The Many Faces of Jerusalem: From Contradiction to the Celebration of Diversity

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At the Threshold of Inquiry: The Questions of Jerusalem

How did Jerusalem come to be a perennial site of conflict throughout its history? Has the city, across the ages, remained a fractured, fragmented space, where the existence of the other is denied rather than acknowledged? Has there ever been a time when Jerusalem became a haven for celebrating diversity—not on the basis of contest and division, but through shared citizenship? If so, under what conditions did this become possible, and what lessons might be drawn from the past to shape a nonviolent present and future for the city?

How has religion, rather than acting as a unifying force to foster common ground, become a catalyst for conflict—both between different faiths and within the sects of each religion? Why is the Palestinian national identity of Jerusalem continually threatened—targeted by ancient historical claims as well as contemporary religious ones? And why are religious claims repeatedly invoked as a pretext for asserting political sovereignty over the city?

Why, too, do we fail to follow the global precedent that affirms religious rights for diverse communities within a framework of national sovereignty—one grounded in inclusive citizenship that recognizes plurality and seeks to govern it through peaceful means? Can Jerusalem overcome its entangled contradictions to become a city that embraces diversity, manages it peacefully, and honors the globally upheld right to national sovereignty and shared civic belonging?

This paper revolves around these questions and proposes a framework of thought aimed at deconstructing their complexities, in pursuit of a future wherein Jerusalem may flourish as a city that celebrates diversity. It begins with a concise survey of global experiences in navigating the tension between fragmentation and plurality, with particular emphasis on the national and religious dimensions as paradigms of such governance, and the current state of global practice in this regard.

The paper then turns to the case of Jerusalem, examining its manifold identities—

national, religious, social-communal, cultural, and beyond. It explores how these facets manifest through the interwoven intersections and contradictions of al-Quds, Jerusalem, and Yerushalayim. Finally, the paper concludes with a vision for the city's future—one rooted in a peaceful framework for managing its affairs through shared citizenship, inspired by the ideas of the late leader Faisal al-Husseini. His vision is revisited and reinterpreted in light of the developments that have transpired since his passing in 2001.

Managing Fragmentation and Diversity; Navigating the National and the Religious: Where Has the Global Experience Arrived?

Pre-modern societies, whether ancient or contemporary, were characterized by the absence of equal citizenship rights. Consequently, these societies were governed by a complex amalgam of pre-civic structures: organic affiliations—familial, tribal, and clan-based—anchored in blood ties, and post-organic structures—sectarian, regional, factional, and clientelist—shaped by loyalty and dependency in their political, social, and economic arrangements. These societies are often described as patriarchal and post-patriarchal.

Patriarchy in its various forms revolves around the authority of the father figure—the clan chief or tribal leader. Post-patriarchal structures, on the other hand, center around the sectarian head, the sheikh, the village elder, the employer, or the political faction leader, who is often surrounded by zealous partisans (factionalism) or cronies engaged in internal favoritism (clientelism). Political clientelism, in turn, is mirrored by similar dynamics at the social and economic levels. The works of Hisham Sharabi, Halim Barakat, and Paul Salem have elaborated on these societal patterns (Sharabi 1987, 1999; Barakat 1998).

Such organic and post-organic societies exhibit two fundamental traits: the first is patriarchy and male dominance; the second is fragmentation along the very organic and post-organic lines described above. This results in the absence of social cohesion or shared life, producing instead a landscape of disintegration and division—closed circles that seldom interact, foster enmity, and often descend

into internecine conflict.

In these pre-modern societies, diversity—be it social, cultural, religious, or ethnic—is managed in one of two ways, both of which reject the notion of citizenship. The first path suppresses difference and imposes uniformity, often through coercion and the sword. The second allows for diversity but under the dominance of a majority that enforces systems of subjugation upon minorities.

The imposition of uniformity invariably leads to tyranny. In such cases, the political and social order imposes top-down "commonalities" dictated by a leader, sheikh, or elder. When this pursuit of homogeneity is pushed to its extremes under the guise of shared values, diversity is erased (Anderson, 1996). The alternative approach, in which majoritarian dominance prevails, prioritizes the political, economic, social, and cultural control of the majority, silencing minority expressions and enacting laws that place them in a subordinate position.

When applied to the relationship between national and religious identities, the global trajectory has evolved significantly from the medieval period to the modern era. In the Middle Ages, Western systems of governance derived legitimacy from religious authority; kings were subject to the Church, and the Crusades (1096–1291) were waged against Muslims in the name of the cross.

In the Arab and Islamic world, the caliph ruled as God's vicegerent on Earth—a claim contradicted by numerous scholars, including Ali Abdel Raziq, who asserted as early as 1925 that vicegerency belongs to the ummah, not to a singular ruler. Anything else, he argued, is a form of despotism that deviates from the foundational principles of governance in Islam (Abdel Raziq, 2011).

History bears witness to varying forms of Islamic rule: some caliphs governed justly and equitably, extending justice to Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Others operated under what came to be termed the "just despot" model, while some ruled despotically in the manner of Persian emperors, Roman generals, Babylonian tyrants, Egyptian pharaohs, and the likes of Genghis Khan and Timur—rulers

whose methods, as Ruhi al-Khalidi noted in 1908, bore no relation to Islam (al-Khalidi, 1908, p. 69).

Abd al-Rahman al-Kawakibi offered a penetrating analysis of such despotism in his two seminal works: Umm al-Qura and The Nature of Tyranny and the Calamities of Enslavement (al-Kawakibi, 1982, 2007).

