

## *Introduction*

In Jerusalem, Israelis and Palestinians must confront each other, and the faithful must deal with those who do not believe. Its neighborhoods are divided among rival nations and religions. Although their residents may ride the same buses and walk the same streets, buy and sell from one another, draw their water and electricity from the same sources, they all strive to insulate themselves from those who live differently.<sup>1</sup> Each community is enclosed within its separate spaces, inhabited by those who order the world in the same way.

Contacts between communities must be carefully managed. The most uncomfortable encounters are often among kinsmen, within Jewish and Arab communities, not between them. Blood enemies evoke a mutual invisibility, fear, or hatred when one oversteps accepted boundaries. But fellow Jews and Arabs who violate the deeply felt commitments of their kinsmen are more likely to elicit disdain and anger.

On her way downtown, for example, a young Israeli woman takes a shortcut through an unfamiliar Jerusalem street. The *hamsin*, hot desert winds that will sweep the midday streets clean of people, are blowing from the east. She is wearing a t-shirt, blue denim skirt, and open leather sandals; her skin is the color of burnished leather; and one can just make out a flowered pattern on her brassiere.

Orthodox Jewish men in their late teens and early twenties stand around, cloaked in black. Their skins, alabaster from study, glisten with sweat. Side curls dangling, they hiss as the woman passes. One spits at her feet. Averting her eyes, she clutches her purse, hurrying to regain modern ground. The young men feel their neighborhood has been violated by a brazen woman whose nakedness bespeaks an empty freedom. Arriving home, the woman contemptuously recounts her treatment at the hands of the *schwartzes*, medieval fossils, the “blacks.”

Jerusalem is a site of multiple sovereignties and sacralities. The routines of life easily get caught up in cultural battles over the identity of Israel and Palestine, Judaism and Islam. Personal choices express collective destinies, the taking of sides. Where to live, when to work and play, and with whom to be friends are choices freighted with deeper meanings.

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Political debate among Israelis, Jerusalem, 1984.

Soccer is a Jerusalem passion, but the city failed to build a stadium during the first half-century of Israeli statehood. When the municipality finally set out to construct one in the suburbs, masses of devout Jewish men turned the streets into an angry, black-coated sea. They didn't want the stadium built near their neighborhoods. In fact, they didn't want it built at all. A football stadium, especially one where games would be played on the Jewish sabbath, would desecrate this holiest of places. They accused their municipal leaders of being "Hellenizers," a reference to Jews who thousands of years before had tried to make Jewish culture more cosmopolitan, more like the Greeks'. Then, too, there had been "games" in the city. Orthodox Jews performed a ritual exorcism of Mayor Teddy Kollek, intending to do him physical injury, even kill him. The decision to let the bulldozers loose almost brought down the national government, preventing Israel from responding to a diplomatic opening toward peace.

Similarly the decision to build a road, hire a worker, go to a movie, or live in a neighborhood can be absorbed into, or come to express, struggles between opposing social movements, between nations, between states far from Jerusalem. The right to rent an apartment, build a house, add a room, construct a synagogue or mosque, pray at a wall, or walk down a street can form the basis for communal warfare and government crisis.

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In 1991, some Israelis bought title to some old stone houses in an Arab neighborhood inhabited by Palestinian tenants. They paid good money, signed contracts. It was all legal. Then, in the night, submachine guns slung over the men's shoulders, they moved into their new homes. Soldiers who accompanied them ate sandwiches left behind in haste by the Arab tenants as they fled. Other Palestinians, returning to homes in which they had lived for decades, found their furniture thrown out the window, their bedding stuffed into an outhouse.

"It's just like 1948," an old Palestinian man, his face field weathered, told us as he fingered amber beads, watching the news on Israeli television. Palestinians threatened to kill both their new Israeli neighbors and the Arab residents who had sold them the properties. "Apartheid!" a Palestinian cursed indignantly to us. "If a Jew can't live in Zion, that would be apartheid," a white-bearded rabbi replied. The Jews' move into the Arab neighborhood, which had to be defended around the clock by Israeli soldiers, was both authorized and financed by the Israeli government. It coincided with American pressure on the Jewish state to negotiate with the Palestinians and was accompanied by almost daily demonstrations and repeated protests by the American Department of State.

