



## **Palestine and Israel: A Religious Conflict?**

November 9, 2024

Muslim Children Education and Civic Center (MCECC)

3:30-4:00: Mosque Tour (Main Building)

4:00-6:00 PUFPA Session (Memorial Building)

### WELCOME

- Introductions - Sajida Jalalzai, Mel Webb, Miriam Shoshanna Sobre, PhD

### POETRY

- "In Jerusalem," Mahmoud Darwish

### PRESENTATION

- Sajida Jalalzai, Miriam Sobre, Mel Webb

### SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION

- Facilitators: Olivia, Amanda, Brigid, Sajida, Mel, James,

### LARGE GROUP DISCUSSION

### POETRY

- "Red Brocade," Naomi Shihab Nye

### CONCLUSION

## POEM #1

### In Jerusalem

By Mahmoud Darwish

Translated By Fady Joudah

In Jerusalem, and I mean within the ancient walls,  
I walk from one epoch to another without a memory  
to guide me. The prophets over there are sharing  
the history of the holy ... ascending to heaven  
and returning less discouraged and melancholy, because love  
and peace are holy and are coming to town.  
I was walking down a slope and thinking to myself: How  
do the narrators disagree over what light said about a stone?  
Is it from a dimly lit stone that wars flare up?  
I walk in my sleep. I stare in my sleep. I see  
no one behind me. I see no one ahead of me.  
All this light is for me. I walk. I become lighter. I fly  
then I become another. Transfigured. Words  
sprout like grass from Isaiah's messenger  
mouth: "If you don't believe you won't be safe."  
I walk as if I were another. And my wound a white  
biblical rose. And my hands like two doves  
on the cross hovering and carrying the earth.  
I don't walk, I fly, I become another,  
transfigured. No place and no time. So who am I?  
I am no I in ascension's presence. But I  
think to myself: Alone, the prophet Muhammad  
spoke classical Arabic. "And then what?"  
Then what? A woman soldier shouted:  
Is that you again? Didn't I kill you?  
I said: You killed me ... and I forgot, like you, to die.

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Source: *The Butterfly's Burden* (Copper Canyon Press, 2007)

## POEM #2

### Red Brocade

Naomi Shihab Nye

1952 –

The Arabs used to say,  
When a stranger appears at your door,  
feed him for three days  
before asking who he is,  
where he's come from,  
where he's headed.  
That way, he'll have strength  
enough to answer.  
Or, by then you'll be  
such good friends  
you don't care.

Let's go back to that.  
Rice? Pine nuts?  
Here, take the red brocade pillow.  
My child will serve water  
to your horse.

No, I was not busy when you came!  
I was not preparing to be busy.  
That's the armor everyone put on  
to pretend they had a purpose  
in the world.

I refuse to be claimed.  
Your plate is waiting.  
We will snip fresh mint  
into your tea.

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## Questions for Small Group Discussion:

1. Based on your personal experience, how (if at all) do religion, nationality, race, and/or ethnicity shape your own sense of individual and/or communal identity?
2. How have your own religious/cultural identities and backgrounds influenced your views on Israel/Palestine?
3. Why do you think it's so common to hear about the political situation in Israel and Palestine as a "religious conflict"? Do you think this is a helpful or unhelpful framing of the situation?
4. Do you think it's possible for members of different religious backgrounds to come together in an effort to end Israeli occupation/liberate Palestine? If so, what are some of the ways you can imagine this happening? Can you think of other examples in which religious movements have successfully contributed to social justice causes?

## Palestine and shared religious significance

### **Old City of Jerusalem and its Walls** (from UNESCO World Heritage Site page)

*As a holy city for Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Jerusalem has always been of great symbolic importance. Among its 220 historic monuments, the Dome of the Rock stands out: built in the 7th century, it is decorated with beautiful geometric and floral motifs. It is recognized by all three religions as the site of Abraham's sacrifice. The Wailing Wall delimits the quarters of the different religious communities, while the Resurrection rotunda in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre houses Christ's tomb.*

### **Hebron/Al-Khalil Old Town** (from UNESCO World Heritage Site page) - designated in 2017

*The use of a local limestone shaped the construction of the old town of Hebron/Al-Khalil during the Mamluk period between 1250 and 1517. The centre of interest of the town was the site of Al-Ibrahimi Mosque/The tomb of the Patriarchs whose buildings are in a compound built in the 1st century AD to protect the tombs of the patriarch Abraham/Ibrahim and his family. This place became a site of pilgrimage for the three monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The town was sited at the crossroads of trade routes for caravans travelling between southern Palestine, Sinai, Eastern Jordan and the north of the Arabian Peninsula. Although the subsequent Ottoman Period (1517-1917) heralded an extension of the town to the surrounding areas and brought numerous architectural additions, particularly the raising of the roof level of houses to provide more upper stories, the overall Mamluk morphology of the town is seen to have persisted with its hierarchy of areas, quarters based on ethnic, religious or professional groupings, and houses with groups of rooms organized according to a tree-shaped system.*

## On Orientalism

Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979).