Those who ruled with justice ensured that all, Muslims and others, were treated with fairness and dignity. People of the book (ahl al-dhimma) were not only tolerated but were often appointed to the highest ranks within the Islamic administration. Uthamina offers numerous examples, which need not be repeated here (Uthamina, 2000, pp. 138–142).

As for the so-called "just despots," they justified their tyranny under the guise of protecting justice—inflicting oppression upon Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Their cruelty, however, disproportionately targeted Muslims. These same rulers enforced the strictest interpretations of the laws concerning ahl al-dhimma, linking tolerance to their loyalty to the state and their abstention from aligning with foreign powers. Uthamina details these examples (Uthamina, 2000, p. 136).

The matter went beyond punitive measures against Christians accused of sympathizing with the Byzantines. Some despotic rulers extended their oppression to both Christians and Muslims—imposing restrictions on Christian dress, employment, and church construction. Uthamina recounts the ensuing consequences in Jerusalem: enforced tattoos, capitation taxes, and more—culminating in the notorious act of the Fatimid caliph who styled himself "al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah," ordering the destruction of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1007 AD (Uthamina, 2000, pp. 147–151).

This legacy of despotism, and the application of ahl al-dhimma laws, endured in the Arab and Islamic worlds until the promulgation of the Ottoman Nationality Law of 1869. This law established legal equality for all Ottoman subjects regardless of religion, race, gender, or any other basis for discrimination. These principles

were further affirmed in the Ottoman Constitution of 1876 and reaffirmed upon its reissuance in 1908.

This occurred during the age of the scientific and industrial revolutions in Europe—an era that marked the transition from ecclesiastical dominance to the ascendancy of the modern state, founded upon the principle of political equality among male citizens, initially in the rights to vote and stand for election. Gradually, these rights were extended to include women—a development whose details fall outside the purview of this paper.

Within this context, the once-mighty ecclesiastical empire was reduced to the confines of the tiny Vatican State, occupying a fragment of Rome, the capital of Italy. The Church relinquished all political authority over Europe, its jurisdiction henceforth limited to the Vatican, while it retained only spiritual authority over Catholic believers around the world. This spiritual authority no longer entailed political sovereignty, which had now become the domain of the modern nation-state.

What befell the Catholic Church likewise occurred with the Orthodox Church, following the fall of Constantinople to the Ottomans in 1453 and the subsequent transformation of Orthodox Russia into a socialist state after the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917.

This overview reveals that the evolution toward modern nation-states—anchored in equal citizenship—effectively brought an end to the domination of religious institutions over the apparatus of the state in the name of religion. Moreover, it subordinated the religious sphere to the organizational frameworks of the modern state, which guarantees all citizens the freedom of belief and enables them to establish their own religious institutions—be they mosques, churches, synagogues, or others—freely and without state interference, while simultaneously denying religious adherents any claim to political power based on religious precepts.

The Case of Jerusalem

Jerusalem presents a singular exception to this global evolution toward equal and integrated citizenship, and the rejection of sovereignty asserted in the name of religion. Zionism seeks to impose sovereign control over the city, not only on the basis of ancient historical claims, but also through religious claims rooted in the Torah, which are invoked to assert both historical rights and fabricated modern sovereignty.

Zionism is aided in this endeavor by global Christian Zionist evangelical movements, some of which maintain headquarters in Jerusalem—established even before the rise of the Zionist movement itself. These evangelical sects claim, among other things, that the gathering of Jews in Palestine is a prelude to the second coming of Christ and the advent of a thousand years of peace following the battle of Armageddon. These sects, along with their institutions and associations, began arriving in Jerusalem and Palestine as early as the nineteenth century, seeking sites mentioned in the Torah. They were among the earliest proponents of gathering Jews in Palestine and establishing a Jewish kingdom therein, as will be further illustrated. Eventually, these evangelical movements succeeded in attracting segments of European Jewry into the Zionist fold, thus helping to shape the Jewish Zionist movement and its efforts to realize their theological-political ambitions in Palestine.

Meanwhile, the Christian denominations of Jerusalem found a path toward a peaceful resolution of their longstanding disputes over ownership and administration of the Christian holy sites—conflicts that had, until the waning years of Ottoman rule, often turned violent, resulting in fatalities and injuries, as detailed by Arif al-Arif (1992, pp. 363–364). Occasionally, these clashes drew in Ottoman state intervention and sparked tensions between Muslims and Christians, also chronicled by al-Arif (1992, p. 358).

The Status Quo arrangements were instituted by an Ottoman firman issued in 1852 to regulate relations and the administration of Christian holy sites among the various Christian sects—primarily the Orthodox and Catholic communities in Jerusalem and Bethlehem. These regulations were later reinforced by the Treaties

of Paris (1856) and Berlin (1878), which affirmed each sect's right to practice its rituals freely, froze any future claims to ownership of the holy sites, and prohibited any new constructions or alterations to the existing structures by either the Orthodox or Catholic Churches (Salem, 2023, p. 81).

The Status Quo thus created a lasting mechanism for resolving disputes among the Christian churches in Palestine—one that remains in effect to this day. In place of sectarian strife, the Christians of Jerusalem—Orthodox, Catholic, and Evangelical—identify themselves primarily as Palestinians. The Vatican, for its part, no longer asserts any claim to sovereignty over the city in the name of religion. Rather, it has recognized the Palestinian people's right to sovereignty over Jerusalem, while preserving its rights to administer its sacred sites in the city and rejecting Zionist claims to dominion over it.

In 1994, the Vatican and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) exchanged diplomatic recognition, and in 2000, they signed an agreement affirming these positions. In 2015, the Vatican formally recognized the State of Palestine. In a study published by al-Maqdisiyah journal, Raheb (Spring 2024) surveys the positions of various Christian churches on the question of Jerusalem, highlighting their consistent affirmation of Palestinian national rights in the city.