The routines of daily life in Jerusalem continually threaten to explode into partisan conflict, into demonstrations and rock throwing, into the deployment of troops and waves of terror. In other cities, citizens share a bedrock of belief; the metropolis is a more mundane and private landscape. Those who govern can manage the city through marginal adjustments in the distribution of office, honor, and wealth; through protection of life's routines from disruption.

But in Jerusalem, there is little common reality upon which citizens can stand and adjudicate their differences. Ordinary lives are suffused with extraordinary significance, radiating the power of collective purposes, irreconcilable and endlessly in conflict. The city is not just a profane backdrop to the daily round, a public instrument for the pursuit of private happiness. It is a symbol of each community's collective identity.

In other cities life can be lived as a relatively brief sequence of biographical moments, but in Jerusalem personal life derives its significance from shared understandings about the long sweep of history, from epic stories that revolve around this city and culminate here. Many see God's hand in that history, giving private life a cosmic, redemptive meaning. People who construe their days so differently cannot easily live as neighbors.

Separation in space is a way to manage conflicts between communities who cannot share historical time. Each community holds fast to the city, strives to multiply its numbers, to expand the space it controls. Each

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Jewish graves on the Mount of Olives and Palestinian homes below Silwan, 1991.

battles with the weapons at hand. Simple acts of municipal construction incite group passions. The bulldozers threaten to disturb the past. It is not simply that in an ancient city digging anywhere is likely to unearth relics or graves. New construction threatens to disrupt the sedimented agreement about who can do what and where. Building reshapes the terrain of group conflict. The stones of the city mark too many miracles, too much ancestral blood, to be rationally rearranged. And so the cement mixers may be followed by demonstrations, litigation, fistfights, and riots. Jerusalem is a battleground with entrenched positions. It cannot be governed, but must be ruled.

### *A Nation in Mind*

We can only make sense of Jerusalem's explosive energies if we understand the struggle is for identity, not just for stone. Even as Israelis and Palestinians strive to control the city, both are building new nations.

A century ago, the nations of Israel and Palestine did not exist. The Israelis and the Palestinians literally had to invent themselves, to imagine themselves as particular peoples armed with an essential, preeminent claim to this land. For both it was an arduous task. The Jews who would become Israelis needed to separate themselves from the nations

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among whom they had lived for generations. To build a national identity beyond ethnicity and religion, they felt compelled to assert their radical difference from those Jews who would not follow them to Palestine. The Palestinians, likewise, had to disengage themselves from the larger Arab nation that surrounded them and fought its enemies in their name.

A nation is a fantastic thing; making one involves an imaginary fusion of a people, a land, a history, and the authority of a single state. It requires the fashioning of a collectivity who believe there is an identity between them and the land, who understand themselves to have a history, a story tracking a distinctive path through time. This meaning of this location, this narrative binds a people to the state claiming sovereignty over the land in their name.

Communities of blood and belief must make claim to particular territories and histories as their own. Nation building is at once mundane, based in the material space and time of existence, and yet a magical transfiguration of people based on an imagined history and homeland that they envision together. Peoples who claim nationhood inhabit imaginary continents and literary fictions at the same time they live in and through real territories and histories shaped by the force of circumstance and state armies, schoolteachers and tax collectors. The national interest is the common reading of a map and a history. A nation must be manufactured in the imagination if it is to cohere through time on the land.

