

ORIENTALIST APPROACHES TO ISLAMICJERUSALEM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF THE RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL AGENDAS

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Following Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978, the topic has been debated from various angles and dimension by scholars from different fields and disciplines over the past few decades. The depiction and understating of Islam's relation to and view of the Holy Land by Orientalists is interesting as it crosses many boundaries with their inherited cultural and religious bias. Moreover with the development of the Western colonial agenda, the rise of Zionism and the creation of the state of Israel, further religious and political dimensions were added. In the case of Islamicjerusalem, some Orientalist and Israelis writings were intended as propaganda in support of imperialistic and colonialist agendas. To date these links have been given little attention and most critiques almost exclusively miss out discussion on these issues. The aim of this article is to focus on these links and discuss these issues which are related to Islamicjerusalem. This is more important today because of the ongoing conflict on this contested land and the way many of these approaches have been carried over into contemporary scholarship, much of the time to undermine the importance of this region in Islam for political implications.

Unbalanced Formula

Islamicjerusalem is claimed as a sacred space by three of the world's major monotheistic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It has always been and will continue to be a major concern

for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Due to its religious significances and cultural attachments, feeling often runs very high and even aggressive over Islamicjerusalem. One could argue that it is difficult to adopt a neutral approach in the case of a holy region such as this, where the competing claims of the adherents of the three world religions and international interests meet and clash. As has been argued, "It is quite hard for those who have grown up in a culture, strongly influenced by one of them, to stand away from their heritage and to take an objective look at the issue". Indeed, a reader of the available literature on Jerusalem might well lead one to believe that it is impossible. Nevertheless, it is worth trying (John Gee, 1995: 1).

This position has led on many occasions to the adopting of a biased approach in addressing its issues. Indeed, the history of Islamicjerusalem has suffered distortion, falsification and alteration. Most of the region's historical researches, especially those relating to the history of Islamicjerusalem before the first Muslim *Fath*, are limited to Biblical and Orientalist studies. Some Orientalists tend to view Islam as static, timeless, and out of date. One of their main points is their rejection or at least underestimation of Muslim sources and accounts. For example, they underestimate generally the relevance of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth to the thinking of Muslims and particularly the importance of Islamicjerusalem within the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth. They may indeed regard allusions to the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth as merely a sort of general piety with little direct bearing on the postures and politics of the Muslims vis-à-vis Islamicjerusalem (Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, 1998: 48).

In addition, there are many published works, available to the public, on Palestine and Islamicjerusalem written by Arabs or Muslims for "different reasons and for specific audiences" (Aisha al-Ahlas, 2004: 9), but very few can be considered as academic writings. This absence of the Arab and Muslim presence from the academic arena has allowed Orientalists and Israeli academics to fill the gap by marketing their academic works in the Arab and Muslim countries in several ways. For more than two decades

(since 1990), the author has been identifying this unbalanced formula and has urged Arab and Muslim intellectuals to discuss this serious issue critically. He has argued that the Orientalists' work which fills the Arab and Muslim academic arena today has become the only frame of reference. This has, therefore, had serious effects on Arab and Muslim thinking, education, and culture. Such a warring situation has put some serious Arab and Muslim scholars on the defensive, leaving the other parties free to draw up phased strategic plans to achieve their goals. Whenever any Arab and Muslim scholar tries to draw attention to an issue raised by the other side, they are forced into yet another defensive position, and so it goes on (Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, 1991: 34-35). This applies to the study of Islam and Muslims (Arabic and Islamic Studies) in general and to the study of Islamicjerusalem in particular. Such a serious position means that there is a lack of balanced academic work on Islamicjerusalem which is not linked to a political agenda.

This article will be critically looking into the religious and political agendas of the Orientalist approaches towards Islamicjerusalem and Islamicjerusalem Studies, through discussing the claims of some Orientalists and Israeli academics on issues related to Islamicjerusalem. In addition, it will highlight how a number of scholars tried to address this unbalanced formula by establishing an academic alternative. It will also give particular attention to the development and reception of the new terminology of Islamicjerusalem.

Discussion of the Claims of some Orientalists and Israeli Academics

The first Muslim *Fath* (i.e., introducing new stage and vision) of Islamicjerusalem, in Jumada I/II 16 AH - June/July 637 CE¹ was an event both remarkable and long-lasting in its effects. It is viewed as a fundamental landmark, not merely in the history of the region, nor even in Muslim history, but as an event which reshaped relations between the people of diverse faiths who inhabited the region. The arrival of Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb (d 24 AH/645 CE) – five years after the death of Prophet Muhammad (12 Rabi' al-Awal

11 AH/6 June 632 CE) – during the early summer of year 16 AH/637 CE in Aelia (IslamicJerusalem) marked the beginning of a new and distinguished era in the relations between followers of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In addition, the arrival of Umar, who was at that time the highest political and religious authority and reference in the Muslim establishment, in the region also marked the start of a golden age and the beginning of a new era in which IslamicJerusalem became a common and open space for everyone. Indeed, the foundations for managing future relations between the three faiths were laid down during that historical visit in the form of what is known in history as *Al-Uhda al-Umariyya* or 'Umar's Assurance of Safety *Amān* to the people of Aelia (IslamicJerusalem). Indeed, 'Umar's Assurance was the jewel of the first Muslim *Fath* of Aelia, and the beacon for developing IslamicJerusalem's unique and creative vision and nature.