In short, Palestine—through the harmony between its Muslim and Christian populations—has forged its own path toward joining the global experience of managing diversity and resolving inter-sectarian contradictions. Yet, this progress continues to be challenged by the Zionist movement and its allied evangelical currents in the West.

<u>The Identity of Jerusalem: Intersections and Contradictions</u>

I. The National Dimension: The Palestinian National Identity of Jerusalem

A distinct Palestinian identity—encompassing both Palestine and Jerusalem—has existed for millennia (Masalha, 2022; Said and Abu-Lughod, 1986), with

Masalha in particular offering a comprehensive exposition. The modern national identity of Jerusalem, according to the literature, traces its roots to the peasant uprising in Jerusalem and Palestine against the rule of Ibrahim Pasha in 1834 (Kimmerling and Migdal, 1998). Rashid al-Khalidi offers a detailed account of how this identity evolved from that point onward (Khalidi, 1997).

This Palestinian identity has historically embraced the city's Christians, Muslims, and also its Palestinian Jews, who participated fully in all facets of civic life during the Ottoman era. Notably, the Jewish community had representation on the Jerusalem municipal council since its establishment by the Ottomans in 1863, and even earlier, in 1840, on the advisory council of the Jerusalem Sanjak—later the Jerusalem Mutasarrifate—which encompassed the districts of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jaffa, and Gaza. At the time, Bethlehem, Jericho, Ramallah, Lydda, Ramla, al-Majdal, and Beersheba also fell within its jurisdiction under various names, as documented by Scholch based on the 1871 Ottoman Salnameh (Scholch, 1990, pp. 30–31).

The early Zionist movement was met with opposition from the Jews of Palestine, who rejected its colonial character and its overt objective of supplanting the native population—Muslim, Christian, and Jewish alike—with European Jewish immigrants. However, toward the end of the Ottoman era and especially during the British Mandate, some Jews began to gradually align themselves with Zionism, particularly after the dissolution of their Ottoman citizenship. Jacobson and Kark have explored the orientations of Palestine's Jewish population during this transitional period (Kark and Glass, 2004; Jacobson, 2001 & 2004).

While increasing segments of indigenous Jews in Palestine gravitated toward Zionism, Muslims and Christians remained steadfast in their shared national identity, forming joint Islamic-Christian associations from 1918 onward. These associations led to the formation of an executive committee, which emerged from eight national conferences held between 1919 and 1928.

In the wake of the colonial San Remo Conference of April 1920—which separated

Palestine from Syria and granted France the Mandate over Syria in July of the same year, while Britain continued to occupy Palestine—the Third Palestinian National Congress, convened in Haifa in late 1920, resolved that it was imperative to call for the establishment of a national government in Palestine, independent from Syria, to oppose Zionist immigration and land sales, and to work toward ending the British Mandate (Sakhnini, 1986, pp. 85–87).

Throughout the 1930s, Palestinian Muslims and Christians continued their joint struggle, engaging together in political parties and in the Arab Higher Committee, which was formed in 1936 to lead the national resistance. Among its notable Christian figures were Emil al-Ghouri, secretary-general of both the committee and the Palestinian Arab Party led by Jamal al-Husseini; Fouad Saba, who served as the committee's secretary in 1937 and had previously participated in the "National Fund" initiative and the 1932 Palestinian Youth Congress; and 'Izzat Tannous, who played a pivotal role in the committee's conferences with the British government in London, established the Arab Office in London and later for the Arab League, and took part in the 1964 founding conference of the Palestine Liberation Organization in Jerusalem, where he also opened the PLO's New York office.

Another leading figure was George Antonius, author of The Arab Awakening, who served as secretary to the Palestinian delegation at the 1939 Round Table Conference in London and as advisor to the Arab delegations in the same conference (The Interactive Encyclopedia of the Palestinian Question). These names exemplify the many Christian leaders who contributed to the shared Palestinian national struggle for liberation from Zionism and British rule.

From this detailed account, it is clear that Jews were an integral part of Palestinian identity until the end of the Ottoman period. Under the British Mandate, however, large segments of the Jewish population aligned with Zionism due to the intensifying conflict, while a small minority continued to identify as Palestinian. Among them were Ilan Halevi, a member of Fatah who represented the PLO in the Socialist International from the 1980s; Uri Davis, a scholar and thinker who

remains a member of the Palestinian National Council; and, on a popular level, the Neturei Karta movement, which proclaims the Palestinian identity of Palestine, rejects Zionism, and holds a seat on the Palestinian National Council alongside the Samaritan community of Nablus, which also rejects Zionism and its domination over Palestine.

The Palestinian national identity of Jerusalem has faced challenges from the Zionist movement, Western evangelical trends, and other governmental and non-governmental Western actors.

The Zionist movement bases its claims on the ancient presence of Jews in Palestine two thousand years ago, asserting that the Jewish people have preserved an unbroken lineage across generations despite the diaspora. In other words, it is claimed that the Jews who arrived from Southern and Western Europe—initially with support from Jewish billionaires in Europe and America and from global evangelical movements in the early nineteenth century, and later through the Zionist movement at the century's end—represent a direct ethnic continuation of those ancient Jews.

This claim, however, has been refuted by Jewish scholars, notably Shlomo Sand, who demonstrated that the Jews who came to Palestine from Southern and Eastern Europe beginning in the nineteenth century were in fact descendants of the Khazar Kingdom—a Turkic polity that existed between Georgia and the Volga River from the sixth to the eleventh centuries. Thus, there exists no ethnic continuity between these migrants and the Jews who lived in Palestine two thousand years ago (Sand, 2010, p. 305).