Mutually exclusive terms that scholars who see themselves as “Westerners” use to frame the knowledge they produce about “East” and “West”

- *Orient*: feminine, weak, irrational/religious/superstitious, exotic
- *Occident*: masculine, strong, rational/intellectual, normal

The Orient is the source of its [Europe's] civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. In addition the Orient... has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience (pp. 1-2).

Under the general heading of the knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for the study of the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind [sic] and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character (pp. 7-8).

My idea is that European and then American interest in the Orient was political according to some of the obvious historical accounts of it that I have given here, but that it was the culture that created that interest, that acted dynamically along with brute political, economic, and military rationales to make the Orient the varied and complicated place that it obviously was in the field I call Orientalism (p. 12).

Because he feels himself to be standing at the very rim of the East-West divide, the Orientalist not only speaks in vast generalities; he also seeks to convert each aspect of Oriental or Occidental life into an unmediated sign of one or the other geographical half (pp. 246-247).

## From Keeping It 101 Podcast

[Consider: Which of the following seems to apply to the Israeli Occupation of Palestine, and why?]

**Basic: religious nationalism *always* casts some people as “good” citizens, and some people as literally so antithetical to the state as to be cast from it.**

- **religious nationalism can look like** a litmus test for who gets to be a citizen (as in, barring particular religious groups *or* ethnic groups affiliated with one religion); on the flip, it could be an issue of the “default” religion of a nation or the legal religion of a nation (as in, one particular religious group is *solely* granted primacy within a nation-state).
- **religious nationalism can look like** prioritizing religion in such a way that *excludes* particular religions (or only *includes* particular religion/s). This is true even in nation-states that purport multi-religious identities or values. For example, nationally observed calendar / holidays; conventional names.
- **religious nationalism can also look like** the ways that non-religious folks are barred from particular practices in public; the ways that racialization happens around inherent identities being assumed to be religious; and the ways that oaths, songs, and patriotic behaviors map onto and into religious spaces. Examples include: swearing on Bibles, saying “In God We Trust,” National Prayer Breakfast, country flags in places of worship.
- **religious nationalism CAN ALSO look like** the ways that a state defends its sovereignty against supposed religious, extra-state threats—even if those threats are not real. Example: the so-called anti-Shariah laws that have swept the US: these are laws folks are trying to pass barring Muslims from establishing *their religious laws* as “US laws” with the idea that the very presence of Islamic religious laws = a threat to the US (for the record, there is no evidence that Muslims in the US are trying to pass any interpretation of Shariah into local, state, federal US law).

## Rashid Khalidi, *The Hundred Years’ War on Palestine*

“The modern history of Palestine can best be understood in these terms: as a colonial war waged against the indigenous population, by a variety of parties, to force them to relinquish their homeland to another people against their will.”

Khalidi, quoting Ze’ev Jabotinsky, Zionist theorist and soldier: “Zionist colonisation ... can proceed and develop only under the protection of a power that is independent of the native population—behind an iron wall, which the native population cannot breach” -from his 1923 essay “About the Iron Wall”

*Overview of Who’s Who from Zinn Education Project:* Historical figures identified for Seeds of Violence Curriculum Project - gives sense of span of different experiences

The Zionists and pro-Zionists include: **Theodor Herzl**, Viennese “founding father” and theoretician of Zionism; **Arthur Ruppin**, director of the Palestine office of the Zionist Organization, and a purchaser of land for Zionist settlement in Palestine; **Joseph Baratz**, Zionist settler, who fled pogroms in Russia as a teenager as part of the Second Aliyah (migration) of Jews to Palestine, and worked there in one of the first kibbutzim; **Lord Arthur Balfour**, the British foreign secretary, who issued the fateful Balfour Declaration, announcing British Empire support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine; **President Woodrow Wilson**, supporter of the Balfour Declaration and the Zionist

movement; and **Herbert Louis Samuel**, British High Commissioner for Palestine during the early years of the British Mandate period. Two Jews in the mixer are anti-Zionists: the Sephardic Jew, **Yosef Castel**, whose family had lived in harmony with Arab Christians and Muslims in Palestine since Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492; and **Pati Kremer**, a member of the socialist Jewish Bund, which sought to transform rather than flee eastern Europe, and saw Zionism as divisive and numb to the exploitation of working-class Jews by capitalist Jews.

