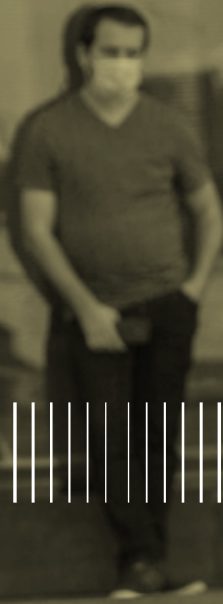


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## **KEEPING OUR (SOCIAL) DISTANCE? The Coronavirus Pandemic and the Relationships between the Various Groups in Jerusalem**

**Marik Shtern, Hani Vayzer**



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**Jerusalem, 2021**

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Marik Shtern, Hani Vayzer

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# Executive Summary

The COVID-19 pandemic hit Jerusalem hard, deeply affecting the Haredi and Palestinian sectors of the city, strengthening and weakening stereotypes about particular groups and leading to a temporary change in the pattern of relationships between the sectors and Israeli government institutions. This document examines the influence of the pandemic on the fabric of intergroup relations in Jerusalem, while highlighting the stories of the two "minority" (although taken together they comprise a majority) Jerusalem communities – the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem and the Jewish Haredi community [in West Jerusalem]. **This document tells the story of how these two communities coped with the pandemic (with a focus on the first wave, from March to May 2020), and specifically explores the encounter between them and the authorities which managed the crisis; the media discourse among the general Israeli public regarding these sectors; and the daily routines which were unique to each of these communities during the pandemic.** Therefore, the aim of this study is to analyze and characterize the changing trends in the patterns of the relationships between the populations being studied and the local and national government establishment during and following the crisis period. The research is based on 29 interviews with influencers and activists from across the city: community leaders, civil society activists, neighborhood and municipal decision makers and researchers who study Jerusalem communities. In addition, texts and discourse which appeared in the local and national media, as well as in social media, were analyzed.

The sociopolitical influence of crises such as the coronavirus pandemic may manifest itself in changes in direction or in the acceleration of processes which are already underway. **The testimonies in this document reveal that the influence of the crisis on the fabric of the relationship of the groups in Jerusalem indicates an acceleration of trends which began during the past decade and at the same time a departure from those trends and a consolidation of new processes.** There was no change in the geographic or political data. Palestinians and Haredim in Jerusalem live in overcrowded conditions and contend with an inadequate response to their growing housing and employment needs. The Separation Wall restricts the Palestinians geographically from

every direction except the west. Furthermore, no change is expected in the weakened political status of the Palestinian Authority in the near future. Among the Haredi communities, the introduction of technology into private homes, the growing exposure to the secular world, the vacuum that remains following the deaths of the prominent members of the previous generation of rabbinic authorities – none of these are expected to change either, in the near future. Over the past decade, these processes have led to increasing spatial mixing in Jerusalem, especially in non-Haredi West Jerusalem, which has become more diverse with respect to its human landscape in the composition of the residents of the neighborhoods, the employees, the consumers and those who frequent the parks and the various leisure and recreational facilities.

The study demonstrates that while the coronavirus crisis accelerated the processes of integration of East Jerusalem residents into Israeli economy and society, and temporarily "normalized" the civilian presence of the Israeli government in the eastern side of the city, it also caused a temporary deterioration in the substance of the relationships between Haredi society and the general population in Israel as a whole, and specifically in Jerusalem. **The change in the pattern of the interactions between the two communities and the Israeli establishment during the coronavirus pandemic may provide an indication of what the character of intergroup relations will be after the pandemic – integration and Israelization in East Jerusalem alongside increasing negative friction between Haredi communities and the general Jewish population in the city.** At the same time, we anticipate that in the long-term it is possible that the deep changes (access to technology and the growth of new local leadership) in the Haredi community that were accelerated by the coronavirus crisis will facilitate the continuation of the creation of positive spheres of collaboration between some of the Haredi communities and the other residents of the city. This study follows a series of studies and workshops conducted by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Israel in the field of the development of shared spaces in the city. The Jerusalem Institute's activity in this area is undertaken in the context of the perception that the growth and prosperity of a city like Jerusalem, which is enmeshed in national, religious, and cultural conflicts, are dependent upon the building of intergroup social resilience, a shared urban identity and an egalitarian relationship of interdependence and reciprocity among the various sectors.

# Introduction

The coronavirus pandemic, COVID-19, hit Jerusalem hard. According to data which are accurate as of November 17, 2020, with the virus detected in 45,780 people, Jerusalem had the largest number of infected people of any place in Israel (Ministry of Health of Israel, 2020). However, the pandemic affected different sectors of the city in different ways, increased and weakened various group stereotypes, and led to a temporary change in the pattern of the relationships between the Haredi and Palestinian sectors and the Israeli government institutions. This document examines the influence of the pandemic on the fabric of the intergroup relationships in Jerusalem. The study concentrates on the stories of the two "minority" communities (which taken together actually comprise a majority) in Jerusalem – the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem and the community of Jewish Haredim. We concentrate on the story of how the two communities coped with the pandemic (with a focus on the period of the first wave, from March to May 2020), and specifically on the encounter between them and the authorities which managed the crisis, the media discourse within general Israeli society, and the routines of daily life during the pandemic. Therefore, the aim of the study is to analyze and characterize the trends in the change in the pattern of relationships between the populations being studied and between them and the local and national government during and following the crisis period. The study is based on 29 interviews with decision makers and activists from across the city: community leaders, civil society activists, decision makers on the neighborhood and municipal levels, and researchers who focus on communities in Jerusalem. In addition, analysis was undertaken of texts and discourse as they appeared in the local and national media and in social media.

When we first started to write this study (in June 2020) the first wave was over, and most of the interviews dealt with an analysis of the processes which occurred during that initial wave. As we continued to write, Israel entered the second wave (September to October 2020), which was different both with respect to its scope and to the responses of the local and national systems. Nonetheless, we chose to delineate the study within the boundaries of the first wave, because we believe that it represents to a great extent the response of Israeli society to the coronavirus pandemic in its most preliminary form,

during a period characterized notably by uncertainty, shock and fear. In this way, the first wave reveals in an uncontrolled manner how the health crisis encountered the social schisms in Israel and in Jerusalem. Thus we relate to the first wave not as a period which necessarily represents the way Israeli society coped with the pandemic, but as a window which exposes central processes and developments within the sphere of the interactions between the populations, even if they were temporary, which shed light on trends, possibilities and hidden fractures now and in the future.

It is important to note that the routine of daily life in the shadow of the coronavirus intrinsically strengthened patterns of spatial segregation among different population groups. The coronavirus pandemic, or more precisely the ways of contending with it, undermined the shared physical space. The rules of social distancing, periods of lockdown, the anxiety about crowded places alongside the closure of businesses on main streets – all of these damaged the urban fabric, and particularly the vibrancy and vitality of public spaces. In conditions of high spatial segregation, such as the residential separation between Arabs and Jews in Jerusalem (96% of the residents of the city live in religiously homogeneous neighborhoods), a reduction in the public space means a reduction in intergroup encounters. This process is accentuated in light of the changes in the workforce, which during ordinary times is one of the main frameworks in which intergroup encounters take place. Therefore, the shift of many employees to working from home and the fact that numerous others were on unpaid leave or unemployed, were additional catalysts for segregation. Under such conditions even the efforts initiated to create a shared space, such as singalong evenings or outdoor dancing or activities open to the children of all sectors, are harmed due to the difficulties involved in holding group events. For this reason the document does not focus on the individual encounters which take place in the daily lives of the residents of the city, but more on the internal processes experienced by each community, and on the links between each community and the Israeli civil and government establishment. This derives from the perception that these processes (such as higher connectivity to technology, "normalization" of government activity within the community, and the emergence of new civil leadership) to a great extent shape the patterns of the relationships between the community and the space dominated by the majority population.

This study shows that while the coronavirus crisis accelerated the integration process of residents of East Jerusalem into the Israeli social space and temporarily "normalized" the civilian presence of the Israeli government in the east of the city, it led to a temporary deterioration in the fabric of the relationships between Haredi society and the general



population in Israel as a whole, and in Jerusalem in particular. At the same time we observed that in the long-term the more profound changes accelerated by the coronavirus crisis in Haredi society (access to technology and the emergence of a new local leadership), will also facilitate the creation of positive collaborative spaces between them and the rest of the city's population.

This study follows a series of studies and workshops conducted by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Israel on the topic of the development of shared spaces in the city. The Jerusalem Institute's activity in this area is undertaken in the context of the perception that the growth and prosperity of a city like Jerusalem, which is enmeshed in national, religious, and cultural conflicts, are dependent upon the building of intergroup social resilience, a shared urban identity and an egalitarian relationship of interdependence and reciprocity among the various sectors.

# Chapter 1. Foreword

The sphere of daily interaction between communities in Jerusalem has been examined in several comprehensive studies, most of which were undertaken in the context of the relationships between Jews and Arabs in the city (see Benvenisti, 1973, 1998; Romann, 1984, 1992; Shtern, 2010, 2015; Shtern and Asmar, 2017), and several in the context of secular-Haredi relations (for example: Hasson, 2007; Shtern and Yacobi, 2020). Romann and Weingrod show how the national-political conflict influences almost every aspect of the interactions between Palestinians and Israelis in Jerusalem, and the way in which the two groups create interaction only in those places where the element of national identity is minimal and instrumental. According to Romann (1984), while in Jerusalem the residential segregation between Jews and Arabs is generally maintained, in community, cultural and educational institutions, in areas which are related to the urban economy – employment, business and consumption – widespread interactions are identified, in which members of the rival groups encounter one another during the day in employment centers, in commercial centers and in consumer centers. When he characterizes the interactions in Jerusalem, Romann claims that they are asymmetrical and are directly influenced by several factors: majority-minority relations; the selective allocation of economic resources; and dominant political control on the part of the Jewish sector in the city. In this situation, regarding most of the interactions there is a tendency to a low level of integration in short-term relationships which do not involve significant cultural or social linkages. This is integration born of separation, in which the Jewish majority has far more options to choose from than does the Arab minority regarding everything related to the quantity, type and location of daily interactions. Studies conducted by Marik Shtern over the past decade examined the fabric of the interactions between Jews and Arabs in the city in the post-Oslo era in the context of the geopolitical changes which occurred after the Second Intifada and the erection of the Separation Wall (Shtern, 2019). These changes include processes of Israelization among the Palestinian population, which are expressed in an increase in the rate of requests for Israeli citizenship; a significant increase in the number of Palestinian students in institutions of higher learning in West Jerusalem (ibid); an increase in the integration of Palestinian employees in West Jerusalem's labor market; and an increase in the spaces where daily encounters occur in public and commercial areas in West Jerusalem

(Shtern, 2010; Shtern and Asmar, 2017). In this context one should note the change in the pattern of government activity in East Jerusalem since 2014, which includes renewed investment in physical infrastructures, and in the education, employment and cultural systems of East Jerusalem, with the aim of strengthening the Israeli governance of the space (Shlomo, 2017) and politically stabilizing the area following the violent incidents which occurred during the summers of 2014 and 2015.

Parallel changes occurred in the past decade in the realm of relationships between secular, religious, and Haredi Jews in Jerusalem. Since the 1990s, the size of the Haredi population in Jerusalem has grown considerably, transforming the majority secular community into a minority, as the Haredi community became the largest Jewish community in Jerusalem. This change took place as the result of the high natural growth rate among the Haredi population alongside the negative migration of secular and religious Jews. During the years 2016 to 2018, close to 33% of the Jews ages 20 and older in Jerusalem identified as Haredim, and only 21% identified as secular (Choshen, 2020: Table C/21). The attributes of the Haredi population in Jerusalem are similar to those of the general Haredi population in Israel and the Jerusalem Haredi population is also characterized by high growth rates, relatively low participation in the workforce, and poverty. The natural high growth rate of the Haredi population led to increased migration to secular and non-Haredi neighborhoods such as Kiryat Yovel, Givat Mordechai and French Hill (ibid: Table/C22). The demographic change in these neighborhoods caused conflicts among the residents over the character of the neighborhoods and issues such as the opening of Haredi educational institutions, community and commercial activity on the Sabbath, and control over the management of the community councils (see for example Shtern and Yacobi, 2020). Alongside the tension between Haredim and non-Haredim in West Jerusalem, one must note the processes of openness and integration that are also occurring within the Haredi population. Over the past decades the number of "modern Haredim" has grown (Zicherman and Cahaner, 2012) among the Haredi communities in Israel. This group is distinguished by its desire to acquire higher education, to integrate into the workforce beyond the Haredi enclave, its willingness to live in mixed neighborhoods and cities, and by political and social behavior which indicates openness to integration within general Israeli society (Zicherman and Cahaner, 2012). In Jerusalem as well, in addition to the religious centers of the conservative Haredi communities, modern Haredi activities take place, which are expressed in the establishment of Haredi educational institutions under the auspices of the state, initiatives to integrate Haredim into higher education and the workforce, and a growing number of Haredi social activists who promote cooperation between different sectors of the population (see for example, Lansky, 2016; New Spirit, 2020)

## The Coronavirus Pandemic and Majority-Minority Relations

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By virtue of their very nature, widespread health crises tend to expose the extent of the efficacy of politicians and governments, to examine the level of social solidarity, and to highlight the existing social gaps (Evans, 2005). Therefore, they are a significant challenge to the social and political status quo of societies and communities and fertile ground for the emergence of new power groups and new political orders. On the level of intergroup relations, historical research about epidemics shows that they are likely to worsen relationships between majority and minority groups and lead to waves of violence inspired by ethnic or religious differences. Weak minority groups are likely to be significantly harmed by epidemics – both due to insufficient access to public resources and due to the need to deflect the public anger, and the characterization of "scapegoat" so that they will function as a social "shock absorber." The pogroms against the Jews during the Black Plague are a typical example of this (Tuchman, 1995). Conversely, as the effects of epidemics traverse borders and cultures they also point up the similarities among people, have the ability to create opportunities to discover intergroup solidarity and to humanize various ethnic groups, and to compel communities and countries to cooperate to eradicate the epidemic (Barry, 2005; Cohn, 2012). Another element which distinguishes the coronavirus pandemic, which is taking place in the 21<sup>st</sup> century following three decades of cultural and economic globalization, is the decrease in international activity and movement and the renewed increase in the state system as the main institution to ensure the health of the residents. The state's economic and health systems have become decisive for many citizens across the world.