Zionism, in its Jewish form, was preceded by a fervent evangelical Zionism, which had emerged from certain Protestant movements across the Anglo-Saxon world—most notably in Britain, the United States, and among the German Evangelicals. As early as the mid-nineteenth century, Prussian Germans had established colonies in Palestine, including two prominent German quarters in Jerusalem (1868) and Haifa (1878), both founded by the German Protestant Templer Society. Other colonies followed: Sarona (1871), Wilhelma (1902), Bethlehem of Galilee (1906), and

Waldheim (1907). In the early twentieth century, parts of these settlements were handed over to the Zionist movement (Salem, 2019, p. 244). Simultaneously, the United States—alongside Mormon and Baptist groups—attempted to establish several colonies, such as Artas (1850), Mount Hope (1853), and Adams (1866), though none of these endured (Salem, 2019, p. 248).

Britain, for its part, chose to support wealthy Jewish magnates in the establishment of early colonies—figures like Moses Montefiore and Edmond de Rothschild—who funded settlements in Jerusalem such as Yemin Moshe, Mea Shearim, and Mishkenot Sha'ananim. Simultaneously, Britain's Christian Zionist statesmen of the nineteenth century—Prime Ministers Salisbury and Disraeli, as well as Lord Shaftesbury—advocated for the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine. These efforts would culminate in the Balfour Declaration of 1917, which called for the establishment of a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine. The declaration was issued by the government of Prime Minister Lloyd George and signed by his Foreign Secretary, Arthur James Balfour—both adherents of the Evangelical stream.

At the same time, the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann played a pivotal role in persuading U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to support the Balfour Declaration (Al-Sharif, ed., 2019, p. 80), aided in this endeavor by the American Zionist figure Louis Brandeis.

In addition to these political maneuvers, Britain supported the establishment of a Protestant church in Jerusalem—Christ Church, founded in 1841 in collaboration with Germany. Britain also encouraged societies devoted to biblical archaeology in Palestine, such as the London-based Palestine Association for the Study of the Land of Israel (1805) and the Palestine Exploration Fund (1865). German institutions contributed as well, notably the German Protestant Institute of Archaeology (Al-Ja'ba, 2019, p. 49), alongside American ones like the Albright Institute of Archaeological Research, founded in 1900 (Al-Ja'ba, 2019, p. 43). French Catholic societies also engaged in biblical archaeology, including the Franciscan School established in Jerusalem in 1901 and the École Biblique et

Archéologique Française, run by the Dominicans since 1890 (Al-Ja'ba, 2019, pp. 41, 47). All of these institutions were headquartered in Jerusalem.

During the British Mandate, proposals emerged to designate Jerusalem an international city. The 1937 Peel Commission suggested such a plan (Sakhnini, 1986, p. 245), and this vision culminated in the 29 November 1947 United Nations Partition Plan, which prescribed a special international regime for the city (Corpus Separatum). The evangelical current, then, sought not only to Judaize Palestine, but to detach Jerusalem from its Palestinian identity and subject it to international control.

Western diplomacy, thus, endeavored to sever Jerusalem from its Palestinian roots—a strategy the Zionist movement capitalized upon to manufacture a new reality in which the city would appear inherently Jewish. This ambition found fertile ground in British Mandate policies, which systematically redrew Jerusalem's municipal boundaries to exclude Palestinian neighborhoods and incorporate distant Jewish settlements. These manipulations produced an artificial Jewish majority in the city as early as 1922 (Mustafa, 1997, pp. 36, 47).

The Mandate period marked the first systematic attempt to divorce Jerusalem from its Palestinian essence and forge a separate "Jerusalemite" identity. This strategy reemerged after 1967. Following the Jordanian administration of the West Bank and Jerusalem—during which the city was elevated in 1959 to the status of a municipality directly overseen by the Prime Minister and deemed the second capital after Amman—the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem in June 1967 advanced along two tracks. First, Israeli law was applied to the city as of 28 June 1967. Then, on 30 July 1980, the Knesset passed a law declaring Jerusalem the "unified capital" of Israel. Second, a legal framework was devised to redefine Palestinian Jerusalemites as Jordanian citizens—or later, as "undefined" residents—living under Israeli rule. The aim was to strip them of their Palestinian identity, reclassifying them as a separate category altogether (Salem, 2018).

Despite these machinations, the Palestinian identity of Jerusalemites endured with

vigor. This was most clearly manifested in the annual uprisings between 2014 and 2022—sparked by the brutal murder of the martyr Mohammed Abu Khdeir in 2014—defending the rights of children, the neighborhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan, the sanctity of al-Aqsa Mosque, and the Christian churches of the city.

Western and Zionist policies, from the nineteenth century to the present day, have engendered a profound identity struggle in Jerusalem: a battle between its original Palestinian character and an imposed Israeli identity. This imposition has taken the form of engineering a Jewish majority in East Jerusalem, camouflaged by the limited naturalization of Palestinians, while the majority have been subjected to home demolitions, evictions, and land seizures to expand Zionist colonies. This has established a relentless cycle of internal displacement, laying the groundwork for eventual expulsion, in line with the "Decisive Plan" proposed by the Zionist right since 2017 (Smotrich, 2017).

Thus, from the nineteenth century to this day, Jerusalem has been transformed into a city of war—with a brief interlude of peace in its eastern sector during the Jordanian era. This state of conflict will not be resolved until the city regains its authentic Palestinian visage, one that embraces diversity and plurality and governs itself in a manner that secures peace and safety for all its inhabitants—those who accept the principles of mutual coexistence, free from domination or aggression.