A people only makes history when they believe they have a history to make, when they understand themselves as distinct, with an essential nature, a character worth reproducing across the generations. The collective actions that mark off the land – settlement by pioneers and ancestors, the definition of boundaries and their determined defense – are seminal moments in the making of a people. Through the historical struggle to cohere in space, a people takes form, a truth exemplified by Israel and Palestine. Both measure their nation's character by how they take, hold, and husband the land. The bounding of the nation's body in space is essential to its bonding in time. Through that bounding a nation is born. The land becomes the body of the whole people. They defend it with their lives, for it embodies their collective life. In nationalist vision, Jewish settlement and Palestinian steadfastness, the first building the land and the other holding on to it, have always been imbued with a sacred aura.

Both the Israelis and the Palestinians were formed as new nations in this century. The Israelis, dependent upon immigration and new settlement, and the Palestinians, a population in place, faced different challenges in creating a nation and bounding the land as their own. Both initially faced serious doubt among their own people that a separate nation-state was necessary.

To form a nation, the Israelis were required to separate themselves, both physically and mentally, from a larger population of Jews who were indifferent, if not hostile, to the project of building a Jewish nation-state in the Middle East. The Zionists wanted to make an ancient memory that had become a messianic dream for religious Jews into a modern historical reality. An earlier Jewish nation, unified and fractured, vanquishing and then vanquished by its neighbors, incorporated and released by different empires, destroyed and rebuilt, had endured for a millennium. But it had been two thousand years since a Jewish state had existed in any form in *eretz-yisrael*, the land of Israel. Since Roman legions captured Jerusalem in 70 C.E., razed the city's Temple, and crushed the nationalists who wanted their freedom, Jews had been dispersed throughout the world.<sup>2</sup>

During the nineteenth century, the overwhelming majority of Jews believed they could find political freedom and personal security as citizens of the modern nation-states then being consolidated throughout Europe and the Americas. Wherever they were allowed, Jews became patriots of the new order, embracing the liberties of the marketplace, the classroom, and the ballot box. They would be good French citizens or Americans on the street, and good Jews at home.

Zionists, the nationalists who first began in the late nineteenth century to seek a Jewish nation-state, had to transform and transport themselves to a nation etched only in biblical imagination, not on the ground. The early Zionists were drawn from Russia and Poland, where liberties were few and fragile, where Jews faced official discrimination at every turn. Jews had lived in the land of Israel, particularly in Jerusalem, for centuries, but the land was overwhelmingly inhabited by Arabs.

For the Palestinians, building a nation was no less difficult. They had an important advantage: they were resident in the land the Romans renamed Palestine after crushing the Judeans. But Palestine had been a province in the Ottoman Empire for centuries. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the empire crumbled. At the close of World War I, when the European powers divided the Middle East among themselves, Palestine became a British mandate. Britain signed the Balfour Declaration promising the Jews a national home there, and as Jewish immigrants streamed into the land, local Arabs mobilized against what they understood to be European colonization. By what right did England in 1917, and later the United Nations in the aftermath of Nazi genocide in 1947, grant immigrant Jews the prerogative to fashion a state in their midst?

However, it was not evident in the region, even to the Palestinian Arabs themselves, that they should create an independent Palestinian state. After World War I, the Palestinians rose against the British and the Zionists in the context of a larger Arab mobilization against foreign

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domination, whether Turkish or West European. Arabic-speaking peoples declared themselves to be a single great nation that would beat back the colonial thrusts of the West and reclaim and replicate their glorious past, when the greatest mathematicians, doctors, poets, astronomers, and architects were Arab and the West lived in comparative squalor and ignorance. Palestine's Mediterranean shore was the Arab nation's most important western front.

Arab nationalists understood the divisions between Arab states as arbitrary colonial legacies traced on the maps by alien conquerors. Palestinians saw themselves as a vanguard of this larger Arab nation, *al-qawmiyya al-arabiyya*, in its struggle to throw off Western colonization. Indeed, Palestinian intellectuals, particularly the minority Christians, had been important in the first fashioning of Arab nationalism. Arab nationalists understood the expulsion of Jewish colonists as crucial to the liberation of the Arab homeland. The Palestine Liberation Organization was formed in 1964 under Egyptian tutelage as an instrument by which the Egyptians might bolster their claim to lead the Arab nation. Palestinians themselves counted on the armed might of the Arab world to free their land.