In light of the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic across the world, several studies have examined its social and political influence in a variety of domains, including the attitude toward minority groups and patterns of discrimination and exclusion. In health crises ethnic and racial minority groups experience significantly more health vulnerabilities than the majority group (Roberto et al, 2020). The unique character of the coronavirus pandemic, which necessitates social distancing, work from home and high standards of hygiene in the houses – makes it more difficult for members of minority groups to contend with it in a suitable manner due to the absence of the technological ability to work or study from home, crowded living conditions, low levels of sanitation, and cultural difficulties which make it difficult for many to understand government guidelines (Templeton et al, 2020). Therefore, the rate of those harmed among minority groups, such as the black and Hispanic population in the United States, is significantly higher than that of the other population groups (Gidda, 2020). These difficulties increase with the growing need for

psychological support services and social assistance which are often not appropriately addressed during the period of the pandemic. In Israel, these phenomena were observed in the Haredi and Arab communities which were hit significantly harder by the effects of the pandemic (Hermann and Anabi, 2020).

The difficulties experienced by the minority communities during the health crisis are likely to increase in light of the processes of stigmatization, racism and even violence toward minority groups, which are historically fueled by incitement and racist discourse led by politicians, opinion shapers and other public figures (Roberto et al, 2020). When a minority group is designated as responsible for an epidemic or as a group with the potential to experience high infection rates, it becomes a "scapegoat," and this enables the political leadership to shift the blame for anything related to failures or oversights regarding coping with the pandemic over to that group. One example is the significant increase in the attacks characterized by racism on Asian-Americans in the United States, following a stereotypical discourse fueled by the Trump administration during the first wave of the pandemic, which defined it as a Chinese pandemic and accused China of sole responsibility for the disease's outbreak and spread across the world (Croucher et al, 2020). In Israel this phenomenon is evident in the way the general media positions the Haredi community as a main source of the spread of the disease in the country, and as a community which does not vigorously observe the rules of social distancing. The leaders of the Haredi community contend that the Haredim have become "the Israeli scapegoat" of the pandemic (Horovitz, 2020). They claim that more severe lockdown restrictions were instated in Haredi neighborhoods and cities than in non-Haredi neighborhoods and cities with similar morbidity rates (Isacowitz, 2020a), despite the fact that the Haredi residents followed the Health Ministry directives to the letter.

The preceding demonstrates that the pandemic and the accompanying socioeconomic crisis have apparently undermined the physical and existential security of many people. At the same time, boosted by political rhetoric colored by fear and divisiveness, the pandemic is likely to widen existing social rifts and even to create new ones. However, the coming together of individuals, communities and civil society organizations for the purposes of disseminating information, distributing food, and relieving psychological and economic distress are likely, to the same extent, to lead to an increase in the social solidarity within the community. During the period of the first wave of the pandemic photographs circulated the globe of people living in isolation and singing on their balconies with their neighbors. Such images became the widespread representation of a new social solidarity in the time of the coronavirus, in which people banded together for the sake of populations at

increased risk and for those under quarantine. According to Jolanda Jetten and others (2020), coping with the coronavirus crisis necessitates the development of a shared social identity, in response to the physical distancing and isolation between individuals in society. This coping creates potential for bridging between communities, for a re-positioning of minority communities and for the creation of a space for humanitarian civic cooperation which crosses social and ethnic lines (Halperin et al, 2020).

An unusual example of this is the change in the attitude of the media and the public toward the Arab minority in Israel during the pandemic. The fact that among the medical personnel across the country there is a very high proportion of Arab nursing staff, medical technicians and doctors, and the fact that contrary to expectations during the first wave the morbidity rate in the Arab areas was low, led to an improvement in the social image of the Arab minority. This was expressed in a previous survey which examined the influence of the coronavirus on the relationships between groups in Israel (Halperin et al, 2020). The survey, conducted by the Achord Center in May 2020 among 1,099 respondents, reveals that among the general public (non-Haredi Jews), people who felt highly threatened by the coronavirus tended to express opinions which were more negative toward the Arab and the Haredi population than did those who felt threatened at a low level by the coronavirus. Furthermore, respondents from among the general public supported negative statements about the Haredi population at a significantly higher level than they supported such statements about the Arab population. Moreover, a majority of the sample of Jewish non-Haredi respondents stated that they view the coronavirus crisis as an opportunity to improve the relationship and cooperation with the Arabs (45% to a great extent and another 35% to a moderate extent), and 95% of the Arab respondents considered the fight against the coronavirus pandemic as a shared mission for both Jews and Arabs. This data indicates the differential manner in which the pandemic influences the relationships between different majority and minority groups. This document also shows that the pandemic caused a worsening in the relationship between the general population and the Haredi population, alongside an improvement (or at least no change) in the fabric of the relationship between the general population and the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem.

To summarize, in light of the events in Israel and across the world from March 2020 to the present, and in light of the current research into those events, three sociopolitical directions of development may be identified that the coronavirus is likely to influence:

**A. Intragroup solidarity** – coping with the pandemic including the conditions for social distancing creates needs and solutions for comprehensive social support and a tightening of identity with the internal group.

- B. Widening of intergroup rifts** – in conditions of public discourse that polarize and provoke, the fear of contagion and the return to the internal group may lead to a designation of the minority group as the biological "other," which contributes to a widening of existing social fissures and/or the creation of new ones.
- C. Creating spaces of intergroup identification and cooperation** – in conditions of a supportive public discourse and a positive media image, new spaces may come into being for intergroup cooperation and an improvement of the public image of the minority group.

## Jerusalem and the Coronavirus

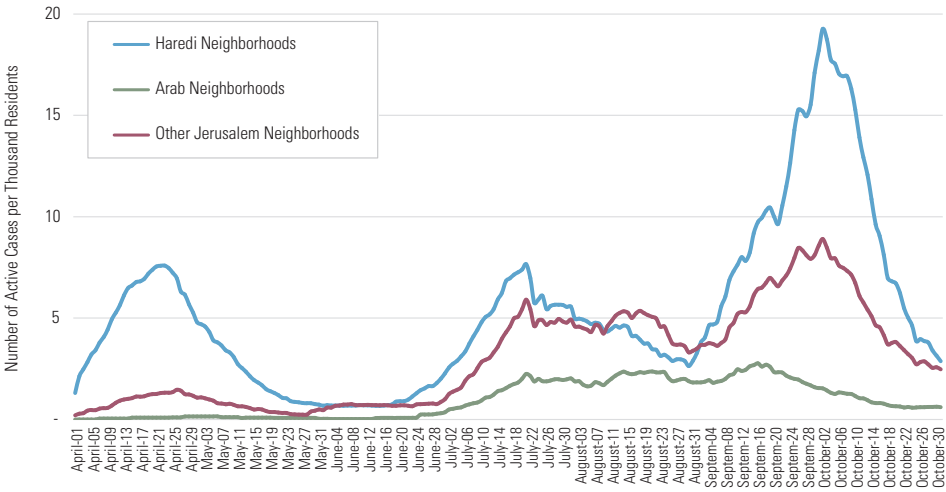
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From the outbreak of the pandemic at the beginning of March 2020 and until November 17, 2020 (when this document was written) Jerusalem has topped the morbidity charts in Israel, with a cumulative amount of 45,780 people infected (no. 39 according to the number of those infected per 100,000 people), according to the data from the Health Ministry in the city (Ministry of Health Israel, 2020). The increase in the number of people in Jerusalem who are infected is directly related to the size of the city and the composition of its population. As a heterogeneous city in which, taken together, the Arab and Haredi populations are a majority of the general population – Jerusalem is in a more vulnerable position than other cities in Israel. At the same time, the population in Jerusalem is very young, and due to its public status it is the focus of government and media attention, and in that sense, its situation is better than that of many other cities.

The Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Welfare, the Home Front Command and the Jerusalem Municipality headed the efforts to cope with the coronavirus. Due to the unique demographic aspects of the city, mentioned above, there was a need for a tailored adaptation of the national treatment approach, to make it accessible to the different communities residing in Jerusalem, with particular emphasis on the Arab and Haredi communities. To make the means of battling the coronavirus culturally accessible, the authority of the municipal system of the community councils was decentralized. This step was formalized in August 2020 under the slogan "People of Valor," as a national pilot which was launched in the city with a price tag of 1.5 million shekels and the aim of preserving the public health and preventing contagion in the community via a stringent treatment strategy in a process led by the local leadership. In this manner the community councils spearheaded the management of the coronavirus crisis in the neighborhoods and it was they who were responsible for activities to disseminate information in the various

languages, and for welfare, aid and humanitarian activities. For example, the community councils assisted the families infected with the coronavirus to enable them to receive available municipal assistance such as: trash collection, weekly food assistance, and relief kits for children, and created a supportive community environment for families with infected members or those who were in quarantine. Furthermore, the community councils also recruited and organized volunteers of all ages from within the community to respond to the needs which arose from the field.

**Diagram 1: Number of Active Cases of the Coronavirus in Jerusalem According to Type of Neighborhood, April-October 2020**



Source: Processed by Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research based on data from the Ministry of Health and the Central Bureau of Statistics Israel



## Chapter 2. Between Distress and Integration – East Jerusalem in the Shadow of the Coronavirus

The coronavirus pandemic broke out at the height of a historical stage in the interaction between the residents of East Jerusalem and the State of Israel. From 1967 and for dozens of years, alongside integration in the sphere of commerce and employment, the Palestinians in East Jerusalem strictly maintained political and social isolation from the Israeli arena, and refused to grant legitimacy to the Israeli government (this was referred to as anti-normalization) (Cohen, 2007). However, from the mid-2000s, with the waning of the Second Intifada, the ongoing disconnect from the West Bank (as the result of the Separation Wall), political despair and apathy regarding the political future, and lately also in the context of significant budgetary investment on the part of the Israeli government into physical and social infrastructures in the east of the city – numerous signs of a change in the trend began to appear, as well as the start of a reverse process of pragmatic Israelization, which are changing the face of East Jerusalem (Shtern, 2019). This Israelization is expressed, among other ways, in a rise in the demand for Israeli citizenship, in increased integration in employment among white collar workers in the Israeli workforce, in increased use of the municipal, commercial and public infrastructures in West Jerusalem, and in a dramatic increase in the number of students from East Jerusalem who are studying at Israeli institutions for higher learning in the west of the city.<sup>1</sup> As a result, for the first time an entire generation of young people from East Jerusalem is being educated at Israeli institutions for higher learning, is acquiring the skills and means to integrate into the Israeli employment market and is in direct, unmediated contact with Israeli culture and society. It is important to note that these processes are occurring in a context of inequality and a difficult sociopolitical situation in East Jerusalem, including the ongoing confrontations with the IDF and the Israel Police and the enforced separation from the West Bank by

<sup>1</sup> In the 2020-2021 academic year, approximately 1,000 students from East Jerusalem applied to The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, for the first time a higher number than to any Palestinian institution of higher learning (such as Al-Quds University, An-Najah National University, and others.)

means of the Separation Wall. All the preceding have created a situation in which there is a lack of other opportunities for young people in East Jerusalem, other than pragmatic individual integration into the Israeli sphere.

In light of the spatial and economic processes of integration of East Jerusalem residents into the Israeli realm, Palestinian organizations and political activists who are affiliated with the Palestinian Authority continue to struggle to preserve the separate political and social identity of the Palestinian communities in the city. This activity is expressed in the opposition to and the pressure which is brought to bear on civil society organizations in an effort to prevent cooperation with Israeli (government, municipal, or civil) organizations, in the continued opposition to putting forward their candidacy or voting in local municipal elections, and in an attempt to prevent consumption of goods in malls and businesses in West Jerusalem. Against this backdrop it is difficult for Israeli and international organizations which promote collaboration and coexistence to find official organizational partners on the Palestinian side in East Jerusalem. In many cases the Jerusalem Municipality, the community councils and various government authorities are compelled to "play down" their Israeli identity and/or to operate via "neutral" intermediaries and suppliers when they want to operate in the spheres of education, culture or employment in the east of the city. The coronavirus pandemic emerged in the context of this political reality, which is caught between forces pushing for integration and those attempting to preserve segregation. It was in these conditions that the Israeli authorities operated as they attempted to mitigate the damage caused by the pandemic in East Jerusalem.