The Palestinian identity of Jerusalem is inseparable from its Arab essence—for Palestine is an integral part of the Arab nation—and it is likewise bound to its Islamic, Christian, and human dimensions. These facets are not contradictory but mutually enriching, imbuing the city with the depth of its Arab, Islamic, Christian, and universal heritage, as the following exposition shall illuminate.

Secondly: The Religious Dimension—The Rights of the Three Faiths in Jerusalem Between the Established and the Invented

Within academic literature and scholarly research, there is no contention regarding the Christian religious rights in Jerusalem. Indeed, there was an era

in the city's history when it was wholly Christian (Abu al-Nasr & Hazboun, eds., 2023). During this Christian epoch, various civilizations and tribes succeeded one another in Palestine, among them Arab Christian tribes.

Today, the Christian presence in Jerusalem and Palestine comprises numerous denominations. Among the Catholic communities are the Melkite Greek Catholics, the Latin Church, and other Catholic sects including the Syriac Catholics, Armenian Catholics, and more. Alongside them are the Greek Orthodox, other Orthodox communities, and ancient churches representing diverse traditions such as the Syriacs, Armenians, Copts, Ethiopians, and the Maronite Church (Sabella, 2014, pp. 49–57).

The Protestant presence is equally diverse, tracing its origins to the Lutheran Reformation of 1517. It is mainly represented by three principal denominations: the Evangelical Lutheran, the Evangelical Christian, and the Evangelical Episcopal churches. These, in turn, encompass eighteen distinct churches, all of which enjoy theological, doctrinal, and administrative autonomy (Younan, 2023, pp. 224–225). This independence has resulted in notable differences between Palestinian Protestant denominations and their Western counterparts—particularly the Evangelicals who advocate Christian Zionist doctrines. In stark contrast, Palestinian Protestant churches reject these notions, assert their affiliation with the Palestinian people, and express deep pride in this identity. This position is consistently articulated by figures such as Bishop Dr. Munib Younan and Professor Mitri al-Raheb in their writings, interviews, and public engagements.

Another Protestant branch present in Jerusalem traces its theological lineage to the Calvinist reforms of the 1530s. These include the Presbyterian Church and Congregational churches (Younan, 2023, p. 227).

These denominations coexist peacefully in Jerusalem and have resolved their disputes amicably since the end of the Ottoman era. Previously, however, there were tensions—both among Christian sects themselves and between them and the Muslim community—rooted in the organic and post-organic structures

that historically fostered fragmentation and conflict. These sectarian strifes were addressed by Ottoman legal frameworks, particularly the citizenship and constitutional laws that enshrined equality among all Ottoman citizens regardless of religious affiliation. As a result, the mechanisms for conflict resolution gradually shifted from violence to peaceful dialogue—whether among Christians, between Christians and Muslims, or among Muslims themselves.

Yet, despite this general accord, a deep rift remains between the Palestinian Christian sects and the broader Palestinian populace on one side, and the Evangelical and Christian Zionist churches that endorse Zionist control over Palestine on the other.

With the transition from organic and post-organic societies—rife with sectarianism and division—to civic models grounded in citizenship, many of these internal conflicts were mitigated, including in Jerusalem. However, alongside the Muslim-Christian understanding, a new dimension of conflict emerged: a Palestinian (both Muslim and Christian) confrontation with the Zionist presence in Palestine. This opposition, which dates back to the nineteenth century, was predicated on biblical narratives that sought to fabricate religious rights for Jews in Palestine, often with the assistance of Evangelical proponents. One manifestation of this was a 1911 British expedition that searched for the Temple, as documented by Abu al-Shaar based on articles from al-Quds newspaper—edited by Georgie Habib Hanania between 1908 and 1914 (Abu al-Shaar, 2022, pp. 446–465). Another flashpoint was the contentious dispute over prayer rights at the Western Wall in 1928 and 1929, culminating in the 2020 "Deal of the Century." This plan declared al-Aqsa Mosque a sacred space for all three Abrahamic religions, stipulating that "people of all faiths may pray at al-Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount in a manner that is fully respectful of their religion, taking into account the times of prayer, holidays, and other religious factors" (from Salem, citing the text of the Deal of the Century, 2020, p. 52). The plan also fabricated thirteen Jewish religious sites in the city, as revealed by the Israeli organization Emek Shaveh (Emek Shaveh, 2020).

Hence, one may conclude that since the nineteenth century—especially during

the British Mandate—the most violent religious conflicts in Jerusalem have centered on the struggle between the Palestinian people (Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans) and the Zionist movement and its Christian Zionist allies in the West. Internally, though religious contradictions and sectarian differences persist within Palestinian society, the people have succeeded in establishing peaceful mechanisms for managing these divergences. In other words, Palestinians have transformed what were once sources of fragmentation, division, and violence into a framework of peaceful coexistence. This transformation is paving the way for a comprehensive model of social integration grounded in an embrace of diversity—a diversity that is no longer a source of weakness, but a wellspring of resilience and unity, enabling a shared civic life among the nation's many communities.

Thirdly: The Social Dimension—The Mosaic of Jerusalem's Society

One of Jerusalem's defining attributes is the mosaic nature of its society—a rich tapestry of communities that constitutes a vital source of strength. This diversity has never served to fracture the city. Rather, it has fostered interaction and synergy among its people, despite their varying origins and backgrounds. Nevertheless, this intercommunal interaction remains incomplete. Gaps persist in communication and familiarity among different social groups, with peaceful coexistence often falling short of true integration or shared living.

