

The Growth of Nationalism over the Temple Mount / al-Masjid al-Aqsa

Conflicting Narratives/Palestinian Prospective

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Introduction

Taking in consideration, among other factors, the religious dimensions and the political leakage concerning the collapse of the final stages of negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, it seems that the compound of al-Haram al-Sharif is the most sensitive disputed site all over the world. Since 1967 and up till now, almost every act, move, aspect, weather it is Palestinian or Israeli, it has a contradicting sophisticated narrative. Sincerely it is at the center of the fierce dispute over the sovereignty of Jerusalem. The aim of this short paper is to shed some light on few aspects of diverse narrative and to explore the subjects of this contradicting narrative.

The decline or the rising of communities, especially if two have to live together in one country, as the situation with the Palestinian and Israeli, usually leads to the growth and strengthening of national and religious dignity. The eagerness to the past, would be for the former a remedy to escape the ugly frustrated present, while for the later, the past will be serve as a prototype, therefore the past for both will shape much of the present and to some extends the near future. Furthermore, past will be mixed with the present to dictate the form of the future community, and some times facts will be replaced by legends and folklore.

Historical Background

According to Islamic sources, Jerusalem and the Haram have a great position in the Islamic faith. The aim of this paper is not intended to explore that position in details, but it would be practical to underline in brief the principles of this position. Jerusalem is holy in Islam for it is associated with of David, Solomon's, and Jesus among other many prominent prophets mentioned in the Quran, it is the first Qibla, and the place from which the prophet of Islam Muhammad preformed his Night Journey miracle. Jerusalem is also blessed by Allah in his Holy book the Quran. Muhammad connected between Jerusalem from one hand and Mecca and Madina from the other hand. Muslims believe that

Jerusalem is the place of the Day of Judgment and the place of resurrection, and Mecca and Madina must come to Jerusalem in that day.

Umar the second Caliph, immediately after finalizing the accords with the Christian community, asked the Patriarch Sufronious to guide him to Mosque of David (al-Haram al-Sharif). His first act was to clean the dirt and to construct a simple Mosque. When the Crusaders conquered Jerusalem in 1099, al-Haram al-Sharif became the focal point in mobilizing the efforts to expel the Crusader. The Haram in particular and the city of Jerusalem in general were the subjects of countless poems, speeches, treaties and a symbol of *jihad* for decades to come. Even when al-kamal al-Ayyubi was sharply condemned for conceding Jerusalem to Frederick, he refuted those who criticized him by pointing that the compound of al-Haram al-Sharif, the Dome of the Rock, the Aqsa Mosque were under the Muslim authority. Furthermore, he mentioned that the call for prayer from the Haram's minarets never halted.

From the above-mentioned information, it is plain that al-Haram al-Sharif, as a major holy site has its impact on events on national and international level. It is reasonable to expect its role in times of confrontation and competitions to be augmented. Holiness has a crucial role in augmenting the tensions between the parties. It is a wide world practice and al-Haram al-Sharif and its surroundings in these regards surely are not exceptions. It is probable that shared historic or religious sites would generate a series of challenges in trying to maintain balance or preserve the status quo. The change of the status quo would much depend on the controlling authority.

The emergence of nationalism-

The British Mandate period

At the British Mandate time (1917-1948) in Palestine, a critical ongoing change concerning the Palestinian society took place. The conflict over the Western wall of the Haram al-Sharif or what is well known as al-Buraq revolution (1929) is a good example of the decline and a conflicting narrative between the Palestinian and the Israelis.

The wall is considered a holy site owned by and belong to the Muslims because it is an integral part of al-Haram al-Sharif architectural fabric, it is the place where al-Buraq (the horse) of Muhammad was tethered during the prophet ascent to heaven, it was a Muslim property supported with official legal documents for more than 13 century, and it is part of Abu Madyan Sufi Waqf foundation.

It is the Muslim sympathy during the early Ottoman period, which enabled the Jews to use a limited area to perform their prayer, provided that no religious tools would be used (tables, chairs, trumpets). During the Ottoman authority, both communities (Jews and Muslim) respected these arrangements. Later on 1929 at the British Mandate, these arrangements were ushered when the Jews

maintained constant crowds, leakage of rumors to buy the western wall, and the erection of a screen to separate between male and female worshipers. These acts viewed in the eyes of the Palestinian infringement of the existing arrangement, and if it were not halted it would be a new status quo.

The Muslims through the Supreme Muslim Legislative Council reacted by organizing Sufi circles with cymbals and drums, establishing of a nationwide campaign and forming a committee to rally support from abroad Muslim Community. In August 1929 clashes erupted, people from both side were killed and injured. The British Mandate Authority interfered to quell the riots, commissioned an international inquiry to discover the causes and requested to offer recommendations. The international committee ruled in favor of the Muslims saying that the wall among other premises is the sole property of the Muslim Waqf. The British Authority managed with difficulty to preserve the status quo till their mandate ended. Between the years 1948-1967 the issue was postponed till the morning of 11/6/1967 when the Israeli army dictates his own solution by erasing the Mughrabi neighborhood. In a matter of few working hours 135 home were demolished, ancient Buraq mosque and Affadali Ayyubid Madrassa were destroyed forever, and about 650 people lost their houses without warning.