## First Outbreak

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On March 4, 2020, 38-year-old Johny Majlaton, from East Jerusalem, a bus driver for a tour group, was hospitalized with the coronavirus in the Baruch Padeh Medical Center in Tiberias. He caught the virus from a group of tourists he drove around the country, and became the 16<sup>th</sup> person in Israel to contract the virus and the first whose condition was termed "serious." Luckily, he was also the first Israeli patient to recover from the virus, and he was released from the hospital by the end of the month and returned home to his family (Hashmonai, 2020). Majlaton's story was the first mention of East Jerusalem in the Israeli media in connection with the coronavirus. It was covered extensively in a variety of media, along with interviews with the doctor who treated him, Dr. Hiba Abu-Zaid, the Director of the Department of Infectious Diseases. The media attention that focused on Majlaton was not the result of his being from East Jerusalem, or due to the fact that both the patient and the senior doctor who treated him were Palestinians, but stemmed from

their ability to provide the requisite media drama to represent the onset of the spread of the coronavirus in Israel. The media attention devoted to the hospitalization of a patient from East Jerusalem, which under normal circumstances would not have been deemed newsworthy, was typical of this period, during which the dangers of the pandemic and the need to contend with them, in principle crossed national and religious borders. However, as was explained in the introduction to this document, the pandemic affected different sectors of the population in a disproportionate manner, and the means of responding to it and the attitudes of the authorities differed from sector to sector.

On March 5, 2020, the day after Majlaton's hospitalization, the residents of East Jerusalem made their first acquaintance with the illness, when the Palestinian Authority declared a state of emergency following the discovery that there were seven coronavirus patients in a hotel in Bethlehem, which led Defense Minister Naftali Bennett to place the city under lockdown. These steps triggered a sense of emergency in East Jerusalem which characterized the atmosphere in the city for the duration of the pandemic's initial wave.

"From the moment when Bethlehem was locked down in East Jerusalem they understood how severe the situation was. People realized that it was a very serious matter, people simply closed themselves in at home, and to this day they aren't sending their children to school." (From a June 9, 2020 interview with Daud Alian.)

Fear of what the future might hold, alongside the absence of an authoritative source of information in Arabic and a lack of confidence in the Israeli authorities, quickly led to an environment of panic and fertile ground for rumors and half-truths.

"And then people started to say that it was all a conspiracy. And disinformation started to flow, that they were doing it to us deliberately, that they wanted us to die. Many people said that if there was a situation where there were people seriously ill with corona, and they would need respirators, they would choose the Jews first and allow the Arabs to die." (From an interview with Hanin Majdala, June 23, 2020.)

The lack of faith in the Israeli authorities and the anxiety about what was to come shaped the reaction of the East Jerusalem public during the first wave of the pandemic. Notwithstanding the expectations of the Israeli establishment and the Palestinian population itself about a wide outbreak in East Jerusalem, the morbidity and the mortality rates in the east of the city were lower than anticipated (see Diagram 1). During the

first wave, the result of the mass anxiety was that the residents were extra-vigilant about practicing social distancing and there was an overwhelmingly positive response to observing the rules of the lockdown (from an interview with Dr. Fuad Abu Hamed, the Director of the Clalit Health fund in Bet Zafafa , and a major activist in the efforts to fight the coronavirus in East Jerusalem). However, the success in the health sphere came at a steep socioeconomic price. From the start of the spread of the pandemic, during the first wave, East Jerusalem suffered very high levels of poverty and unemployment. Between the months of February and April 2020, the number of Arab job-seekers in Jerusalem jumped from 5,532 to 38,352. The rate of Arabs from among the general population seeking unemployment benefits was 35%, a higher rate than their rate of representation in the workforce, which is 28%. The highest rates of firings and of people being placed on unpaid leave were found in the branches of the economy with an especially high rate of Arab workers, such as tourism, transportation and commerce (Porziki, 2020). It should be noted that in the majority of East Jerusalem households there is one wage earner (because 80% of Arab women do not participate in the workforce), and income per household is significantly lower than it is among the Jewish population (Shtern and Asmar, 2017), so that this population is at higher risk in conditions of loss of source of income.

The combination of the socioeconomic distress and the existential anxiety led to three significant developments in the pattern of the sociopolitical activity of the Palestinians in East Jerusalem. 1) The empowerment of a new generation of Palestinian local civic leadership; 2) Partial, temporary normalization of the connections with the branches of the Israeli government that deal with public health; and 3) The strengthening of cross-sectoral connections with Jewish civil society.

## The Rise of Palestinian Civil Society

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"Today I am a well-known person in East Jerusalem – I saw how I became more and more famous during the corona period. The media pursued me relentlessly, including Palestinians and Arabs [...] Yesterday I posted on Facebook – The Ministry of Health is recruiting student epidemiological researchers for 30 shekels an hour. You have no idea how many people approached me – thousands responded to me! Many of them were also older people. [...] I believe that the results of this thing will be very tough and will affect the residents of East Jerusalem in a severe manner for the very long term and will influence every sphere of life." (From an interview with Dr. Fuad Abu Hamed, the Director of the Clalit Health fund in Bet Zafafa , and a major activist in the efforts to fight the coronavirus in East Jerusalem.)

The vacuum of coping with the coronavirus during its first wave was filled by local social leaders and organizations who worked on various levels to prevent the spread of infection and to assist residents and families suffering social or economic distress. Several social activists were prominent, such as Dr. Fuad Abu Hamed, Daud Alian, Dr. Samer El-Awar and Muhammad Abdo. An example of a civil society organization that intensified its activity and its presence with the onset of the crisis is the The Atta'a Assistance Center for the Rights of East Jerusalem Residents. A significant challenge in combating the pandemic was the lack of information in Arabic. Guidelines from the Ministry of Health and forms for those returning from abroad who had to quarantine were available only in Hebrew. The same was the case regarding information about one's rights and eligibility for unemployment assistance or grants from the National Insurance Institute, which was also only available in Hebrew. The center organized volunteers who helped hundreds of residents to fill in forms and to submit applications for unemployment benefits and assistance grants. The center also provided information and raised awareness about the importance of social distancing. Among other things, in cooperation with the organization, the national government and the Jerusalem Municipality produced an informative video which was distributed among thousands of viewers on social media (from an interview with Daud Alian).

The crisis led to the establishment of a coalition of organizations – The Jerusalem Assembly for the Fight against Corona (Tajamua EL-Makdasi), which united about 82 Palestinian organizations from across the political spectrum to coordinate information and assistance efforts. The group, which was mainly active on the WhatsApp application, independently initiated the establishment of the first quarantine hotel in East Jerusalem at the St. George Hospital, which was officially recognized by the Ministry of Health. Thus the coalition became a dominant mediator (if an unofficial one) between East Jerusalem and the Israeli authorities handling the pandemic. Meliha Zgier, urban planner and Beit Hanina resident describes the situation:

"The unification of the civil society was very impressive. Tajamua EL-Makdasi or The Jerusalem Assembly for the Fight against Corona, did amazing work disseminating information. The residents of East Jerusalem had faith in this organization, they continuously published information about themselves on social media and there was transparency. They did very good work and that increased the residents' trust in them. It gave the sense that here we can do something good without the Palestinian Authority and without the Israeli authorities."

The extensive activity of Palestinian civil society did not appear out of nowhere. It was preceded by years of the growth of a rich fabric of civil society organizations, neighborhood activism and the creation of an "East Jerusalem/*Makdas*" identity, as distinct from the identity of Palestinians in the West Bank or that of Israeli Palestinians. These processes occurred in response to the residents' sense of hopelessness regarding having their needs met by either the Israeli or the Palestinian authorities and the sense of ongoing isolation and despair experienced ever since the collapse of the Oslo Accords and the Second Intifada (Abrahami, 2020). The critical, fateful period when the entire world was confronting the coronavirus brought these ongoing processes to the fore. At the same time, the growing political strength of the civil society in East Jerusalem indicates a rise in the social capital of East Jerusalem, which was created during the period of the coronavirus and expresses itself in a strengthened fabric of interaction between civil organizations, in a higher level of trust among organizations and activists, in greater familiarity with them, and in a positive sense of shared purpose beyond opposing the Israeli government.

## Temporary Normalization – the Relationship with the Israeli Establishment

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In the face of the internal cohesion of East Jerusalem civil society, the coronavirus crisis also created precedents in the external axis – the potentially explosive and charged relationships among the residents, the social activists, and the local Palestinian organizations and the Israeli government authorities. As they contended with the pandemic, the local aid organizations had no choice but to cooperate with the branches of government which in ordinary times are considered illegitimate, for cooperation with them is viewed as normalization. Interviews conducted with East Jerusalem residents reveal that three main elements gave rise to the temporary normalization with the Israeli government. 1. The civil-humanitarian nature of the crisis – unlike previous crises, for instance the Jerusalem Intifada which began in the summer of 2014, the coronavirus did not have a political or security aspect but was seen as a humanitarian crisis, so that the civil society could determine the local agenda without fear of the response of the Israeli security authorities. 2. The Palestinian Authority – the lockdown imposed on the cities in the West Bank by the Palestinian Authority, for the first time, prevented residents of East Jerusalem from entering the neighboring cities and left them within the Israeli health domain. 3. The Israel government – following the Second Intifada, the Israel government implemented aggressive actions to exclude the involvement of the Palestinian Authority in East Jerusalem. During the pandemic, this policy was implemented in the sphere of

public health within Jerusalem's city limits. While PA health activities were shut down, formal and informal cooperation with the Israeli authorities was advanced with three major elements: the Ministry of Health, the Jerusalem Municipality and the Home Front Command. Cooperation with the latter, as an Israeli military body, embodies the most dramatic change in the traditional anti-normalization policy which prevails in East Jerusalem.

Starting in March 2020, the Jerusalem Municipality operated a wide range of assistance activities in East Jerusalem, in the spheres of food, welfare, education and culture, on a scale never seen in the past (Jerusalem Municipality, 2020a). An example is the activity of the Department for Society and Teenagers – East Jerusalem. According to the director of the department, Osama Ghanem, the coronavirus crisis led to a significant increase in the activity of the department, as well as in the responsiveness and cooperation of the public. The department operated emergency teams at the community councils in the various East Jerusalem neighborhoods, and recruited about 2,000 local volunteers, the majority of whom had not volunteered in the past in a municipal framework, some of whom had previously even been openly opposed to doing so. The volunteers were utilized to support the elderly and the isolated by supplying foodstuffs. A prominent group among the volunteers was comprised of young people who had participated in youth movements established by the Jerusalem Municipality in 2016 at community councils in East Jerusalem. In this manner the Jerusalem Municipality leveraged the efforts which were invested in the framework of the government five-year plan for youth and society in East Jerusalem. The coronavirus crisis provided legitimation and social institutionalization of municipal frameworks previously perceived as cynical attempts at Israelization.

"There are those who to this very day oppose accepting assistance from the municipality. Many of those who worked, who collaborated together, felt that in times like these there is no politics, no wars, just what a person in need or a resident himself requires. There are already many neighborhood cooperative efforts, a neighborhood mechanism, at the community councils. There are those who said – I helped out during this period and I am not interested in anything more – but they won't object (anymore in the future)." (Osama Ghanem, Director, Department for Society and Teenagers – East Jerusalem, Jerusalem Municipality.)

It was the activity of the Home Front Command in East Jerusalem that created the most significant dilemmas for the residents. It commandeered the St. George quarantine hotel, which was set up by the coalition of East Jerusalem organizations known as Tajamua EL-

Makdasi or The Jerusalem Assembly for the Fight against Corona. This was an essential step, as there was a need for ongoing communication between those supervising the individuals in quarantine and the Ministry of Health and the other authorities involved. Thus ongoing contacts and collaboration emerged between the various activists and the Home Front commanders. The Home Front Command even distributed food directly to residents in the Palestinian neighborhoods. Despite the predictions of the authorities themselves, the activity of the Home Front Command was received without any protest or active opposition (Interview with Hani Reit).

However, for most of the Palestinian population assistance didn't necessarily arrive via "uniforms" or stamped with the Jerusalem Municipality logo, but via intermediaries. In an attempt to avoid opposition, over the past decade, the Jerusalem Municipality, as well as other authorities, have learned to utilize intermediaries, such as local non-profit organizations, self-employed people and local businesses. As Ariella Tzveikel, Director of the Culture, Sport, and Society Department at the Jerusalem Municipality put it: "The municipality has learned to put its ego aside, with no logo or sponsorship committee, it has found ways to run programs in East Jerusalem." In this way the authorities recognized the political anomaly that characterizes East Jerusalem and subjugated the need for symbolic representation to the supply of the required service.