Yet these existing social fissures pale in comparison to the overarching conflict between the Palestinian people and Zionism—a movement that severed the organic bond between Palestinian Jews (once concentrated in Jerusalem, Safed, Tiberias, and Hebron during the Ottoman period) and their broader society. Zionism manufactured a struggle of dual identities within the city, seeking to displace the historically entrenched Palestinian identity of Jerusalem.

Owing to its global religious significance, Jerusalem has long drawn pilgrims and travelers from across the world. Many chronicled their encounters and impressions of the city, and some chose to remain, becoming part of its social fabric. Thus, alongside its native inhabitants—whose lineages trace back to the city's earliest

days—Jerusalem is home to individuals of Indian, Uzbek, Moroccan, Egyptian, African, Kurdish, Armenian, and European origin, many of whom arrived generations ago and have become integral components of its harmonious mosaic. These communities often define themselves by dual identifiers: referencing both their ancestral homelands and their Palestinian or Jerusalemite identity—or both.

The Armenians, whose numbers in the city and Palestine have dwindled to roughly one thousand (Agabekian, 2022, p. 16), variously identify as Armenian Palestinians or Armenian Jerusalemites. Agabekian elaborates, by name, the pivotal roles Armenians have played in Palestinian politics and society, describing them as inseparable from the national fabric (Agabekian, 2022, pp. 13–27). Some Armenians, however, identify solely as Jerusalemite Armenians, as several personally shared with the author.

A study of one hundred Moroccan-descended families found that 38% identified as Moroccan Jerusalemites, 32% as Moroccan Palestinians, 20% as Palestinian, 6% as Jerusalemite, 1% as Arab, and 3% opted for none of the listed identities (al-Ja'bah, 2021, pp. 8–9, with an introduction by Dr. Mohammad Salem al-Sharqawi). The Dom community, numbering about 1,500 in the city, describe themselves not as Israelis or Palestinians, but simply as Dom (Teller, 2022, p. 90). The rest of the groups, including the African community—numbering approximately 300 residents who inhabit the African Quarter near Bab al-Majlis by the al-Aqsa Mosque—identify as African Palestinians. These individuals once served as guards for Grand Mufti Amin al-Husseini and later participated in the Palestinian national struggle through various factions of the Palestine Liberation Organization (Teller, 2022, p. 98). Similar identity patterns are found among other groups.

Despite the relative variations in how these communities articulate their identities, such differences have not engendered conflict. Rather, they have coexisted peacefully across the ages, cultivating a shared identity and resolving internal disputes through dialogue grounded in mutual recognition and acceptance of diversity. Nevertheless, this pluralism has not yet matured into complete civic

integration, as previously noted.

In contrast to this emerging collective identity—a Palestinian one that embraces diversity and resolves internal conflicts through peaceful means—certain Israeli narratives seek to interpret Jerusalem's social mosaic outside the universal context of diversity found in societies around the world. These narratives deny the existence of a unified Palestinian identity, portraying Jerusalem instead as a mere patchwork of parallel local communities, not as a people with a cohesive national consciousness. They further assert that many of Jerusalem's social groups arrived only at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century, purportedly to forestall a Jewish majority, and lacking any shared national bond (e.g., Gotthiel, 2003).

Historical realities, however, reveal that the modern concept of national borders—where only those residing within fixed boundaries are deemed a "people"—is a relatively recent phenomenon, emerging in Europe with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648. Prior to this, European societies were open to movement and resettlement. Similarly, in the Arab-Islamic world, successive Islamic states regarded all residents of their vast domains as citizens, free to migrate within the state's territories without restriction. This remained the case until the fall of the Ottoman Empire, whose subjects could relocate freely across its lands.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement of 1916, followed by the British occupation of Palestine and the French occupation of Syria and Lebanon, brought an end to this freedom in the Levant, just as colonial powers had earlier disrupted it elsewhere in the Arab and Islamic world. Nonetheless, the Lausanne Treaty of 1924, signed between Western powers and the Ottoman state, established that those previously under Ottoman rule would become citizens of the newly formed states that succeeded it.

Accordingly, with the British Mandate in place from 1918, former Ottoman subjects residing in Palestine became Palestinian citizens under the 1925 Palestinian Citizenship Law. This law stipulated that all who had held Ottoman

nationality would now be granted Palestinian citizenship. Thus, all those who had arrived in Palestine before that time were recognized as legitimate citizens of the land.

By contrast, a problematic aspect of the British citizenship policy in Palestine lay in its facilitation of Jewish immigration and naturalization—an illegal process that enabled those who came to settle on Palestinian land to be granted citizenship. These settlers, unlike the former Ottoman subjects, were not legitimate residents of the land.

IV. The Cultural Dimension: A Mosaic of Cultural Identities

In 1938, Taha Hussein wrote of Egypt's manifold cultural countenances—Arab, Islamic, European, and Mediterranean (Hussein, 2014). Similarly, Milad Hanna later asserted that Egyptian identity springs from seven cultural wellsprings: Pharaonic, Greco-Roman, Coptic, Islamic, Arab, Mediterranean, and African (Hanna, 1989). A parallel can be drawn with Jerusalem, whose civilizational lineage traces back to the Natufian culture in the northwestern hills of the city during the Epipaleolithic period (14,000–8,000 BCE)—the very culture credited with humanity's earliest discovery of agriculture and the consequent shift to settled life (Adel, 2019). The Natufian civilization was preceded by twenty-seven other cultural stages across historic Palestine (al-Majidi, 2022).