Benvenisti, the former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, justified the act by Saying: “The Move was the settling of an historic account with those who harassed the Jewish people over the centuries, restricting it and humiliating it at its holiest place...” Though Benvenisti restrained by saying: the displaced inhabitants of the Mughrabi Quarter were not personally to blame, but it was their fate to be additional victims of the Arab –Israeli conflict”. In the view of the Muslims and the Palestinian this was unjust revenge with innocent simple people who never contributed in the historic humiliation of the Jewish people. Many simple Palestinian wonder if this humiliation or mistreat took place in the seventh century, when Muslim permitted the Jews to return to Jerusalem, after they have been barred for centuries by Roman and Byzantine, or in Muslim Spain, or in early 16 century when Suleiman the Magnificent allowed the Jewish to pray in front of the Western wall for the first time in history.

The fire of the Aqsa Mosque

In the morning of August 21, 1969, a fire at Masjid al-Aqsa erupted in southeastern wing of the mosque. Further to the spiritual religious shock, the fire caused a valuable destruction to the building¹.

¹ The fire caused a serious damage to the mosque and destroyed a masterpiece of Islamic art which embody a very historical and artistic values. It is the pulpit (minbar) that had been ordered by Nour al-Din Zanki twenty years before it was brought from Aleppo by Saladin in 583/1187. For a detailed report on the

The Palestinian narrative concerning the atrocity of the Aqsa fire is based on two levels: technical and legal. Examples of the first aspect are the slow response of the Israeli fire brigades, that the brigades from west bank cities arrived before west Jerusalem brigades, the haste misleading explanation to attach the fire to an electrical fault, the quick release and deportation of Rohan calming that he was insane and mentally ill, fostering and focusing one side pious information about the history and archaeological development of the site. The Muslims and the Palestinian see the burnt just from one angle, it is the hastening in the coming of the Messiah Mosque, in order to rebuild the Jewish third Temple on site of the Dome of the Rock. Unfortunately, in these days and after almost four decades, this opinion found a steady ground to prevail among great numbers of Arabs, Muslims, and the Palestinian.

With regard to the legal aspect, despite the fact that Rohan was not a Jew or Israeli citizen, but a fanatic Australian, Israel bear responsibility since the Israeli Knesset passed an amendment to the *Law and Administration Ordinance*, which extended Israeli sovereignty to the eastern part of the City of Jerusalem, including the Old City. It also the Israeli responsibility to safeguard the Muslim Holy sites according to international charters. This explains why the U.N. Security Council adopted a resolution condemning Israeli for failing to comply with the Geneva Conventions and international law (UNSC resolution 271).

The Tunnel excavations

What is called today the tunnel excavations, known also as Hasmonean tunnel, and "Western Wall Tunnel," is an ongoing project started immediately after the occupation of Jerusalem in June 1967. Though the responsible authority of the tunnel keep announcing that the works is over, yet from time to time leakage indicates that works in process².

First let us state that the Palestinian in general is not apposing the archaeological exactions in principle. It is the hidden aims, the methodology, and the way of the presentation of the results of the excavations which forced the concerned Palestinian to oppose theses activity, it worries them and they announce many protest and reservations.

The Palestinian attitudes consider these excavations illegal according to international law and Venice Charter. It was initiated and supervised by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. This is against the Israeli law that constitutes that

damage one can consult the massive reports at the Aqsa Mosque restoration committee at Jerusalem and Amman.

² Recently In early 1996s massive ventilation's equipments were installed in a newly constructed visitor center.

excavations must be conducted by professional archeologists³. However, to legitimize the excavation Meir Ben-Dov, was assigned to oversee the ministry dig, yet on a part-time basis.

The reports of the UNESCO contains many incidents, attempts of penetrations, damage caused such as large cracks, collapses of stairs) these appeared in to a group of Ayyubid and Mamluk architecture such as Ribat al-Kurd, al-Madrassa al-Jawhariyya, al-Madrassa al-Manjakiyya.

It is also the disturbing feelings that zealots Jews are digging under the Holy Haram and part and that excavation in Jerusalem in particular and in the rest of country is a political sensitive issue. It aims among other objectives to justify the creation of the State of Israel and the annexation of Jerusalem. It is not just the fear about the foundations of the mosques, which annoy the Palestinian, but also the continued efforts for changing of the Moslem character of Jerusalem. When the presentation of the revealed structures within the tunnel premises concentrate solely on Jewish heritage, avoiding to mention any Palestinian or Muslim contribution though it is presence⁴, and when converting certain space to be synagogue, the Palestinian have no way to understand this apart for being an intended attempts to concealing the Arabic Islamic for the sack of Jewish Israeli presence.

