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Lucine Endelstein,
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Summary

The eruv is a ritual system instituted by the rabbis of the Mishnah and the Talmud, which relies on a symbolic mixing of public and private spaces in a physically enclosed area. To be created, an eruv sometimes needs the construction of spatial boundary markers as poles and wires. Sometimes it is completely invisible and leans on the preexisting residential space when the latter is already enclosed. Its function is to allow the observant Jews who take part of this system to carry objects out of and into their houses, to get around one of the prohibition of the shabbat : carrying any kind of object from the private to the public « domains ».

In any case, an eruv is a negotiated space which requires the agreement of those who live inside its boundaries and don't use it –Jews and non-Jews. In the general context of religious revival, those systems have multiplied during the last decade in Western countries. Because the eruv concerns the boundaries between the public and the private and the question of minority concentrations in the city, it is an object of intense controversies.

After a short review of the contemporary controversies around the construction of those ritual systems, this communication will focus on a case study in Paris. This exemple of impact of a religious practice on the urban space raises several questions : is it a mechanism of exclusion and separatism, or is it a system of mutual recognition ? To what extent can we define an eruv as a Jewish territory in the city ? Is the eruv a process of privatisation of space ?

Based on a geographical approach to answer those questions, the paper will highlight the role of religion in a complex process of social and spatial boundary making.