Palestinians: **Ahmed Sharabi**, evicted from his land by Zionists of the First Aliyah (migration from Europe), who bought Sharabi's land from an absentee landlord; **Mahmoud Khatib** resisted his land being taken over by Zionists of the Second Aliyah, who also had bought it from a wealthy landlord in Beirut; and **Razan al-Barawi** who lived in Gaza and was caught between warring empires, the Ottoman and British, made a refugee and reduced to dire poverty. **Shukri al-'Asali**, the Ottoman (and Palestinian) district governor of Nazareth, refused to approve the Zionist purchase of land from absentee landlords that would result in peasant evictions.

Scholars and journalists wrote defiantly about the waves of Zionist migration and the Zionists' separatist vision for Palestine, which would turn Palestinians into "strangers in their own land": Palestinian scholar **Yusuf Diya al-Din Pasha al-Khalidi** knew Theodor Herzl from his time in Vienna and wrote to him: "In the name of God, let Palestine be left alone"; **Najib Nassar**, the Christian publisher of the newspaper *al-Karmil*, wrote about Zionist land purchases and Palestinian expulsions; **'Isa-al-'Isa**, editor of *Filastin*, wrote critically about the Balfour Declaration and the British-Zionist partnership during the early years of the British Mandate; and **Musa Kazim al-Husayni**, a leader with the Palestine Arab Congress organized against the discriminatory nature of the British Mandate in the years after the Great War. And finally, there is **Elias Sursuq**, one of a number of absentee landlords who took advantage of an 1858 Ottoman law to claim ownership of huge tracts of land in Palestine and later sold that land to Zionists, who were committed to empty the land of Palestinians.

### **Who are the Druze? (from Al-Jazeera)**

The Druze are an ethnoreligious minority that largely identifies as Arab and is Arabic-speaking. The Druze religion grew out of Ismaili Shia Islam in the 11th century but has evolved to include aspects of other religions, including Hinduism, as well as ancient philosophies. The faith believes in reincarnation while recognising traditional figures in Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The minority has remained largely separate from surrounding communities with no proselytising and marriage outside the faith discouraged. The community is found in Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Israel and the Golan Heights – Syrian territory occupied by Israel. Ties between Druze in different countries continue to be strong.

### **Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center (from Sabeel Website)**

Sabeel is an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, to promote

unity among them and lead them to act for justice and peace.

**Mission:** To strive towards theological liberation through instilling the Christian faith in the daily lives of those who suffer under occupation, violence, injustice, and discrimination.

**Vision:** Local Christians inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ stand for the oppressed, work for justice, engage in peace-building

## Background on Role of Asking Questions in Jewish Life

Asking questions from different modes of engagement as part of Passover Seder in Jewish tradition - each mode of engagement invites a different kind of responsiveness

Four questions for the seder:

- **The wise** child asks details about the specific meaning of the laws of Passover observance: “What are the testimonies, the statutes, and laws which *Adonai* our God has commanded you?” to which we respond with one of the very specific laws of the Passover seder.
- **The wicked** child asks, “Whatever does this mean to you?” The authors admonish this child as one who is not concerned about the laws personally, but only for others. This exchange reminds us of the importance of not separating ourselves from our community or from traditions that might seem uncomfortable or foreign to us, but rather to engage with them in ways that enable us to connect with our community.
- **The simple** child asks, “What does this mean?” to which a straightforward summary of the story is given, directly from the Torah: “It was with a mighty hand that God brought us out from Egypt, the house of bondage.” (Ex 13:14).
- In response to **the child who does not know how to ask**, we are instructed to “open it up” and explain, “It is because of what God did for me when I went free from Egypt” (Ex 13:8). (ReformedJudaism.org)

For further reading:

Sobre, M. S. (2022). *Jewish-American Identity and Critical Intercultural Communication: Never Forget, Tikkun Olam, and Kindness to Strangers*. Rowman & Littlefield.



## Feedback and reflection



We will continue the conversation on the messaging app Signal!

Please scan the QR code or visit this link to join:  
<https://tinyurl.com/38bk9zhw>



Link to articles, books, videos, etc, mentioned at the People's University for Palestine (updated throughout the semester)  
<https://www.zotero.org/pufp-yanaguana/library>

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