When the tunnel was opened for the public on 24 September 1996, a severe confrontation erupted, the worst since the peace process, it resulted in the death of 86 Palestinian, 15 Israelis, and thousands of injury. What a price?

The name and its implications

One of the fundamental issues of nationalism between the Palestinian and the Israelis in these days is the dispute over the names and its implications for the majority of the places all over the country. The compound located in the southeastern part of the Old City of Jerusalem, which comprises fifth of the area of the Old city, is one of the most important example. This site is usually called “The Temple Mount” by the majority of the Israeli or pro-Israeli writers. However, recent years have witnessed the growth of the circulation of this name within western media, literature, international organizations (UNESCO), and by certain American officials. The circulation of this name among the western scholar’s still limited though few would combine the “Israeli and Palestinian” names i.e. Temple Mount/ al-Haram al-Sharif. However, handy Israeli writes occasionally mention al-Haram al-Sharif or al-Masjid al Aqsa in their treaty provided that they deal with Arabic or Islamic period.

³ It seems that a deal has been researched between the Department of Antiquities and the Religious Affairs Ministry, to let the later have its dig as long as they don’t bother the major excavation conducted by Binyamin Mazar on the south of al-Haram al-Sharif.

⁴ In most informative labels exploring the structures the visitor will note that the term medieval instead of Mamluk or Ayyubid, and the second temple period to replace the Roman period.

For the majority Palestinian (ordinary or intellectual, religious or secular) the using of this name is an intended systematic attempt to deny the prolonged Muslim religious and cultural affiliation and associations to the site. Its political and religious implications are very obvious, and it is too difficult to comprehend even by some intellectuals, especially if this name is given while speaking about Islamic culture. Furthermore, this name lacks any scientific or academic approach; it could be similar to calling nowadays Spain by al-Andalusia, or naming someone known by George as Ahmad. One may digest the term "Temple Mount" if the account regarding the Biblical or the Roman period, but to report on Islamic affairs by calling it Temple Mount", is a clear manipulation to pave the way for replacing the standing Muslim monuments (the Dome of the Rock and the Aqsa mosque) by the distracted Temple. The replacement could be mentally, and later could be physically. This actually fits by some declared attitudes expressed once by the rabbi of the Temple Mount when he says that: We would like first to build the temple in the minds of the People'.

The continuation and the condensed usage of this term will certainly aggravate the situation; it will lead to negative overreactions, and would not help in promoting dialogue and cultural understanding of the shared Heritage among the ordinary persons. It worth mentioning that a practical approach for this matter has been discussed most recently by a group of intellectual made up of Palestinian, Israelis, and Western. It is suggested that whenever the account concerns the Islamic affairs the name of the al-Haram al-Sharif or al-Masjid al-Aqsa would be followed by the term "The Noble Sanctuary" to substitute "The Temple Mount".

The Sharon provocative visit to al-Aqsa 28/9/2000

"Message of peace".

For the Palestinians, there are countless reasons to reject and resist Sharon visit to the Aqsa Mosque (al-Haram al-Sharif). First lets take Sharon own words concerning his motivations for his visit. He says: "I came here to the holiest place of the Jewish people in order to see what happens here and really to help the feeling that we are now ready to move forward". There is no mention whatsoever for the Muslim or the Palestinian. By saying "I came to the holiest place of the Jewish people" Sharon is simply eradicating any Muslim associations to al-Haram al-Sharif, he ignore the standing remarkable architecture, which developed by Muslims Dynasties. One may wonders what he exactly means by stating "to move forward"? Is it the prelude of a formal move to the destruction of the two Mosques for the constructions of the third Temple? Is This the Sharon "message of peace"?

It worth noting that at the time of this visit al-Haram al-Sharif premises⁵ were opened to all visitors according to the arrangement agreed between the Awqaf and the police office. Actually the timing of the visit was extremely unfortunate;

⁵ The Islamic Museum, the Dome of the Rock, the Aqsa Mosque, and the opened courtyards. In certain cases also the Old Aqsa and the Marwani Musalla

the visit came after several years of quietness, and at a highly sensitive time for the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. The negative imprints of this visit can be seen in daily life of al-Haram al-Sharif, and it ended by the eruptions of the worst violence, which Jerusalem never witnessed for many years. Though the site is holy even in Sharon words (see above), the short limited visit was under heavy guard, and it ended by firing tear gas and rubber-coated metal bullets by Israeli forces.

Palestinian has no doubt that the visit is not innocent; it is so obvious that Sharon used the sensitivity of the site to generate votes in the coming elections, it is poorly a cheap political investments. To conclude, Sharon visit “was not a mere intended to underline the Jewish claim to the city of Jerusalem and its holy sites” as it is expressed by Hilary Andersson, the BBC correspondent, but also to abdicate the Muslim Arabic heritage.

Further topics for discussions

- Maintenance and restoration
- The rehabilitation of the Marwani Mosque
- The West bank residence and the Friday prayer
- Tourism and non-local residence visits