Colonial and ethnic rivalries quickly shredded the dream of a unitary Arab nation-state. Soon after the First World War, the one Arab nation was carved into a multitude of states. But the vision of unity endured, particularly as a mantle of legitimacy for expansion. As it took territory, each Arab state claimed it was reaching toward the larger nation. Neighboring Arab states naturally claimed Palestine as an extension of their own land. From the east, the Hashemite Kingdom of Transjordan considered these lands its territorial prerogative. To the north, the Syrians fervently believed Palestine should be a province in Greater Syria. Many Palestinians, including some of its preeminent warriors against Zionism, supported one or the other of their claims. That the Palestinians should or could fight on behalf of a separate state of their own was a premise that would have to be established.

The several Arab states won their independence. But after all the European soldiers had debarked, the Arab embassies had opened, and the oil fields had been nationalized, the Jews remained behind, their state in place, humiliating proof that the Arab nation was indeed more rhetoric than reality.

### *At the Center Stands a City*

At the center of all great nations stands a city, a nucleus of power. From its ramparts, rulers ride out to pacify the periphery, commands are given

and laws passed, revenues flow in and expenditures out. From this spot, elites attempt to orchestrate the life of their people, to bind them as a nation, and to protect those boundaries from others who would claim their loyalties. A nation's frontiers are at once physical and cultural.

This power center becomes the locus of a nation's identity, its most important signifier. Those who believe in the nation come here to hear its voice and to speak in its name, to see its face and be seen as one of its own. It is in the capital city where the mandate to rule is reaffirmed, where critical events in a people's history are compressed and ritually remembered, where its most important ancestors are often buried. The city, a physical concentration of buildings and bodies, becomes a symbol of the nation, the fixed point from which the global expanse and the chaos of time take on a particular perspective.

Israelis and Palestinians both see themselves through Jerusalem's eye. The city is the symbolic center of their two nations, the foundation stone of their claims to the land. Both stand on this city as their capital.

Israel was first forged into a unified nation from Jerusalem some three thousand years ago, when King David seized the crown and united the twelve tribes from this city, located on a stony spine in the no-man's-land between the fractious tribes. David renamed this conquered village Zion, a new capital of a new nation. For a thousand years, Jerusalem was the seat of Jewish sovereignty, the household site of kings, the location of its legislative councils and courts.

In exile, the Jewish nation came to be identified with the city that had been the site of its ancient capital. Jews, wherever they were, prayed for its restoration. The modern Jewish nationalists likewise called themselves Zionists. When the 1948 war ended, the new state of Israel had survived. But the frontiers marked by trenches and mine fields did not include Zion. Israel had lost control over King David's capital, had been expelled from the Old City by Jordanian Legionnaires.

Israel's Jewish citizens were concentrated along the Mediterranean coast. Nonetheless, David Ben-Gurion, the first prime minister, declared the modern Jewish part of Jerusalem outside the old walled city, dating back only to the nineteenth century, to be Israel's national capital. The Zionists built their capital outside the walls of Zion, in an even more modern suburb, their national future seemingly spread below them to the west along the sea. In the new Jerusalem they built a memorial to the Holocaust, the singular barbarity that to many provided the historical imperative for a new Jewish nation-state. And here they buried the heroes who had died to make it so.<sup>3</sup>

But Zion, the ancient capital, lay to the east in enemy Arab hands. The Zionists could only turn and look longingly at the monuments that provided the mythic template for their return. They could not go there until



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1967, when Israel conquered the city from which its nationhood had originated. Israel declared the walled city to be an inseparable part of a unified Jerusalem. It had always been Israel's capital. It was as if it had been waiting for them. It was theirs now and they would never let go.

Jerusalem was also central for the Palestinian nation. Although the coast was peppered with nationalist leaders and intellectuals, only the old families of Jerusalem successfully vied for the right to speak in the name of the Arabs of Palestine. Divided between the more urban and urbane coast and the rural and traditional highlands, between Muslim and Christian, fragmented among jealous towns and villages, divided by intensely loyal networks of extended kin, penetrated and manipulated by agents of the surrounding Arab states, the Palestinians were forged into a nation from Jerusalem.