A further expression of the adaptation of municipal-government information-sharing in East Jerusalem is the centrality of social and digital media as a legitimate and effective conduit for communication. So, for example, prominent alongside the digital broadcast listings in Arabic published by the Jerusalem Municipality via the Kulna non-profit organization (more about Kulna in the coming pages) was the Arabic Facebook page of Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Lion performing its central role as an information channel (interview with Ben Avrahami). Arabic broadcasts produced by the Ministry of Health and disseminated on social media also received very high exposure, and some of the messages were transmitted effectively with the help of local intermediaries, East Jerusalem residents who independently translated, re-wrote and shared the Health Ministry guidelines via their personal social media accounts (see interview with Ahmed Asmar). It appears that the fact that the residents follow social media in a private, individual and anonymous manner, or by means of local intermediaries, and not in a public or institutional way, grant these channels a higher level of legitimacy than would be granted to traditional conduits of information occurring through the public media channels or through face-to-face encounters which are likely to be perceived as a type of normalization, which numerous East Jerusalem residents prefer to avoid. According to Ben Avrahami, who studies social



media in East Jerusalem, the residents of East Jerusalem related to the efforts of the municipality in the framework of the fight against the coronavirus, and this was expressed in a more positive discourse regarding the municipality and the mayor on social media. And in fact, a psychological resilience survey conducted among all residents of Jerusalem by the Jerusalem Municipality during the months of May and June 2020 (Jerusalem Municipality 2020b) reveals that the East Jerusalem residents exhibited a high level of trust in the municipal establishment during the period of the coronavirus crisis. Among Arab respondents, 53% (n=1419) reported satisfaction with the activity of the municipality and the mayor ("quite satisfied," and "very satisfied"), in comparison with 63% of Jewish respondents (n=3041).

However, while the Jerusalem Municipality and the Home Front Command endeavored to provide assistance, the Israel government, via the Israel Police, did not alter its strict policy regarding signifiers of the involvement of the Palestinian Authority in Jerusalem, even when this was manifested by humanitarian aid at the height of the crisis. During the month of April the Palestinian Authority was active at several focal points on the seamline between East and West Jerusalem, such as in Kafr 'Aqb and the Shu'afat refugee camp, in activities to preserve the public health, such as disinfection, enforcing the lockdown and setting up roadblocks. In some cases the activity was coordinated with or ignored by the Israeli authorities, although in certain cases Israel intervened forcefully and prohibited the individuals involved to continue what they were doing or demanded that the Palestinian Authority withdraw from the municipal area of Jerusalem (Hasson, 2020b). In the Sur Bahar neighborhood the Israel Police confiscated a truck carrying donations of food for the residents of the neighborhood, claiming that it initiated in the Palestinian Authority. This claim was later disproved, but images of the Israel Police interfering in various relief efforts served as political ammunition for those opposed to the Israeli assistance. It was alleged that they were deliberately attempting to strengthen Israelization and to normalize the presence of the Israeli government in the city (see interview with Daud Alian, 2020). An example of this is the article by Nir Hasson on May 3, 2020, published in the *Haaretz* daily newspaper under the headline "The Coronavirus Crisis Looks like a Honeymoon between Corona and the Municipality." The article, which describes the strengthening of the relationships between the Jerusalem Municipality and Palestinian civil society activists during the crisis, also pointed out the ongoing cooperation with the Home Front commanders. The article was translated into Arabic and shared on East Jerusalem social media networks, where it was met with widespread condemnation and denial from the Palestinian activists, among them members of the Tajamua EL-Makdasi or The Jerusalem Assembly for the Fight against Corona. A post published on the coalition's

website responded that the description in *Haaretz* was false, and that the members of the organization are committed to their goal which is religious, nationalistic and patriotic. Furthermore, the post urged the members of the coalition not to derive current events information from Israeli media, whose purpose is to spread poison and to whitewash the actions of the Israeli government.

### Photograph 1: Facebook post on The Jerusalem Assembly for the Fight against Coronaor Tajamua EL-Makdasi website



In conclusion, it is clear that during the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic the activity of the Jerusalem Municipality, the Ministry of Health and the Home Front Command created precedents in the interaction between Palestinian civil society and the Israeli establishment. Most prominent was the increase in the Palestinian public's confidence in the Jerusalem Ministry and the mayor, Moshe Lion (see interview with Fuad Abu Hamed). However, with the cessation of the first wave, several of the relationships which were built during the height of the crisis unraveled, and the renewed efforts on the part of the Israeli health authorities in East Jerusalem were not felt to the same extent during the second wave.

## Solidarity across Borders – West Jerusalem's Civil Society

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During the past decade, and even more so following the murder of Mohammed Abu Khdeir in the summer of 2014, a change occurred in the liberal civil society of West Jerusalem. After years of inward-looking activity – engagement with planning and the environment, religion and urban issues and local politics – a new need emerged to contend with the rift between different sectors in the city, with a focus on the national-religious conflict between Jews and Arabs and the cultural-hegemonic conflict between the secular, religious, and Haredi populations. As a result there was an increase in initiatives seeking to create shared spaces in Jerusalem, to combat racism, and to foster a common and tolerant urban identity in an attempt to disregard political aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, or to circumvent them. In the majority of cases the initiatives, which as stated "were born" in West Jerusalem, had a hard time finding Palestinian organizations to cooperate with, and many activists in the east of the city refrained from overt connections to Israeli social activities, lest in that way they be perceived to be sanctioning them as politically legitimate or creating an appearance of normalization. Despite the difficulties some organizations, such as The Jerusalem Intercultural Center, Kulna and the Jerusalem Model, have managed to forge long-term partnerships with Palestinian activists and to create new models of inter-sectoral collaboration.

During the first wave of the coronavirus pandemic and the period of lockdown and the social restrictions, when the residents of East Jerusalem experienced numerous difficulties, it was apparent that the Jewish-Arab civil society inter-sectoral infrastructure grew stronger in West Jerusalem. The same organizations which had cultivated a cross-sector infrastructure before the crisis, managed to leverage this to increase their involvement and to develop tailored means of assistance. At the same time, several organizations which were active only on a Jewish intra-sector level before the crisis, managed for the first time to initiate activity with East Jerusalem.

The Kulna non-profit organization is an example of an inter-sectoral organization which underwent various incarnations before it was established in 2010. At first it held sing-along evenings for the Jewish and Arab public, and later a Jewish-Arab backgammon tournament in the neighborhoods of Talpiot and Beit Hanina. In recent years, while continuing to hold activities designed to create a shared society, the organization has also focused on improving the standard of living in East Jerusalem and in ensuring that civil rights are recognized vis-a-vis the Jerusalem Municipality. The organization's management is comprised of both Jewish and Arab activists, and during the coronavirus

crisis Kulna became one of the Jewish Municipality's biggest "sub-contractors" in the operation of an assistance program to supply and distribute food and to promote cultural activities in East Jerusalem during the lockdown. A central project operated by Kulna and the Jerusalem Municipality was the creation of a digital broadcast program in Arabic – continuous content for children who were at home during the lockdown (approximately 700,000 children consumed the content during the period of Ramadan). According to Kulna Chairman Zackie Jamal, for the Jerusalem Municipality, the advantage of the organization is that it is "perceived in a different way by the establishment, and creates a non-political encounter with no talk of the conflict. It allows people of all backgrounds to be involved." And yet, the municipal partnership with Kulna is carried out under the auspices of the local non-profit Mineno Bom, whose director, Mahmoud Shhada, is a member of Kulna. The Kulna example represents the advantage of an inter-sectoral civil society organization during the crisis and the centrality of questions of political legitimacy in the short-term within the boundaries of the discourse between the Jerusalem Municipality and the residents of East Jerusalem.

A central element in the building of an inter-sectoral infrastructure in Jerusalem is the Jerusalem Model which was established by the Leichtag Foundation, and which, since 2014, has operated a forum of multi-sectoral civil society activists with the aim of building municipal resilience based on shared civil society. During the period of the coronavirus crisis the Jerusalem Model provided emergency grants to its activists, who proposed assistance projects. The meetings held in the framework of the Jerusalem Model created connections between representatives of various non-profit organizations, which facilitated the exchange of ideas and information as well as collaboration during the pandemic. One of the new connections created during the current crisis is between the SAHI organization and Kulna, which, for the first time, brought the Jewish volunteers from SAHI to East Jerusalem to distribute food.

SAHI (the Hebrew acronym for "Special Grace Unit") organizes youth at risk for the benefit of needy residents in their own neighborhoods. In ordinary times, the youth anonymously deliver food packages to the homes of needy residents and Holocaust survivors. In addition to providing assistance to weak populations, the activity is intended to foster a sense of belonging and of meaning among youth. The organization has been active since 2010, and has 36 branches across the country, all of them in the Jewish sector. In March, in light of the blow to the National School Lunch Program caused by the suspension of studies at schools, the Jerusalem Municipality invited the organization to a meeting with its Education Administration. SAHI helped the municipality to deliver boxes of food to those

residents of the city supported by the Ministry of Welfare. The project included addresses in East Jerusalem. The youth volunteers prepared the boxes of food and transferred them to the community councils and local organizations in the east of the city. According to Avraham Hayon, CEO and co-founder of the organization, for the first time the youth found themselves helping a population in distress in East Jerusalem, and attempting to ensure that the food deliveries were culturally appropriate. He said that despite the anticipation that some of the youth would oppose the idea of providing assistance in East Jerusalem, since some of them were previously connected to extremist organizations such as Lehava ("Prevention of Assimilation in the Holy Land" – a Jewish organization based in Israel that strictly opposes Jewish assimilation, objecting to most personal relationships between Jews and non-Jews), "the young people surprised us and joined in enthusiastically, and were very excited by the encounters with East Jerusalem." The venture had wider organizational influence, according to Hayon, who said, "It enabled the youth to be mature and open to broadening the activities to the non-Jewish sector, and also built connections with the other side."

In conclusion, the coronavirus crisis set three processes in motion which affect the fabric of the interaction between the residents of East Jerusalem and Israeli-Jewish society. Firstly, the rise of civil society in East Jerusalem and its empowerment create a new platform for local leadership. This leadership, even if it remains religious and nationalistic to the same extent as the previous leadership, is likely to be less submissive to political elements in the Palestinian Authority and less dependent on them, more involved in and conversant with Israeli society and more receptive to collaboration on the civic level with the Israeli authorities and the residents of West Jerusalem. Secondly, normalization of the institutional ties between the Palestinian activists and the Israeli authorities, accompanied by empowerment of their role and the extent of public recognition of the community councils, promotes processes of the governance and Israelization of East Jerusalem and de-facto transformation of it into a more integral part of Israeli society and its economy. Thirdly, the crisis heightened the relevancy and the importance of civil society inter-group organizations to build foundations for collaboration on the basis of shared urban identity and for the building of urban social resilience by means of networking among activists and organizations.

## Chapter 3. Community under Siege – Haredim in Jerusalem and the Coronavirus

As early as the beginning of the first wave of the coronavirus, a committee of experts from The Weizmann Institute of Science, which advises the National Insurance Institute regarding how to cope with the coronavirus pandemic, designated the Haredi population as one of the populations at highest risk for spread of the disease. The distribution of the ages and the housing density, as well as the unique lifestyle characterized by social and religious gatherings with numerous participants, placed the Haredi population in a dangerous situation, especially regarding coping with the spread of the virus. And in fact, the Haredi society did suffer an especially harsh blow, and the Haredim were the population with the highest rate of coronavirus victims – especially high in relation to their representation in the population. In mid-May, near the end of the first wave of morbidity, 22% of those infected with the coronavirus were from the Haredi areas, and an additional 26% were in areas where there is a high concentration of Haredim. For months during the first wave, the rate of verified cases among the Haredi population in Israel was consistently the highest among all populations (Weiss, 2020). Until the month of October, the rate of coronavirus victims among the Haredi population was 12%, similar to their numbers in the general population, but especially high in light of the age distribution in that sector. Furthermore, at 15%, the rate of Haredim among the patients in serious and critical condition was very high.

In addition to the damage to health, the high rate of those infected, and the loss of life, the coronavirus pandemic also harmed the Haredi population in many other ways. The outbreak of the coronavirus in Jerusalem undermined the relations between the Haredi population and the government authorities and the secular residents and increased the existing tensions which also characterize the Haredi community, between self-segregation and isolation and the processes of integration and modernization. The lockdowns imposed only on the Haredi neighborhoods, the lack of information and the alienating attitude exhibited

by the authorities, the general population, and the media, led to a sense of persecution among the Haredim in the city. Alongside crises in the perception of the leadership and economic and social damage, the coronavirus pandemic revealed and accelerated deep processes that have been underway during the past decades in the Haredi population in Israel and which are likely to lead to changes within it as well as a reshaping of Haredi society.