Throughout the epochs of the Eastern Kingdoms, Palestine witnessed the successive dominion of the Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks, Romans, Byzantines, and then, from the year 638 CE onward, a succession of Islamic dynasties: the Rashidun, Umayyads, Abbasids, Tulunids, Ikhshidids, Fatimids, and Seljuks, until the Crusader invasions began in 1099 under the banner of the cross. These campaigns persisted until Salah al-Din al-Ayyubi liberated Jerusalem in 1187, ushering in the Ayyubid era which endured until 1250, though it, too, was marked by renewed Crusader incursions that continued until 1291. Thereafter came the Mamluk period (1250–1517) (for details, see: al-Muhtadi, 2020), followed by the Ottoman rule (1517–1917), the British Mandate (1917–1948),

and finally the Jordanian administration (1949–1967).

Jerusalem, then, is the heir to a vast and layered civilizational history in which myriad cultures have converged and intermingled. The contemporary Palestinian—especially the Palestinian of Jerusalem—thus embodies the legacy of these civilizations and their diverse cultures. This lived reality stands in sharp contrast to the Zionist historiography which anchors Jerusalem's history solely in the eras of David and Solomon, or to certain strands of Islamic historiography which limit the city's significance to the Islamic period alone. Both approaches diminish the ancient heritage of Palestine.

Indeed, throughout its many historical phases, Jerusalem has been a city of cultural plurality. In the waning days of Ottoman rule and the early British Mandate, for instance, both Palestine and Jerusalem thrived with intellectual and ideological ferment: Islamic, Christian, Palestinian nationalist, Arab nationalist, Marxist, humanist, and scientific thought all found vibrant expression, as documented in other studies published in al-Maqdisiyah and beyond (Salem, 2024; Salem, 2014). Newspapers of the period bore witness to lively debates on secularism, religion, women's unveiling and veiling, and feminist voices began to assert themselves in writing as well (al-Shomali, 1990). This cultural efflorescence encompassed music, art, photography, theatre, and song—nurtured in part by the influential radio station Huna al-Quds, as chronicled by Nasri al-Jawzi (al-Jawzi, 2010).

Such a portrait directly refutes the Zionist thesis that Palestine was an empty land, or a stagnant and backward society awaiting the civilizing mission of Zionism. Contrary to such claims (Ben Arieh, in al-Ja'ba, 2019, pp. 137–138), a dynamic society with social stratification and a flourishing cultural scene already existed—one that was arrested by the advent of the Zionist movement. The Palestinian people were compelled to divert their energies from cultural development to resisting colonization. The budding seeds of modernity, nourished by internal dynamics since the Ottoman reform era beginning in 1856 (Schulze, 1990), were effectively stifled and replaced by a settler-colonial modernization project imposed for Zionist ends at the expense of the indigenous people (Salem, 2014, pp. 20–22).

The Faces of Jerusalem:
al-Quds, Jerusalem, and Yerushalayim in Contemporary Reality

To grasp the full spectrum of Jerusalem's contemporary manifestations, one must glance back into its origins. The city was born as a Canaanite settlement known as Ursalimum or Ursalem, dedicated to the Canaanite deity Shalim. It is referenced in the Egyptian "Execration Texts" and in the Amarna letters of the nineteenth century BCE. This identity endured until political control was lost in the sixth century BCE with the Babylonian conquest. Notably, no archaeological evidence has substantiated the existence of the so-called "City of David" or "City of Solomon" alleged to have replaced the Canaanite Ursalimum (Nur al-Din, 2022, pp. 167, 169, 181–182). Later, the Romans renamed it Aelia Capitolina, a title that persisted until the Islamic conquest. There is also scholarly doubt regarding whether the city was ever known as "Jebus" before these periods (Nur al-Din, 2022, pp. 173–174).

The name "al-Quds" emerged after the entry of Caliph ʿUmar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb into the city in 636 CE. Initially termed Bayt al-Maqdis, it was later shortened to al-Quds. During the Ottoman period, it came to be known as al-Quds al-Sharif. This nomenclature reflects the city's Arab-Islamic rule and its dual Arab and Islamic identity. In truth, Palestine's Arabness predates its Islamization: Arab tribes migrated to the region before the second millennium BCE, long before the term "Arab" gained its specific cultural definition in the first millennium BCE (ʿUthmana, 2000, p. 2). Some of these tribes adopted Christianity, which itself was born in Palestine during the first century CE. However, it was Islam that ultimately gave the city its current name.

Christianity remained the majority religion in Palestine for three centuries after ʿUmar's entry into Jerusalem (ʿUthmana, 2000, p. 143). Thus, the city maintained a Christian majority—some of whom were Arab—for nearly a millennium before becoming predominantly Muslim in the tenth century, largely due to the settlement of Muslim soldiers and subsequent migrations (ʿUthmana, 2000, pp. 22–30). Christianity did not vanish under Islamic rule; it endured under the

dhimma system until its dissolution with the Ottoman Citizenship Law of 1869.

This historical panorama reveals that Jerusalem's Islamic heritage was preceded by a deep-rooted Christian era, itself built upon a foundation of older civilizations. The city's richness, therefore, resists all exclusive narratives—whether Islamic, Christian, or Arab. It is, instead, an intricate whole: a quintessentially Palestinian city, bearing the imprints of all who have passed through its gates.

It is Zionism alone that seeks to monopolize the city's narrative, reducing it to a solely Jewish heritage rooted in the contested reigns of David and Solomon. Consequently, Zionism—backed by Evangelical fundamentalism—refuses to recognize the rights of any non-Jews in the city. In contrast, the Palestinian narrative embraces the idea that today's Jerusalem is the culmination of all the civilizations and cultures that have shaped it, envisioning a future rooted in shared citizenship and a celebration of diversity.