But the Palestinians never achieved a state of their own. Until the *intifada*, which exploded in 1987, their most determined effort was led by rival Jerusalem families a half century before. This rebellion, between 1936 and 1939, against British and Zionist colonization degenerated into a civil war between those who wanted independence and those who saw their future with the Jordanians, between those who refused to accommodate a Jewish state and those willing to make their peace with it. In 1948, those Palestinians who were still willing to fight for an independent state were beaten from the west by the Zionists, and from the east by the Transjordanians, who conquered the Old City and claimed all the lands the United Nations had allotted to the new Palestinian state for themselves. Although many Palestinians, particularly the large landed families, were happy to be part of the new Jordanian order, others rebelled. At the 1948 war's end, these Palestinians formed their first provisional government in Gaza, a sandy strip along the coast held by the Egyptians. They declared Jerusalem the capital of the new state they still hoped to form. In 1964, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), a nationalist movement aiming to rid Palestine of Zionist occupation, was established in Jerusalem. But the city was then Jordanian territory and so the PLO did not claim it as their capital. In 1988, forty years after the Palestinians' first provisional government, the PLO finally declared an independent Palestinian state and reaffirmed their national claim to Jerusalem.

The Israeli–Palestinian struggle for Jerusalem draws its desperate energy from the fact that each nation grounds its existence, its right to sovereignty, in the city's history, in the memories imprinted in its landscape and the ancestors buried beneath it. For almost a century now, two peoples have fought each other to control this town, struggled to hang on when their prospects looked bleak. For the underdog, residence has always been a form of resistance. Each fights for the city as an essential

part of the struggle to survive as a nation. The war for Jerusalem can never end because it is not just a war for the high ground of a stone city. It is a war to control a symbol.

*Sacred and Sovereign*

If Jerusalem were simply a piece of property on which to live and claim sovereignty, the conflict between Jewish and Palestinian nationalisms would be difficult enough. But this city is also a sacred center, the ground of faith. Over three millennia, the city has drawn pilgrims, a steady stream of new residents who waited and bore witness, warriors who fought for the faith. Many came because they believed God was near. Some believed their coming would bring him closer.

The site where God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac stands within the city's walled core, the same place, it is believed, where King David's son, Solomon, built the Temple to the one God of Israel. In Jewish thought, this was the center of the world, the hinge between heaven and earth. Here human history began and here it would end. When the Temple stood, Jews believed that pilgrimage to and sacrifice in its sacred precincts kept both social order and cosmos in place.

For challenging this Temple's priesthood and its complicity with Rome, the Galilean wonder-worker Yehoshua bar-Yosef, whom the Christian world would later know as Jesus, son of God, was crucified a thousand years after Solomon built the first Temple. Jesus died the death of a political criminal, not a religious heretic. Yet if Christianity understood the loss of Jewish nationhood and the destruction of the Temple as proof that God had transferred his covenant to a new community, devout Jews still believed that the restoration of sovereignty and the reconstruction of the Temple would signal the coming of their messiah, finally a king in David's line.

Jerusalem was also the destination of the Prophet Muhammad's magical "night journey" before ascending to heaven in the seventh century. The Prophet, Muslims believe, tied his winged steed, al-Buraq, to the Western Wall of the Temple Mount, the same outer wall made of huge blocks of hewn stone where Jews still pray fervently for the Temple's rebuilding. Muhammad rose to heaven from an enormous rock in the midst of the platform that once housed Solomon's Temple, the same one where Isaac was bound for sacrifice.

Islam began as a religion of conquest, the veracity of its followers' faith proved by the military victories of those who wielded swords in the name of their Prophet. Shortly after Muhammad's death, Islam's second caliph (*khalifa*, from which the word derives, means "successor"), con-