## The Rise of Local Leadership

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The first wave of the coronavirus was characterized by significant misunderstandings in the communication between the state authorities and the Haredi population. It seems that the authorities were considerably late in providing information and assistance to the Haredim, the majority of whom are not connected to the Internet and lack access to mainstream media. Various groups of Haredim in Jerusalem were completely disconnected from the fast-changing sequence of events taking place in an attempt to cope with the pandemic. Although in April an information headquarters was established at the Ministry of Health specifically for the Haredi sector, and printed material and vehicles providing public announcements circulated in Haredi areas and declared Ministry of Health directives via loudspeakers (Hila'i and Nahshoni, 2020), which is common practice in Haredi communities for information sharing, this proved insufficient. The chairman of the Committee for Public Inquiries at the Knesset, Knesset Member Ya'akov Tessler of the United Torah Judaism alliance, claims that only a tiny percentage of the budget for providing information about the coronavirus was directed to the Haredi sector, an investment which represents half of the ratio of the Haredim in the population (Tucker, 2020). In Jerusalem, the gap between the information failure on the part of the government authorities and the Haredi population was filled by local leaders of the various communities and organizations belonging to the third sector. ZAKA, Hatzolah of Jerusalem, and additional initiatives in the city operated independently in roaming vehicles providing public announcements, and designed and created publicity campaigns and organized information activities in synagogues. The information activities created by the various Haredi organizations were characterized by their creativity (ZAKA used the voices of the children of victims of the pandemic in their audio campaigns broadcast from the roaming vehicles, while Hatzolah invested great efforts in dramatic, "warning" graphics they posted on billboards), but none of this was funded by the state. The Ministry of Health and the Jerusalem Municipality responded to the independent information initiatives within Jerusalem's Haredi communities, which brought up-to-date information to the Haredi public about the virus, about its morbidity and about how to protect themselves, by ignoring them or silently sanctioning them.

The absence of information was especially apparent in the most extremist Haredi communities in Jerusalem, which are often even disconnected from the other Haredi populations in the city. Yehuda Meshi-Zahav, former Chairman of ZAKA, spoke about thousands of Haredi families who never received any information about the virus. He claimed that to date, no government bodies have contacted the leaders of the Haredi sector regarding the coronavirus. "No government body, not the Police not the municipality, not the mayor – have come to sit with these people. No one has come to hear them, no one has come to explain to them, to listen to them. Total disconnect." At a time when the rest of the residents of Jerusalem listened every evening to updates from the prime minister and from the Minister of Health and his representatives on television, numerous Haredi residents of the city consumed rumors. "Me, I have a mobile phone and I see Bibi talking and I am sure that now everyone knows about this," said David, a member of the anti-Zionist Toldos Aharon Hasidic movement who today lives in West Jerusalem. "In Mea She'arim they don't know anything. And if the information gets there, it arrives like some idiotic decree of the Zionists. It doesn't come through the accepted sources." The first information about the coronavirus reached the extremist Haredi communities in Jerusalem via businessmen who had contacts with medical personnel in the city, and it was passed on by word of mouth, like a rumor. The absence of reliable information led to disinformation, and the rumors which reached the Hasidic communities in Jerusalem described a demeaning attitude toward Haredim at the hospitals and even reported that they were ignored there. It may be that these rumors encouraged many people to stay at home even if they didn't feel well, and to prefer to receive assistance from within the community. In Mea She'arim an independent medical treatment system was set up to treat those who had coronavirus symptoms. "There are people who didn't feel well for an entire week, they brought them some oxygen, and that's it," David reports. "They took care of them, they stayed home, and everything's fine."

Aside from the information failure, the authorities also encountered difficulties coping with the virus in the Haredi population due to its unique lifestyle. For example, in April it was discovered that the announcements about the coronavirus from the Ministry of Health were blocked and weren't reaching the Haredim who use "kosher" cellphones (cellphones which are "customized" for the Haredi population) (Peretz, 2020). In these instances as well, the third sector organizations among the Haredi public were the connecting link between the Haredi population in Jerusalem and the government authorities. When phone calls from the Ministry of Health to update those whose coronavirus tests had come back positive were not answered in Haredi neighborhoods on the Sabbath, the ZAKA organization offered to help and coordinated a system of volunteers who went



out to inform the infected people. The Jerusalem Municipality encouraged activities to disseminate information among the Haredi population through the various Haredi non-profit organizations, and integrated Haredi volunteers into the different assistance systems set up for the Haredi population in the city. The mayor came to express his support for the activities of Haredi volunteers in the Hatzolah organization, and volunteers from Hatzolah were added to the team at the municipal emergency headquarters, where they worked in coordination with the welfare services and the community councils to provide assistance to the at-risk population in the city where there are high concentrations of Haredim.

In March the government began to limit the activity of the economy and to prohibit holding mass events, to close down the education system, transportation, and later even to curtail the movement of citizens in the framework of emergency regulations (the new coronavirus) 2020. The authorities also experienced difficulties implementing the emergency coronavirus regulations among the Haredi population. Some claim that the Haredi suspicion of the government and lack of confidence in the national authorities led them to trivialize the guidelines (Malchi, Malach and Friedman, 2020).

During the entire first wave and even following it there were specific cases of violating Ministry of Health guidelines in areas of Jerusalem where there are large concentrations of Haredim. The Mir Yeshiva in the Beit Yisrael neighborhood of Jerusalem continued to operate as usual in mid-March, despite the social distance guidelines, and thousands of students were crowded together despite the instruction to study in small, separate groups. At the end of March, the police were active in Mea She'arim, attempting to disperse gatherings (Nachshoni, 2020). Similar confrontations repeatedly took place in the neighborhood in the month of April as well (Sherki and Nussbaum, 2020), and children were also among those injured (Shternbach and Eli, 2020). Weddings with numerous guests were even held in areas of Jerusalem where there are large concentrations of Haredim, such as in the neighborhoods of Bayit Vegan and Har Nof (Breitkopf, 2020), and in additional neighborhoods. Several *admors* (spiritual leaders within the Hasidic movement), in Jerusalem held mass events over the Pessah holiday (Rabinovitz, 2020), and at the beginning of May, hundreds of residents of Mea She'arim gathered for Lag B'Omer celebrations (Sherki and Nussbaum, 2020b). The authorities also failed to enforce the coronavirus regulations among those who violated them from the Haredi population. The police were often summoned to disperse gatherings in parts of the city where there are large concentrations of Haredim, and mostly resorted to violence. Following several lockdowns which specifically targeted Haredi neighborhoods in Jerusalem, at the beginning of July there were mass protests against the coronavirus regulations in the Romema

neighborhood (Tamari, 2020), which devolved into violence between the police and the demonstrators. Against the backdrop of the harsh confrontations between Haredi groups and the police in Jerusalem the Association for Civil Rights in Israel even approached the Minister for Internal Security with a request to investigate the police violence employed to disperse the gatherings during which both children and adults were hurt.

Despite the violations receiving widespread media coverage, most interviewees said that the majority of the Haredi population in Jerusalem observed the Ministry of Health regulations. Many education and religious institutions were closed, events were cancelled and there was apparent adherence to the lockdown guidelines. Hatzalah's Operations Manager Dubi Maisel stated that many requests for humanitarian assistance were received from the Haredi neighborhoods for people who would not leave their homes. "If a person phones and says he needs someone to buy him his medicines, it means that he is not leaving the house to get his medications. If a person says I need someone to shop for me, it means that he isn't leaving the house to go shopping. We had many such requests from the Haredi neighborhoods," said Maisel. On the other hand, specific groups within the Haredi population of Jerusalem chose to continue to observe their regular lifestyle, far from the public eye, while the police and the municipality turned a blind eye. David related that there were Haredi communities in Jerusalem which held large events in violation of the guidelines and took pains to avoid being photographed or exposed. "They brought magnometers – if anyone's cellphone triggered them, they weren't allowed in. They made sure that no one saw it." A certain group of extremists from within the Haredi community and the Jerusalem Faction even exploited the state of emergency to promote its agenda of segregation and insularity. Yehuda Meshi-Zahav points an accusatory finger at this group. "The minute they started to have lockdowns, the extremist factions started to do what they do all year long, all the time – to widen the gap between Israelism and Haredism," he said. According to him, the differential lockdowns played right into their hands. "The minute they were holding that card, that said look, they are only locking us down, and there's extra enforcement and it's in the Haredi sector, these things started to trickle into the mainstream. Later we saw many people going out to demonstrations, even if they weren't actually connected to Neturei Karta or to the Faction. They took it in another direction, it became a sectoral dispute, it took us to another place – not medical but political, and everyone with his own position." Meshi-Zahav said that in Mea She'arim he saw posters reading: "Corona – A Zionist Disease."

## The Biological Other

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Under conditions of lack of information, the politicization of the pandemic, and conflicting guidelines, the morbidity continued to increase in the Jerusalem areas with high concentrations of Haredim. During the first wave, almost 75% of coronavirus patients (those who contracted the coronavirus) in Jerusalem lived in Haredi neighborhoods. In mid-April, the government decided to declare certain neighborhoods in Jerusalem, mainly Haredi neighborhoods, as "Restricted Areas." The partial lockdown on the Haredi neighborhoods in Jerusalem was extended by an additional Government Decision for several more days. At the end of April as well, the morbidity continued to rise in the Haredi neighborhoods, and another lockdown was imposed on several Haredi neighborhoods with the aim of overcoming the rising morbidity. The Jerusalem neighborhoods of Kiryat Belz, Kiryat Sanz and Romema were declared "Restricted Areas" for several more days. Thus the Haredi population in Jerusalem contended with more lockdowns than did the general public, and Haredi neighborhoods were locked down again and again during the first wave of the virus and in essence disconnected from the rest of the city. The population density which characterizes Haredi neighborhoods and areas, as well as the housing density and the high number of inhabitants per household (Sahur-Shai and Keisar, 2020), led to significant difficulties during the period of the lockdowns and when movement was restricted. The lockdowns which specifically targeted Haredi neighborhoods also caused tremendous frustration. "When the lockdown is everyone's, there's no problem with it," said Dvorie Emmanuel, a Haredi resident of the Bayit Vegan neighborhood. "The difficulty was when the lockdown was just for you. It's not necessarily a technical difficulty. The police at the roadblock stopped the Haredim, but didn't ask the others who passed by. You can't ignore it when the attitude of the police to the Haredim is different," she said, "and with the Corona it was very significant." Delaying residents with a Haredi appearance at the various roadblocks during the lockdowns was a widespread phenomenon, which received wide exposure among the Haredi population in the city. "I am not a Haredi, and from an objective perspective of an outsider the police operated in a very selective manner which really makes you wonder. I could understand their sense of persecution," recounts Maisel from Hatzolah, whose office looks out on one of the junctions located within the area of the repeated lockdowns, at the entrance to the Romema neighborhood.

To a great extent, within the general media, the Haredi community was positioned as a main source for the spread of the virus in Israel (Horovitz, 2020) and as a community which categorically did not observe the rules of social distancing or the regulations of the Ministry of Health and thus endangered society as a whole. The various media sources

prominently reported about Haredim who violated the Ministry of Health guidelines, at a time when similar violations were taking place in the general and Arab sectors but were not covered as extensively (Cohen, 2020). Moreover, the media blamed the Haredim for cases of infection that were not related to them. An example is the report of the outbreak of the virus at the secular Gymnasia Rehavia high school in Jerusalem, when a live report from Channel 13 used footage of Haredi students (Tal, 2020). At the end of May, research by Prof. Eran Halperin from the Department of Psychology at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem was published, and he presented a situation report according to which almost half of the general public (44%) accused the Haredim of not observing the Ministry of Health guidelines regarding the coronavirus and thus endangering the entire population of Israel. Similar sentiments found a broad platform in the media and there were even those who called to reexamine the attitude of the state toward the Haredi population (Pfeffer, 2020; Lavie-Nashiel, 2020). Toward the end of the first wave of the pandemic there was already widespread criticism of the mainstream media for its outdated and discriminatory attitude toward the Haredi population (Isacowitz, 2020b). The use of photographs of Haredim in every media report about violations of the regulations, even if they weren't related to the Haredi public, and generalizing about the entire Haredi community regarding specific violations at a time when other violations were taking place among other populations in the country, led the Haredi population to relate with suspicion to the way the outbreak of the pandemic was being handled. "Every week on Saturday night a demonstration at Balfour with 10,000 people is okay, while here even the synagogue is closed," is how David (from the anti-Zionist Toldos Aharon Hasidic movement) describes the sentiments. The distorted image of the situation that was presented in the media caused the Haredim to feel that the rest of society was "gunning for them," and there was a widespread perception among the Haredi population that their sector was being singled out as a target and that this treatment was not supported by valid data (Levy, 2020). The Haredim claimed that the Haredi neighborhoods were placed under stricter lockdowns than those imposed on cities and neighborhoods across the country with similar rates of morbidity but which were not characterized by a Haredi population (Isacowitz, 2020a), and that their willingness to go en masse to be tested for the coronavirus led to their neighborhoods being designated as "red" (having a high rate of people infected with the virus) and to the arbitrary imposition of restrictions (Greenwood, 2020). Even Haredi elected public officials claimed that the increase in cases of infection among the Haredi population was the result of the increase in people being tested (Ben Haim, Segal and Eli, 2020). Many Haredim described feeling a sense of exclusion and of a physical recoiling from them on the part of the non-Haredi population in the public space. Yitzhak Trachtengut, a resident of the Ramot neighborhood in Jerusalem, recounted that when he and his son were waiting in line to enter the

Malha Mall in Jerusalem, the security guard at the entrance interrogated only the two of them about their reason for being there, while secular shoppers were admitted without being questioned. He also said that the head of HR at his place of work instructed him to continue to work from home, claiming that this was due to the fact that he lived in a "red" neighborhood. "My neighborhood wasn't red," said Trachtengut, who confronted the "recoil" of many people when he traveled on public transport. "When I traveled on the bus everyone moved away from me," he recounted. Ephraim, a Haredi social activist from the Har Nof neighborhood, said that the Haredim felt very much under attack during the coronavirus period. "The feeling was that people were looking at us askance." He describes how others recoiled from Haredim in the street or at work: "They looked at us differently, as if, who knows, maybe he will infect us with corona. The feeling that we were singled out was very difficult." David related that he feels as though the coronavirus created a wide rift separating Haredim and the general public in Jerusalem. "We hit rock bottom," Yehuda Meshi-Zahav also said. "We invested so many years in connection, in bringing people closer together, in unity, and all at once everything went down the drain. We will overcome the coronavirus, but the polarization and the division that it caused, I'm not sure that we will manage to overcome that."