Muslims and Christians in Palestine are united in their Palestinian identity, their Arabness, and their shared humanist vision that cherishes plurality. They collectively reject the exclusivist appropriation of Jerusalem, a project advanced by both Evangelical and Zionist forces seeking to impose a singular identity on the city while marginalizing its Islamic and Christian heritages.

Evangelicalism, in fact, gave birth to Christian Zionism before Jewish Zionism emerged. It was Evangelicals who cultivated the leadership of the latter from among assimilated Western European Jews, tasking them with organizing the immigration of Eastern and Southern European Jews—communities less integrated into their respective societies. In a 1977 study, Abbas marvels at Theodor Herzl's abrupt transformation from a staunch advocate of Jewish assimilation into European societies to a zealous promoter of Jewish emigration and the establishment of a Jewish state—an endeavor eventually focused on Palestine, though other territories such as Cyprus, Sinai, Argentina, and Uganda had been considered (Abbas, 2011 ed., p. 33). Zionism, then, was superimposed upon Palestine, disrupting its civilizational continuity and instituting an alien framework bent on erasing its

people, history, culture, society, economy, polity, legal order, physical landscape, and collective memory—and replacing them with a Zionist surrogate. This is the aberrant reality now unfolding in Palestine and Jerusalem.

Thus, the pivotal question arises: what conditions must be met to restore Jerusalem to its rightful path as a city of dialogue, cultural encounter, and diversity? The reawakening of Jerusalem's cosmopolitan spirit is far from inevitable—it demands deliberate action and the cultivation of its necessary foundations.

Today, Muslims and Christians in Jerusalem stand united as the city confronts the coercive replacement of al-Quds with Yerushalayim, aided in this process by one face of Jerusalem—namely, its Western incarnation. This "Jerusalem" comprises two broad Western visions. The first does not seek political sovereignty over the city in the name of religion, but instead defends the legitimate right of all Christian denominations to independently manage their holy sites under Palestinian sovereignty. This is the position of the Vatican, the Catholic Church, and other Christian communities in Jerusalem. Politically, this current also supports the Palestinian right to self-determination and the designation of Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state. This vision—shared by both Catholic and other Christian churches—embodies a peaceful coexistence between al-Quds and Jerusalem.

The second Western vision—Christian Zionism—weds Jerusalem to Yerushalayim in a joint endeavor to erase al-Quds, temporarily in favor of Zionism and ultimately for Evangelical Christianity, which anticipates a final showdown at Armageddon. In this eschatological vision, Jews who refuse to convert will be annihilated.

Accordingly, al-Quds stands in fundamental opposition to Yerushalayim. Meanwhile, the two visions of Jerusalem remain split—one aligning with al-Quds and the Palestinian narrative, the other with Zionism. It is noteworthy that the first group within the West also affirms the right of Jews to practice their religion in East Jerusalem without political sovereignty, while maintaining Israel within its pre-1948 borders.

Yerushalayim is a city built on myths—a superimposed identity that seeks to overwrite the existing one, expanding Jerusalem's boundaries at the expense of the 1967-occupied Palestinian territories. This project of reengineering is pursued through coercion and compulsion: demanding loyalty to the Israeli state, displacing those who refuse, or killing those who resist.

In contrast, al-Quds, along with the congruent vision of Jerusalem, advocates a civilized model of peaceful coexistence—one that integrates Israel within its 1948 borders into the regional fabric, respects religious freedoms for all faiths, and reimagines Jerusalem as a global cultural and spiritual center open to all peoples and the adherents of the three monotheistic religions.

Conclusion: From Fraught Contradictions to the Advancement of a Pluralistic Palestinian Jerusalem

In sum, Zionism, with its exclusivist ethos, offers no civilizational vision for Jerusalem—nor do the Evangelicals, whose theological project rests upon gathering all Jews in Palestine, propping up the State of Israel as a precursor to their conversion to Christianity. Those who resist conversion, in this apocalyptic scheme, are to be slain, so that "Evangelical Jerusalem" may supplant the real Jerusalem, along with the spirit of coexistence it has long embodied. Thus, the Zionist and Evangelical projects—though presently allied—form a temporary and opportunistic coalition. Together, they fuel a cycle of perpetual war and bloodshed, seeking first the triumph of a Yeroshalem imposed upon both Jerusalem and its Palestinian people, to be followed by the Evangelical conquest over Zionism and the Jews themselves, in a bid to resurrect an exclusivist Christian Palestine—one that monopolizes Jerusalem and expunges every trace of otherness from its fabric.

In stark contrast, the true civilizational project—one rooted in historical reconciliation—is borne by the custodians of Jerusalem's face, alongside those among the bearers of Jerusalem's many faces. Zionism and Evangelicalism now face a pivotal choice: to persist in their unilateral exclusivity or to relinquish it in favor of shared life, opening the city to the entire world.

Within the details of this envisioned shared life lies the enduring vision of the late Faisal al-Husseini, who proposed that Jerusalem serve as the political capital of two states, while safeguarding freedom of worship for the three Abrahamic faiths. His vision preserved the city's unity between East and West Jerusalem, granting unfettered access to holy sites for all, and restoring the rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites to reclaim their properties in West Jerusalem (Husseini, 1995 and 1998). That vision remains viable today—but its realization depends on developing the means to compel both Zionism and global Evangelicalism to relinquish their monopolistic designs. Should they refuse, the path may shift from the paradigm of an open Jerusalem within a two-state solution, to a struggle for a single, unified state—free from Zionism and Evangelical ambition alike.

Jerusalem may persist as a locus of bloody conflict. Yet within it lies a latent project—a reservoir of potential—that could transform it into a civilizational beacon for all humankind. This is a possibility still within reach.

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