Politics and Religion: Israel's Unsustainable Politics of Exclusion in Jerusalem

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While the history of the world is moving decisively toward a culture of inclusion, diversity and pluralism, Israeli politics seems to challenge history by moving in the opposite direction of exclusion and unilateral self – righteous monopoly of geography, demography, history, archeology and culture, especially in Jerusalem, where Israelis are desperately trying to establish a "Jewish" capital for Israel and "the Jewish people" worldwide, excluding centuries old presence of Palestinian, Arab, Muslim and Christian deep-rooted existence and heritage, thus sowing the seeds of imminent conflict and foreseeable war by strangling a city that has historically been of diversified and pluralistic character and a flashpoint for human misery whenever exclusion becomes the rule of the day.

Israeli politics is not moving against history only, but is challenging world politics as well. Although the first Knesset of the newly born "state of Israel" voted on December 13, 1949 to move the seat of government from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, and despite Israel's annexation of east Jerusalem on June 27, 1967, which the UN Security Council declared "null and void," both unilateral declarations have never been accepted and recognized by the international community, not even by the U.S., Israel's strategic guardian.

More recently, while millions of Christians were celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ in Bethlehem, on the southern outskirts of Jerusalem, and the birth of Christianity in Jerusalem, the scene of Jesus' resurrection following his death by crucifixion, which is the cornerstone of Christian faith, the Knesset was, on Christmas day, scheduled to consider a draft law that would declare Jerusalem "the capital of the Jewish people" and the capital of Israel at the same time.

The fact that the ruling elite in Tel Aviv has made a prior recognition of Israel as a "Jewish" state a precondition for making peace implicitly and consequently applies to Christians as well, otherwise how could any observer interpret the still simmering crisis with the Vatican over the holy places in Jerusalem. The "Fundamental Agreement" signed by both sides on December 30, 1993, as well as an agreement on the recognition of the civil effects of ecclesiastical legal personality, signed on November 10, 1997, have yet to be ratified by Israel's Knesset. Some in the Israeli media has been recently accusing the Vatican of seeking to hold control of "Jewish holy sites" in Jerusalem .

The Vatican in the past supported making Jerusalem a corpus separatum, an international city in accordance with the UN Resolution 181 of 1947; Israel's non-compliance delayed Vatican's formal recognition of Israel until 1993.

More recently, the Vatican renewed calls for an internal agreement to protect the holy

places in Jerusalem . Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, head of the Vatican 's Council for Inter-religious Dialogue, and Vatican 's former foreign minister, declared "There will not be peace if the question of the holy sites is not adequately resolved. The part of Jerusalem within the walls – with the holy sites of the three religions – is humanity's heritage. The sacred and unique character of the area must be safeguarded and it can only be done with a special, internationally-guaranteed statute."

The only perceived threat to the holy places against which the Vatican is seeking protection comes from the Israeli politics of exclusion. Rabbi David Rosen, member of the Israeli delegation to the negotiations with the Vatican told the Israeli daily Haaretz on January 17, 2010 that Israel "has not been faithful to the pacts of 1993."

The precondition of recognizing Israel as a "Jewish state" is rejected by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), Israel's partner in peace accords, and its self-ruled Palestinian Authority, the 22-member League of Arab States and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC); in a statement he issued on December 26, 2011, the Secretary-General of the 57-member states of the OIC, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, condemned the Israeli draft law that declares Jerusalem "the capital of Israel and the Jewish people" as "a direct assault on the Palestinian people and their inalienable and clear rights" and "a flagrant violation of international law and international legitimacy resolutions," which affirm that Jerusalem is part of the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel in 1967. PLO representatives considered the Israeli draft law a "declaration of war" and a recipe for igniting a religious conflict. The Islamic – Christian Commission in Support of Jerusalem , in a statement, said if the Israeli draft law is passed it would make Jerusalem "for Judaism and Jews only, which means there would be no freedom of worship in the land of worship."

Israeli attorney and founder of Terrestrial Jerusalem, a Jerusalem-based NGO, Daniel Seidemann, wrote on November 30, 2011: "Cumulatively, Israeli policies in East Jerusalem today threaten to transform the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from a bitter national conflict that can be resolved by means of territorial compromise, into the potential for a bloody, unsolvable religious war. This threat derives from Israel 's dogged pursuit of the settlers' vision of an exclusionary Jewish Jerusalem."

"... Today, Israel must choose between two visions of Jerusalem . On the one hand, it can continue pursuing an exclusive, largely fictitious rule over an already divided, bi-national city — exposing Israel to virtually universal censure and imperiling the two-state solution. On the other hand, it can pursue policies that can make Israeli Jerusalem, Yerushalayim, a thriving national capital, recognized by all, existing side-by-side with but politically divided from the Palestinian capital in Jerusalem , al Quds. To those who cherish Israel and understand what is truly at stake, the choice is clear," Seidemann concluded.

What is much more important than excluding "a conflict that can be resolved by means of territorial compromise," is that the Israeli politics of exclusion in Jerusalem, which could be summarized by Judaization of the holy city, is a roadmap to de-Arabizing, de-Islamizing, de-Christianizing, de-historizing and de-humanizing Jerusalem, the oldest continuously inhabited city in the world, and this could not be anything but a roadmap to hell.

Absolutely this is unsustainable Israeli politics.

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