Against the backdrop of the labelling and the sense of persecution, a process of withdrawing into their communities took place among the Haredim. Those Haredim who have integrated into Israeli society, who work, and who are connected to the internet and to the media, experienced the alienation from the general population to a greater extent. "It's very painful for Haredim today," said Dvorie, "especially for Haredim who are exposed to the attitude of the media toward Haredim, to the general attitude toward Haredim." She spoke of the sense of being categorized, when despite the difference in their proximity to the general population, the modern Orthodox are lumped together with the general Haredi population, and even with the extreme elements which violate the coronavirus regulations. "Here we are, doing what you want, we're working, sometimes we serve in the army, only in addition we observe the religious commandments – and we are still treated the same way [as the Haredim]." According to Dvorie, the period of the coronavirus caused the Haredi public to distance itself greatly from Israeli society. "The thinking is that they don't want me to work, they don't want me to support myself, to go to the army – they want me to be like them," she described the widespread sentiment. "The man standing in front of you says 'You [people] and the coronavirus,' and doesn't see any difference between me and those who are violating the guidelines," said Dvorie. "Haredim who see themselves as Haredim, just those who work more and are more involved, during the corona period felt closer to the Haredi sector, and not the reverse. The Haredi identity of 'I am not like you' was more acute during the corona, in my opinion," she said.

"A Haredi person, and it doesn't matter which situation he is in, in the final analysis his group is the Haredim, he will always tend toward them," said Meshi-Zahav. "When he sees that his sector is being attacked, the Haredi collective – even people who had already distanced themselves – suddenly it brought them back."

## Leadership in Crisis

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During the period of the coronavirus the Haredi population in Jerusalem withdrew into itself, but changes occurred within the community as well.

The social distance regulations and the lockdowns affected the heart of Haredi community life, demanded that the Haredi population make significant concessions regarding its lifestyle, and effectively eliminated the public functions in Haredi life. The Haredi community fabric was significantly damaged when gatherings of every kind were prohibited and it wasn't possible to continue to observe the social and religious routine. In Israel, the first wave of the coronavirus took place during the period between the end of February and the end of May 2020, between the Jewish calendar months of *Adar* and *Sivan* 5781, a period which encompasses many holidays which are customarily observed in prayers, and social gatherings and encounters. This is also the period when the anniversaries of the deaths of important rabbis and important *admors* from within the Hasidic movement, whose center is located in Jerusalem, are observed, generally with prayers and large audiences. The Haredi, the rabbinical and the political leadership were all dealt a blow during the period of the coronavirus. During the first wave a rare spotlight was shone on the instructions issued by the Haredi community leaders, and on the unusual occurrence of discourses between the different rabbinical streams regarding the appropriate behavior during this time, all of which were widely covered in the media (Sherki, 2020). Suddenly there was a significant gap between instructions provided by the state and the Ministry of Health and those issued by the religious leaders, and the Haredi public was compelled to decide and to choose between them. The question of the expertise possessed by the spiritual leaders in health matters, as well as the lack of cooperation between the rabbinical courts and those of the Hasidic *admors* with the state authorities moved to the forefront of the Haredi public agenda and sparked intense controversy (Farkash, 2020). "There was a sense that the attitude toward the rabbinical leadership came in waves," recounted Dvorie, "At the start of corona with the remarks by Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky, it seemed that he was 'erased,' and now that is far from the case." Meshi-Zahav said, "At the start of the first wave the rabbis failed to a great extent. They didn't take in the enormity of the danger and

didn't understand the issue." After the period of the first wave, when the restrictions were relaxed and there was a return to "routine in the shadow of the coronavirus" it seemed that the power of the Haredi communities was restored, even that of those who initially called for violating the guidelines. Over the course of the first wave, the instructions from the rabbis which started out as public opposition to the guidelines from the state and caused great confusion among the Haredi population, became agreement, or at least silent agreement, so that violations, if they occurred, took place under the radar and not as the result of public instructions. It seems that at the start of the first wave the Haredi lifestyle was suspended and community life came to a standstill in many communities in the city. The significant lockdown during the first wave was imposed on all parts of the city and prevented the various Haredi communities, even those who would have chosen to do so, from observing their routine religious lifestyle. Many events planned for the Purim and Pessah holidays were cancelled; yeshivas and synagogues were closed, and for a certain period the Haredi "space" in Jerusalem was suspended. However, a short time later the various Haredi community leaders made a conscious choice to return to the observance of the regular Haredi lifestyle based on a clear preference for maintaining their spiritual and religious way of life. As early as the Pessah holiday certain communities in the city had returned to their regular lifestyle, albeit far from the public eye. During Pessah 2020 it was reported that, in direct contravention to the guidelines published by the Ministry of Health, several *admors* in Jerusalem held mass events which included hundreds of participants (Rabinowitz, 2020). A special investigation even revealed how, following the first wave of the virus, during the holidays in the Jewish month of Tishrei, a special "underground" transport system operated which ferried Haredim from the Haredi neighborhoods and areas to the courts of the rabbis and *admors* in Jerusalem, and that hundreds of Haredim used it, although this was a violation of the lockdown guidelines (Weiss, 2020). Haredim in Jerusalem describe social events with large numbers of participants, such as weddings and religious gatherings numbering numerous attendees, which continue to be held in enclosed spaces and contrary to the regulations, but which are not documented and to which the police and the municipality turn a blind eye. Different communities continue to observe the Haredi lifestyle as usual, only in secret, in accordance with the instructions of the local rabbis and leaders. "For the Hasid, even in ordinary times the *admor* is above the doctor. Regarding the words of the *admor* there was no question as to who should be listened to, [when choosing] between the law of the land and the law of the *admor* – the law of the *admor* takes precedence," explained Meshi-Zahav. And in fact it appears that many attempted to continue to adhere to a Hasidic lifestyle, which revolves around community events in the *admor's* court. In Mea She'arim, since the end of the general lockdown during the first wave, most of the communities in the neighborhood

have returned to ordinary life, including attending prayer services and gatherings. David, a member of the Hasidic Toldos Aharon movement, says that the admor himself is careful to maintain some social distance, although he continues to participate in the normal routines of community life. "The rebbe from Toldos Aharon himself did observe lockdown for several weeks and he prayed alone," David recounted, "No one touched him. To this day, when people go to wish him '*Shabbat shalom*' there are four tables arranged in the shape of a closed letter '*het*,' so they can't get too close to him. He doesn't extend his hands. He attends weddings – and there is a wedding every day in the movement – he never wears a mask. He attends, leaves the car, no one approaches him, they say '*mazal tov*' from a distance and every day he blesses Hasidic grooms. Every wedding is a minimum of around 200-300 people, if not more, who come together and dance as usual. Every night the yeshiva dances at the wedding of a member. There are solutions, all the halls have rear exits." David said that in addition to holding gatherings numbering numerous participants, many people in Mea She'arim have also stopped wearing masks, and that when he went to the neighborhood wearing a mask he was mocked.

Halting studies and the rare closures of the Haredi yeshivas during the first wave caused great concern among the Haredi community leaders and led to a real crisis in the yeshiva world. Many yeshivas in Jerusalem closed down completely during the coronavirus period and for the first time yeshiva students were not bound by the educational frameworks. There were those who found jobs and even abandoned religious observance (Weiss, 2020b). In mid-March, municipal inspectors and police were already performing targeted enforcement at Haredi educational institutions in the city (Zaken, 2020), and several yeshivas which were operating in violation of the regulations were closed, but some of the students had already returned to their studies in the month of April, before this type of gathering was permitted (Rabinowitz, 2020b). One learns of the great importance attributed by the Haredi public in general, and the Lithuanian sect in particular, to Torah study for young pupils in the *Talmud Torahs* (Haredi junior schools) and at the yeshivas from a rare video which was released by leading Lithuanian Haredi authority Rabbi Chaim Kanievsky at the start of the first wave, in which he instructs that the *Talmud Torahs* shouldn't be closed despite the dangers posed by the virus. In the video the rabbi is seen saying, "Closing down the *cheders* – is a greater danger" (Nachshoni, 2020b). "The rabbis began to understand that they were losing the young men and that they were dropping out because the yeshivas were closed," said Meshi-Zahav.

The Haredim justified violating the coronavirus regulations in favor of maintaining a Haredi lifestyle by citing the government authorities' lack of understanding of the value set of the



Haredi population. "The authorities didn't understand that for the Haredi public, education, studying, are very important," said Tali, a member of one of the larger Hasidic sects in Jerusalem who lives in the Romema neighborhood. They don't know which values are important to us." Set against a historical continuum of thousands of years of Torah study and observance of the commandments despite hardships and restrictions, many Haredim viewed the coronavirus as an isolated incident which was not sufficiently significant to bring about a change in their way of life. "When they didn't allow him to study, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai hid in a cave for 13 years, so here there's some little pandemic, and you won't allow me to study? My children will leave the fold? People don't understand that this is their very essence," David explained.

While the Haredi lifestyle was suspended at the start of the first wave, it was restored and continues today under different conditions. Alongside communities which violate the coronavirus regulations, a majority of the Haredi population is attempting to adapt itself to the new reality. The period of the coronavirus challenged the Haredi lifestyle, but also granted it a rare opportunity for re-evaluation, for change, and for adaptation.

## New Opportunities

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The problematic functioning of the central Haredi leadership during the period of the first wave of the coronavirus, as well as the physical distancing from the courts of the rabbis and the *admons*, facilitated the strengthening of the local rabbinical elements and the civil society activists among the Haredi population. Ephraim, a Haredi social activist from the Har Nof neighborhood, recounted that while the rabbinic authorities dithered over their decisions, those who actually led the communities were the rabbis of the various neighborhoods and communities. The Haredi leadership also experienced political upheaval. "A lot of power was moved over to the local leadership, in terms of the organizational and political management of daily life," said Ephraim. "If at one time you would pick up the phone to a Knesset Member to ask for help, now you would turn to a member of the municipality." And in fact, the activity of the Haredi Knesset Members was at the center of the criticism during the period of the coronavirus, and it was often alleged that they were not doing enough for their electoral base during the pandemic. A survey conducted among young Haredim revealed that 38% had less trust in their Knesset representatives following the coronavirus crisis (Malach, Hermann and Anabi, 2020). Many Haredim said that it was apparent that their public representatives in the Knesset do not have sufficient influence, and that many were disappointed by their functioning

during the coronavirus period. "I don't know a single Haredi who isn't angry at the Haredi Knesset Members," said Dvorie, "They didn't behave properly in the way they handled the coronavirus, they didn't do anything, or almost nothing, for that entire period." The Haredi leadership was also judged according to its successes. Haredi mayors, for example, were perceived as failing due to their inability to contend with the spread of the pandemic and the lockdowns and because they transferred authority to IDF generals. "For years the Haredim have come out against the army, suddenly it's the soldiers who are leading the city," said Meshi-Zahav, who described this as a significant conceptual change.

The economic changes which resulted from the pandemic also changed the reality of the Haredim in Jerusalem. Small businesses which operate from home, which characterize the Haredi economy, were hit hard by the lockdowns, the social distancing guidelines and the restrictions on movement. Hundreds of those who operated pre-nursery playgroups from home were in crisis as a result of being closed down and losing their income. Many Haredi workers employed at a low wage were not eligible for unemployment payments (Tchernoviski, 2020), and in many cases the employment grants distributed by the Ministry of Finance did not include the Haredi population (Orlozorov, 2020b). At 27%, the rate of Haredi workers whose employment was halted due to the coronavirus crisis was especially high. Even the stipends for yeshiva students, which rely to a great extent on income from donors abroad, especially from the United States, were significantly curtailed (Regev, 2020). Numerous Haredi institutions, among them educational institutions and charities (*gemach* societies) which are dependent on donations, income from the community, and government support are likely to close down due to the crisis (Malach and Gorbet, 2020). Although it is too soon to see the true, long-term influence of the coronavirus pandemic on the Haredi economy in Jerusalem, it is reasonable to assume that there will be some change in the economic model which has obtained to date. The economic crisis may, for instance, increase the need for Haredi men to receive professional training or to acquire an education in order to integrate into the workforce (Klingweill, 2020). A representative sample of the intentions of Haredim in the economic sphere indicated willingness among certain percentages of the Haredi population to invest effort into acquiring education or professional training to increase the ability to earn a livelihood or to increase the number of hours they work (Hermann and Anabi, 2020).

