

Al-Quds and Yerushalayim: Two Names for Two Cities

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It was only in the middle of the 19th century that the residents of Jerusalem began to live outside the historic walled city. For Jews that walled city was Yerushalayim, for Arabs it was Al-Quds - one city, with two different names. The Old City constitutes less than one percent of present-day Jerusalem, yet for both Israelis and Palestinians it remains the very heart of Jerusalem.

Of Jerusalem, Israeli officials tend to say, "There are some issues on which we will never reach agreement with the Palestinians." Perhaps this is true of the Old City, but what about the other 99 percent of Jerusalem? Might it not be possible to dramatically transform the Jerusalem question by reaching agreement on the 99 percent and then finding a modus vivendi for the unresolved one percent?

The plausibility of the familiar assertion, that it is impossible to resolve the Jerusalem question, rests on treating the city as a single aggregate - as though there were one unified, coherent entity that is Jerusalem. Yet Jerusalem is anything but a coherent whole. Residentially it is starkly segregated. Virtually no Palestinians live in West Jerusalem. With the exception of the Old City, almost all Israelis living in East Jerusalem live in physically distinct neighborhoods, often appearing as fortress communities surrounded by undeveloped land.

THE EASTERN ENLARGEMENT

What we today call "East Jerusalem" is not merely the eastern part of the city that Israelis were cut-off from when the city was divided between 1949 and 1967. Within weeks of overpowering Jordanian forces and unifying the city, Israel significantly redefined the boundaries of Jerusalem, including - for the first time - areas of the West Bank that had never historically been part of Jerusalem. This 1967 expansion of East Jerusalem is roughly ten-times the size of East Jerusalem as defined when it was under Jordanian control (prior to the June 1967 war). This area, which we might call "the eastern enlargement," is the only part of the West Bank that Israel has actually incorporated into Israel proper.

The eastern enlargement is a critical space for maneuver. In no sense is it a coherent part of the rest of the city. Indeed, significant parts of it are not an urban environment at all. In addition to the post-1967 Jewish neighborhoods, the enlargement includes isolated Palestinian villages such as Um Tuba and Sur Baher. In the north it runs to the edge of Ramallah with a corridor of Palestinian homes and occasional shops on both sides of the Jerusalem-Ramallah road. It includes a very extensive area of undeveloped land, some of which - such as Har Homa/Jabal Abu Ghunaym - is at the center of contention. This enlarged East Jerusalem even includes a Palestinian refugee camp. And it is within the enlargement that most of the 180,000 Palestinian residents live. Surely this is not what Israelis are thinking about when they aver their attachment to Yerushalayim; surely this is not the Yerushalayim mentioned in the daily prayers of the Jewish people for thousands of years.

Two recent studies (of which I was one of the researchers) explored the nature of Israeli and Palestinian attachments to Yerushalayim and Al-Quds. When we asked Israeli Jews, "How important to you as part of Yerushalayim" are various areas of the city, three features of the attachment to Jerusalem emerged:

1. Most Israeli Jews prioritize. Some parts of the city are more important to them "as part of Yerushalayim" than others.
2. This prioritization occurs among all groupings of Israelis, and there is a general consensus as to what the most important areas are.

3. Far greater importance is given to Jewish religious sites and Jewish neighborhoods (East or West) than is given to the areas where Palestinians live.

The analogous question was put to Palestinians with respect to Al-Quds (the Israeli questions were in Hebrew, and the Palestinian questions were in Arabic).

Here again we see the same three structural features: Palestinians prioritize, there is broad consensus as to the priority ranking, and far greater importance is given to religious areas (Islamic/Christian) and places where Palestinians live than is given to Jewish neighborhoods.

If we bring the two sets of data together, we find that within the entire city only the Old City and the Mount of Olives emerge as areas of extreme importance to both peoples. This area constitutes 1-2 percent of the entire city. And the Old City took on this centrality only when it was treated as a whole; when disaggregated into its national/religious quarters, only parts of it (e.g. the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif) are of vital importance to both peoples.

OPTION FOR NEGOTIATION

While caution is advised in drawing conclusions from this (e.g. that Israelis or Palestinians would readily relinquish claims over areas of lesser importance), there is a clear connection between how Israelis and Palestinians experience the essence of the city and how they respond to various compromise proposals. For instance, when Israelis are asked to respond to a proposal which itemizes their retention of the areas of the city that are most important to them, their general opposition to compromise on Jerusalem fades quite significantly. Thus, when asked:

"To what extent would you agree to cede the Arab neighborhoods of East Jerusalem to the Palestinians if the Old City, the Mount of Olives, all of the Jewish neighborhoods of East Jerusalem and Mount Scopus remain in Jerusalem as they are today?"

Israeli Jews responded:

Definitely agree 9%

Agree 33%

Disagree 31%

Definitely disagree 26%

Similarly, when one focuses on the parts of the city that are least important "as Yerushalayim" to Israeli Jews, substantial openness to transferring them to the Palestinians emerges. Thus, with respect to "the Arab settlements and villages previously in the West Bank which are now within the borders of Jerusalem (e.g., Shuafat, Um Tuba, Sur Baher, Beit Hanina)," we found that 45 percent of Israeli Jews would "seriously consider" transferring these areas to Palestinian sovereignty. This was a Plurality, as only 36 percent indicated thorough rejection of this option.

Yet it should not be thought that either people will readily let go of even those areas of relatively limited centrality. For instance, among Palestinians there was strong support for the following proposal:

"West Jerusalem would be under Israeli sovereignty and East Jerusalem would be under Palestinian sovereignty, with a special arrangement for Israeli control of the Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. The Old City would be dealt with separately." (52% seriously consider, 32% reject).

Yet when this was modified to:

"West Jerusalem and the Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem would be under Israeli sovereignty and the rest of East Jerusalem under Palestinian sovereignty, with the Old City dealt with separately," those willing to seriously consider the proposal fell to 28 percent, with those rejecting it rising to 57 percent. The difference between these two proposals was the difference between giving the Israelis "control" over Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem, as distinct from giving them sovereignty.

On the other hand, Palestinians showed significant support for the idea that "within the Old City, Israel would get sovereignty over the Jewish neighborhoods and Palestine would get sovereignty over the Palestinian neighborhoods" (41 percent to 47 percent). Of this however, no more than 23 percent of Israeli Jews would seriously consider the possibility.

There was also significant Palestinian support (50 percent to 35 percent) for "Palestinian sovereignty over the Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount) in exchange for Palestinian recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the Western Wall," but this too is thoroughly rejected by Israeli Jews, with only 20 percent willing to seriously consider it.