Haredim who participate in the workforce in Jerusalem express skepticism regarding conjecture about meaningful changes in the economic sector as a result of the coronavirus. Dvorie, whose field is project management in Jerusalem, thinks that it's possible that the kollels will encounter financial difficulties, but not that this will necessarily lead to a

movement toward the workforce. "Someone who is at a kollel because that's where he wants to be – will remain," she said, "But those who are undecided will be influenced." At the same time, Dvorie described numerous Haredim in Jerusalem who work "under the table" (for cash) and as a result of the current crisis came to understand the importance of the safety net provided by the state, and suggested that in the future they may choose to work legally. It is also possible that there will be an increase in the number of people seeking work among the Haredi population, although in conversations with Jerusalem employers Dvorie also encountered prejudice. "I myself met employers in Jerusalem who said that they don't want to employ Haredim now," she said. "They say: Why should I employ Haredim now? They'll be stuck at home or they'll bring the coronavirus to work." In her opinion, the negative image of the Haredi population which arose during the period of the coronavirus may hamper the continued integration of the Haredim into the workforce. New opportunities were created for the Haredi population regarding access to technology. The switch to working from home and online learning presented many challenges for the Haredi population and the Haredi education system in Jerusalem. Most of the old age homes in the Haredi sector do not have a computer and lack access to the internet. During 2017-2018, among adolescent Haredim, 59% used a computer and 49% accessed the internet, as compared to 80% and 89% respectively of non-Haredi Jews (Cahaner and Malach, 2019). A report from the Chief Economist Division at the Ministry of Finance indicates significant gaps in readiness to adopt distance learning between the general and the Haredi populations, where 42% of Haredi pupils live in households without a computer, and 72% live in households which do not have a connection to the internet. Among 42% of Haredi pupils there is no access to a computer or to the internet. The lack of technological access among Haredim affects the adult population as well – 17.9% of the Haredim tested in The Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) were found to be lacking in ICT skills.

Despite the weak starting point, the unique situations imposed on the Haredi population by social distancing actually led to a re-evaluation of its attitude to technology. At first tablets were distributed only to those who were ill or isolated, but later, "justified" by the coronavirus, many Haredi families brought computers into their homes for the first time, to help their children or students with distance learning (Elkayam, 2020). A Ministry of Communication report about internet usage during the period of the coronavirus indicates an increase in internet use among Haredim. The legitimacy of wider use of technology also generated unique phenomena among the Haredi rabbinic and political leadership. For example, before the Pessah holiday and immediately afterward there were rare live broadcasts of supportive material from Rabbi Gershon Edelstein, the leader of the

Lithuanian faction, on Haredi internet sites, among them talks targeting teachers and their pupils. On Independence Day, Knesset Member Moshe Gafni (United Torah Judaism) appeared for the first time in a live, open Zoom broadcast with students of the Achvat Hatorah initiative, which integrates employment and Torah studies, and similar discussions featuring rabbis and community leaders became a common occurrence on Haredi internet sites. In Jerusalem, a community initiative supplied tablets to elderly people living in the Haredi Har Nof neighborhood. The project received a grant from the Jerusalem Model entrepreneurs' community forum, was sanctioned according to Jewish Law by the non-profit "The Guardians of Israel" (*Shomrei Shabbat*) and was implemented by means of a partnership with the Har Nof community council. This is an example of the special opportunities created in Jerusalem by the coronavirus crisis which facilitated inter-sectoral collaborations, and of the rare openness in the Haredi community to technology and digital communications. Jerusalem Haredim describe changes in the technological accessibility in Haredi neighborhoods, families which connected to the internet for the first time during the period of the coronavirus, and a general legitimacy regarding the use of the network to create virtual connections with relatives who live far away and to increase access to services, for instance to sites operated by Health Funds. Although it was clandestine, even in Mea She'arim there was an increase in connections to the Internet via mobile devices, especially in order to use the WhatsApp application. However, it appears that the Haredi educational institutions are not yet a part of these changes, and long-distance learning continues to be implemented via telephone (Nachshoni, 2020c) despite the considerable difficulty this constitutes for parents and pupils.

In conclusion, it appears that the negative public atmosphere toward the Haredim in Jerusalem that was created during the first wave of the coronavirus is what defined the attitude of both the general and the Haredi population, and pushed many Haredim who had integrated into Israeli society back into the arms of their community, at least on a conscious level. Leadership, behavioral, and social changes also occurred within communities, and may redefine the agenda of the Haredi population in Jerusalem. In the absence of a satisfactory government response, during the period of the coronavirus the Haredi population continued to rely on organizations in the third sector, on its own organizations and on the Haredi authorities and entrepreneurs in the medical realm.

It is likely that the post-coronavirus Haredim in Jerusalem will be characterized by a stronger community identity; increased suspicion of the general population, the media and the authorities; and by an attempt to organize community life in the best possible way in accordance with the changing circumstances.

## Summary: Influencing the Future – Crisis as a Leap Forward

The coronavirus outbreak occurred at the height of processes of change in the interaction between sectors in Jerusalem. The means of coping with the pandemic and its influence on the nature of the interactions between the Palestinian and Haredi communities and the general Israeli "space," was markedly different in the two communities. It seems that a huge chasm yawns between the Palestinian and the Haredi communities in Jerusalem – a gap of language, culture, religion and a tradition of religious and national segregation. For centuries, members of the two groups lived in geographical proximity, but in strictly-observed social distance. Despite being characterized by a similar socioeconomic status, the two communities do not share equal political status. While the members of the Haredi community in Jerusalem are Israeli citizens who enjoy far-reaching political representation on both the municipal and the national level, the vast majority of Palestinians in Jerusalem are residents with no political representation. However, despite the numerous differences between them, during this period the two groups experienced a similar trend of change on the axis between religious conservatism and Western modernization, as well on the axis of the interaction between them and the Israeli government and general society in Israel. Over the past two decades both groups have faced significant challenges which have eroded the traditional political power structures and the internal social institutions – those which for many years erected and maintained the walls of community segregation and isolation intended to preserve national identity (vis-a-vis the Palestinians) and religious-cultural identity (for the Haredim). Processes of Israelization, neo-liberalism, the penetration of advanced communication technology and spatial density do not allow for further concentration of political power, monitoring of the flow of information, or the enforcement of the social agenda by the veteran leaders of the community alone (i.e. activists of the Palestinian political parties in East Jerusalem, or the senior rabbis in the Haredi communities).

At this point in time it may be said that although the coronavirus pandemic accelerated the processes of integration of residents of East Jerusalem into Israeli society, there was

a deterioration in the short term in the delicate fabric of the relationship between the Haredim and Israeli society on the national level, which may also be expressed negatively in the fabric of that relationship in Jerusalem. At the same time, the internal processes currently taking place within the Haredi community, among them the increased exposure to technology and to the internet and the continuation of the weakening of the control of the central rabbinic establishment, are likely, in the long term, to create new opportunities for drawing together and for alleviating the inter-group dispute.

The following is a summary of the influence of the coronavirus on the fabric of these relationships in four central areas: divisive discourse, new leadership, role of the state, and expressions of solidarity.

## **Politicization in Mea Shearim, De-Politicization in Salah Al-Din**

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Health crises, and especially epidemics, are fertile ground for deterioration in majority-minority relationships and for phenomena such as stereotyping and collective accusations. As we have shown in this document, the Haredi community in Jerusalem became a scapegoat for the coronavirus in Israel. Due to objective difficulties resulting from the socioeconomic structure of Haredi society in Israel, alongside demonstrative disdain for the Ministry of Health guidelines expressed by leaders and specific individuals in the community, an image was created of an entire population group which refused to do its part and contribute to the common effort to eradicate the pandemic, and which promoted infection among the general population. The process of generalizing about Haredi society during the period of the coronavirus occurred in the context of a years' long polarized political discourse between Haredi and non-Haredi Jews, characterized by the tension in the relationship between religion and state and the singular status of the Haredi community as a community of students exempt from the obligation to serve in the army or to study core subjects at school. The fact that the Haredim were accused of spreading the coronavirus in Israel illustrates the way in which epidemics are likely to adversely affect the attitude to minority groups. The pandemic added an additional layer of "biological otherness" to the negative image of the Haredim in the view of the general public, and thus strengthened the existing aspects of the cultural conflict regarding the control over politics and space in Israeli cities, Jerusalem in particular. The manner in which the Haredi population responded to the pandemic (holding common religious services and risking infection) was directly understood as an additional aspect of the system of competitive or contradictory values which separates between the Jewish-secular population and

the Haredi-traditional population, and as another facet of the ongoing dispute about the character of the public-Jewish space in Israel.

It is interesting to note that within the Arab-Palestinian population in Israel in general, and in Jerusalem as well, which under ordinary circumstances is embroiled in the deepest and most violent confrontation with the Jewish population in Jerusalem, there was no worsening in relations with the other groups in the city. It is true that in the general media there were many reports about the spread of the disease in East Jerusalem during the second wave, which, as was the case with Israeli Arabs as well, was related to the holding of weddings and other family events numbering numerous people. However, this issue did not become the subject of political debate, as occurred as the result of similar events in the case of the Haredim, and it was overshadowed by the concern about the morbidity in Haredi society. It may be estimated that as was documented in other cases in the city (for example: Shtern and Yacobi, 2020), the concern of the secular sector about Haredi hegemony or conversely the resentment toward what was perceived as its "exclusive" status, was greater than the national rift with the Palestinians. Still, apathy regarding the east part of the city also has its price. Interviewees from East Jerusalem said that they felt as though they "stood alone," in their coping with the coronavirus, that the institutional attitude toward them was not comprehensive and always arrived later than it should have, and that when there was intervention it was immediately translated into efforts toward Israelization and deepening Israeli dominance.

The fact that the deterioration regarding the state of the morbidity in the east of the city (or in the general Arab sector in Israel) which occurred during the second wave (See figure 1), was not politicized and didn't develop into an additional crisis in Jewish-Arab relations in Israel, is an important bright spot in the coronavirus story in Jerusalem and Israel. This was made possible thanks to the de-politicization of the activities of the Israeli government in the health sphere in East Jerusalem during the period of the coronavirus, the civil aspect of the virus, and the substantive fear of a serious health disaster. Together these constituted a platform for the amplification of the dimensions of the confidence of the residents in the system (even if only in a very focused and temporary manner). These indicate a certain maturity on the part of both groups and readiness to deepen the dimensions of the integration, the willingness to contain the other, and to promote deeper civic equality between Jews and Arabs in Jerusalem. The fact that coping with the pandemic was partially conducted in a pragmatic and professional way not only in the Arab society in Israel, but also in East Jerusalem – where the separate national identity and the struggle against the occupation are deeply ingrained in the identity of the residents –

indicates the importance of the event. Conversely, the immediate politicization of the battle against the coronavirus in the Haredi sector, in which the practical-health discourse became to a great extent a debate about struggles over power, rights, and obligations and political leverage for local and national politicians, is the social tragedy of this period. Israeli society as a whole will have to contend with the problem and mend the tears between the Haredi communities which today feel excluded, negatively labelled, and discriminated against and the general Israeli public which is angry and harbors resentment against them. Also, since Jerusalem is the most culturally and religiously mixed city in Israel, where Haredim and secular Jews are intertwined spatially and systemically, the city will be a major arena for contending with such rifts.

## Leadership in Transition

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The coronavirus crisis revealed the weakness of the traditional leadership of the Palestinian and Haredi populations as they contend with the challenges of the current era, especially when there is a weakening of the dimensions of the political leadership's monitoring and control over the flow of information that originates in the majority society. The coronavirus crisis created a need for leadership in possession of the appropriate tools and organizational and information-sharing capabilities, and these are lacking among the traditional leadership. With respect to East Jerusalem, the state of Israel did not allow the Palestinian political leadership (which is identified with the Palestinian Authority) to fill this role. The ensuing vacuum empowered the local, neighborhood, and regional leadership, such as neighborhood rabbis in Haredi communities or directors of community councils in Palestinian neighborhoods. Similarly, it facilitated the rise of civil society leaders, social activists and directors of organizations in both parts of the city, which accepted the responsibility and led information, assistance, and support ventures for the local population. Unlike the veteran and traditional political echelon, the new leadership is technologically savvy, is familiar with general Israeli society and with its government institutions, and is willing to pool all the existing resources for the sake of the health of the community. Therefore, it may be said that the coronavirus crisis exposed at once the incompetence of the traditional leadership in both Haredi and Palestinian society and revealed and reinforced the activities and the importance of the new local-civil leadership. These new leaders, should they continue to be dominant within the community leadership, will play a decisive role in promoting better intergroup relations in the city.



## Toward A New Social Order?

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The coronavirus launched a process of accelerated "acquaintanceship" between the general public and the Haredi public. The gaps and the different worldviews as well as the different lifestyles, values, and sources of authority were clearly accentuated. On the one hand, the general population was exposed to the hierarchy of authority within the Haredi population, to the concept of "*Da'at Torah*" (the concept of seeking the input of rabbinic scholars for all important matters, not only religious ones), and to the ways in which the different rabbis lead the various Haredi communities in Jerusalem in particular, and in Israel in general. In addition, the different lifestyle of the Haredi population, its religious and community events and even the routines of Haredi daily life became more accessible to the average Israeli, who during the period of the coronavirus was exposed to the prayers, yeshiva study, the tishes and weddings in the *admors'* courts and more. On the other hand, the Haredi population found itself contending for a lengthy period with fundamental questions touching on its way of life, its leadership, and its attitude toward modernity. During the period of the coronavirus many Haredim were exposed to professional experts in the realms of health and science, and to the Israeli democratic decision-making process; to the access technology provides to a range of spheres of life, and first and foremost to the manner in which the Haredi population is linked, via a meaningful connection, to general Israeli society, through the collective attempt to cope with the new pandemic. The geographic segregation which is perceived as something positive by Haredim in Jerusalem, who prefer to live among members of their own community, was transformed during the coronavirus period into a negative socially-conscious isolation, through the lockdowns which singled out the Haredi neighborhoods. The changes occurring within Haredi society in Jerusalem are taking place alongside the changes in its attitude toward the general population, and the coping with the coronavirus pandemic necessitated moving up to the next level with respect to both of these in a short period of time. The authorities had to quickly adapt their messages, guidelines, and enforcement to the singular characteristics of the Haredi population, whose lifestyle and traits are distinct and different from those of the general population. Meanwhile, the Haredim had to bridge media, technological and social gaps in order to gain access to the centers of decision making and become integrated into the system that was coping with the pandemic. The importance of preserving Haredi community life was heightened, alongside a growing understanding of the importance of involvement in shared community life in Jerusalem and the need to keep pace with the general population in daily life in the realms of media, economy, and technology and to "secure a place at the table" to ensure the preservation of the rights of the Haredim, while also preserving their lifestyle.

## The Rise of the State

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Until the advent of the Jerusalem Intifada in 2014-2015 free market forces were the principle element shaping the shared space between Jews and Arabs in contemporary Jerusalem. While the municipality adopted a policy of non-action in light of the tensions and violence between the groups, the state was mainly occupied with punishment and deepening the dimensions of control in East Jerusalem. It was the business people, and the managers of the shopping malls and cinemas who saw the Palestinians as a desirable consumer market and source of efficient (and cheap) labor in the city. The riots that broke out in the east of the city following the murder of Mohammed Abu Khdeir and in response to the war in Gaza demonstrated the need for the establishment to intervene and was expressed in a government plan to invest about two million shekels in the improvement of physical and social infrastructures and to promote the Israelization of East Jerusalem (as enshrined in Government Decisions 2684 and 2790). The dominance of the state – through the Ministry of Health, the Home Front Command, The Ministry of Finance and the National Insurance Institute in the efforts to cope with the coronavirus in Israel – bolsters the same trend toward the strengthening of the sovereign national element within the processes of intervention in East Jerusalem which are not security-political processes. The growing exposure of the Palestinians in the east of the city to Israel's "soft power," alongside the hard force of the presence of the IDF, the Border Police, and the Police created the strongest-ever presence of the state of Israel in daily life. During this period the state became the main intermediary between East Jerusalem and the Israeli space. The Jerusalem Municipality also played a central role in leading the efforts to cope with the coronavirus both in East Jerusalem and in the Haredi street. Mayor Lion was praised by the residents of the east part of the city for his direct efforts to meet the daily needs of the residents, and to relate to their religious identity as well as to the difficulties they experienced in coping with the pandemic. In general, the processes of Israelization in East Jerusalem via the municipal and national institutions received a significant boost during the period of the coronavirus crisis, and these processes had an important indirect influence on the relationship between the east and west parts of the city. On the one hand the integration of Israeli systems into East Jerusalem was normalized further, while the Palestinian national institutions received another blow. These are encouraging factors which move beyond choosing the Israel matriculation stream (*bagrut*), learning Hebrew, and integrating into the Israeli workforce, and the significance of these steps is in the increased number and the greater complexity of interfaces with Israeli society. However, until now the processes of Israelization have also led to higher and stronger political walls, evidence for which may be seen in the lack of change in the voting patterns of

East Jerusalem residents in Jerusalem Municipality elections. Past experience proves that integration from "the top" is likely to boomerang and to shape a stronger local Palestinian national identity, which refuses to surrender the use of diverse and effective tools in the struggle against suppression and discrimination in a national context.

## Asymmetrical Expressions of Solidarity

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The coronavirus pandemic is unusual in the Israeli context in that it is a countrywide emergency crisis which is unique in its civil character, as opposed to the security or political character of most crises in the country. This fact, as we have illustrated in this document, allowed the Palestinian residents of the city to receive assistance from and to cooperate with elements in the Israeli government and Jewish civil society, in a way which under ordinary circumstances would be perceived as taboo and as undermining the resistance to Israeli rule in East Jerusalem. In this way the pandemic caused the residents of East Jerusalem to shed their national or religious identity in favor of a shared humanity, even if only temporarily and superficially. Even the inability to disconnect the parts of the city from each other or to completely segregate neighborhoods and workers, all of which are connected in one economic-functional web, strengthened the need for cross-sectoral collaborations to deal with financial and social damages. The various collaborative efforts within society, even if they are few in number, have great symbolic significance and were facilitated by a decade during which a cross-sectoral network of social activists cohered, whose purpose is to create a shared civil-urban identity in the narrow space between the mechanisms of national and religious segregation which operate with tremendous force in the city. However, in the context of deep inequality in the city, these collaborations occurred asymmetrically, and were expressed mainly in assistance with food, information, and volunteers from West Jerusalem (mostly secular) to assist East Jerusalem. This fact is illustrative of the low glass ceiling for the building of bridges in Jerusalem, in conditions of ongoing political, economic, and social inequality. Thus, the period of the coronavirus crisis was the first true test of the potential inherent in shared civil society and of its limitations. Despite the limited scope of the activity, local successes are likely to set new precedents and to lead to the understanding that urban social resilience is probably only possible through inter-group cooperation and solidarity.

In conclusion, the sociopolitical influence of crises such as the coronavirus may be manifested in a change in direction or an acceleration of existing processes. The evidence we present in this document indicates that the influence of the crisis on the fabric of the

relationships between the groups in Jerusalem marks an acceleration of trends which began during the past decade. The geographic and political data haven't changed, and Palestinians and Haredim continue to live in Jerusalem under overcrowded conditions, with no satisfactory solution to their ever-increasing needs in the spheres of housing and employment. The Palestinians are restricted geographically by the Separation Wall from every direction but the west, and the weakened political status of the Palestinian Authority is not expected to change in the near future. Within the Haredi communities, the entry of technology into private homes, the increasing exposure to the secular world, the vacuum remaining following the deaths of the rabbinic authorities of the previous generation – none of these are likely to change either any time soon. Over the past ten years these processes have culminated in increased mixing within the public space in Jerusalem, most prominently in non-Haredi West Jerusalem, which has become more diverse with respect to the human landscape as manifested in the composition of residents of neighborhoods, employees, consumers and those who frequent the parks and various leisure and recreation areas. These processes of spatial mixing occurred with no interference from the state or the municipality, while the inter-community conflicts between Jews and Arabs or between secular people and Haredim are still characterized by fear, lack of trust, and also by violence.

It seems that the coronavirus pandemic, which weakens the importance of the open public space and reduces the spaces for activity for residents beyond their homes, in the short term works to reduce spatial mixing. However, the intra-community processes within the Palestinian and Haredi communities, the strengthening of civil society and trends of Israelization, indicate that in the long term the spatial integration and the interaction between members of the different groups will stand firm and continue to develop in the coming years. The community that is not Haredi – the secular, the traditional or the religiously observant community – which is referred to in various studies as "the general population," is not a passive community, and its different components respond in different ways to the dramatic changes within their household spaces in Jerusalem and to the sense of being "besieged" which many of them feel. For example, in many cases the secular population responds to changes in the public space with negative immigration or with neighborhood struggles to halt the changes. The religious population has worked to maintain its political status in the city and wrestles with the Haredi population for control of the synagogues, municipal resources, and political positions. At times, communities which live on the seamline neighborhoods between East and West Jerusalem, such as Pisgat Ze'ev or Armon Hanatziv, struggle openly against a Palestinian presence in the neighborhoods. Such responses demonstrate the volatility inherent in the spatial mixing

processes, at a time when they are taking place in the absence of institutional intervention and with no attempt being made to give them a positive interpretation, to establish mediation processes, or to educate toward tolerance and inclusion. The coronavirus crisis once again raises the issue of the need for the increased involvement of the public and civil sector to improve relations between different groups in the city and to contend not only with the negative socioeconomic ramifications in the wake of the crisis, but also with the rifts and the opportunities that have been created in the complex social fabric of Jerusalem.

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## Appendix: List of Interviewees

**Avner Saadon**, Director of Strategic Policy and Planning Division, Jerusalem Municipality

**Avraham Hayon**, CEO and co-founder of the SAHI organization

**Ehud Uziel**, Public policy development and research consultant

**Osama Ghanim**, Director of the Social Department East Jerusalem, Jerusalem Municipality

**Ahmed Asmar**, Registrar of Students from East Jerusalem at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

**Ephraim**, social activist from Har Nof neighborhood in West Jerusalem

**Ariel Marcus**, Director of the Jerusalem Model at the Leichtag Foundation

**Ariella Cwikel**, Director of the Culture, Society and Sport Department East Jerusalem, Jerusalem Municipality

**Ben Avrahami**, researcher at the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research

**Bezalel Cohen**, The Society for Advancement of Education, Jerusalem

**Daud Alian**, The Atta'a Assistance Center for the Rights of East Jerusalem Residents

**Dvorie Emmanuel**, Project Manager, resident of Bayit Vegan neighborhood in West Jerusalem

**Dubi Maisel**, Operations Manager United Hatzalah

**David**, a member of the anti-Zionist Toldos Aharon Hasidic movement

**Daniella Zeltzer**, Food Rescuers JLM

**Hani Reit**, Director of the Abu Tor Community Council in East Jerusalem

**Zaki Djemal**, Kulna Non-Profit

**Haggai Agmon-Snir**, Director of the Jerusalem Intercultural Center

**Hanin Majdala**, social activist in human rights organizations in Jerusalem



**Tali**, a resident of the Romema neighborhood in West Jerusalem

**Yair Ettinger**, religious and Haredi affairs reporter for the Kan 11 Television Channel

**Yehuda Meshi-Zahav**, Founder and former Chairman of "ZAKA – Identification, Extraction and Rescue – True Kindness"

**Yaara Katz Feiner**, Director of the Social Urban Renewal Project, Shahaf Foundation

**Rabbi Yitzhak Trachtengut**, Director of Haredi programs at The Joint

**M.**, director of an educational network in Haredi society

**Maliah Zugair**, researcher at the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research

**Nir Yanovksy**, board member of the Yuvalim Community Council, West Jerusalem

**Inbar Bluzer Shalem**, Director of Rashut HaRabim - The Jerusalem Forum of Jewish Renaissance Organizations

**Dr. Fuad Abu Hamed**, the Director of the Clalit Health Fund in Bet Zafafa, business entrepreneur, and lecturer in business administration

**Shmuel Drilman**, Director of the Dosim non-profit think tank and awareness raising organization to counter the negative representation of Haredim in the media, business and social entrepreneur

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The COVID-19 pandemic hit Jerusalem hard, deeply affecting the Haredi and Palestinian sectors of the city, strengthening and weakening group stereotypes and leading to a temporary change in the relationship patterns between the sectors and Israeli government institutions. This document examines the influence of the pandemic on the fabric of intergroup relations in Jerusalem, while highlighting the stories of the two "minority" communities of Jerusalem – the Palestinian community in East Jerusalem and the Jewish Haredi community.

This study joins a series of studies and workshops conducted by the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research in cooperation with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in Israel on the development of shared spaces in the city.

**Dr. Marik Shtern**, urban-political geographer, studies cities in conflict, urban politics and intergroup relations in the urban space; researcher at the Jerusalem Institute for Policy Research; postdoctoral fellow at The Harry S. Truman Research Institute for the Advancement of Peace, and at the Department of Geography at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

**Hani Vayzer**, BA in communications and political science from Bar Ilan University, MA in educational administration and policy from The Hebrew University; her Master's thesis explores the topic of determining public policy in the context of controversial issues, in a test case of the core curriculum in Haredi education in Israel.

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