In addition, 'Umar's Assurance is regarded as being a major turning point in both historic and juristic terms. Muslim historians have presented several accounts on the historic visit of 'Umar to Aelia which marked the conclusion of the operation of the first Muslim *Fath* of Aelia. A number of Orientalists and Western scholars, such as G. Robert Hoyland (1992: 64-65), Albrecht North (1994: 181), and Fred McGraw Donner (1981; 151-153), have critically examined these Muslim accounts and accepted their reliability. However, some Israeli academics and Orientalists have not only cast doubt on the Muslim accounts but even deny that the historic visit of 'Umar took place. For example, they claim that Sayf Ibn 'Umar al-Asadī al-Tamimī al-Kufī (died 170 AH/786 C.E.) had a strong bias towards his tribe of Bani Tamim. It may be that he tried to give his tribe some prominence in his accounts of the Muslim *Futūḥāt* in Iraq where they were part of the Muslim forces there but not in *al-Sham*. This may be what prompted Wellhausen to accuse Sayf Ibn 'Umar somewhat hastily of tilting many historical events in favour of his own school of thought and his own theories of history².

Shlomo D. Goitein's hasty accusation of Sayf as having little authenticity and "whose lack of reliability is well known and whose

irresponsibility and ignorance about Palestinian matters" are based on the "reports about the *Fath* of Ramla", a town founded by the Muslims only seventy years later (Shlomo D. Goitein, 1982: 171), is undoubtedly a trumped-up distortion displaying a shameful bias. It would seem to this author that such bias is not based on any rational academic analysis or objective criticism of the historical sources, but rather, at the very least, on religious and political reasons linked to the struggle of the political institution currently ruling in Israel to gain control of IslamicJerusalem and to lend their establishment a historical legitimacy. The attempt made by some Israeli academics and Orientalists to play down the importance of Muslim sources relating to the period of the first Muslim *Fath* of IslamicJerusalem and, in particular, to undermine the significance of IslamicJerusalem to Islam, seeks to eliminate other viewpoints and to rewrite the Muslim history of IslamicJerusalem from a single biased point of view. One example of such a bias is Goitein's assertion that the Arab *Fath* is embellished with imaginary myths and legends, and that consequently there remain only a very few authentic accounts of the stages of the Muslim *Fath* and the early centuries of IslamicJerusalem life under Muslim rule. In other words, he is attempting to cast doubt on the authenticity of these accounts and the whole process of the first Muslim *Fath*. He claims that these accounts aim to raise the holy status of IslamicJerusalem in the hearts and minds of Muslims so that they will consider the first Muslim *Fath* as a major event (Shlomo D. Goitein, 1982: 169).³ On the other hand, Moshe Gill cannot justify Goitein's claim. Gill (1992: 73) argues, "we have seen how Goitein, in his attempt to overcome this contradiction, expressed doubt as to the authenticity of the treaty's ('Umar's Assurance) version as transmitted by Sayf Ibn 'Umar. But there seems to be little justification for this very stringent attitude (of Goitein) towards a source that has been preserved for more than a thousand years".

However, Goitein's claim is not an isolated one; it represents a trend among Israeli academics and Western Orientalists. Another example from this group is Herbert Busse who alleges that the first Muslim *Fath* of Aelia narrated in the Muslim accounts is no more

than a myth. He also claims that this, dreamed up by Muslim historians, was an initial step to give IslamicJerusalem a religious holiness, the aim being to replace the Christian character with a Muslim one. To justify his allegations, he presents a weak claim. According to him, to determine the name of the real Muslim conqueror, the Arab narrators (whose Arabic is their mother tongue language) confused the names of 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb and 'Amr Ibn al-As, mixing them up. Busse, whom Arabic is not his language, alleges that this was due to the similarity of letters in both names (Herbert Busse, 1984:73-119; and 1986: 149-168).

In addition, the current struggle to gain control over IslamicJerusalem has led to the development of these claims and debates between academics on both sides of the conflict, with either nationalist or religious backgrounds. John Gee, the author of one of CAABU briefings, argues that "seeking to establish a widely accepted common ground of historical understanding is not just an academic exercise, for the past is constantly invoked in situations of conflicts to justify present practice and a future objective and of nowhere is that more true than Jerusalem" (John Gee, 1995: 1). A young Palestinian scholar, Othman al-Tel (2003: 266 and also 264-276), argues that the Israelis are trying to "prove" that IslamicJerusalem was "not important to the Muslims and they did not pay attention to it". For example, Israelis frequently claim that, as "a sign of their fundamental indifference to the holy city", "Muslims never bothered" to make IslamicJerusalem the "capital of their empire or even the administrative capital of Palestine".⁴

On the other hand, some Palestinians, as in the case of Khalil Athaminah, are trying also "to prove that Jerusalem was the administrative capital of Palestine" (Athaminah, 2000: 205-219). Al-Tel concludes his argument on this ongoing debate by stating that the two parties "lack objectivity" in their discussion of the issue, "The argument between them becomes restricted to saying that, if Jerusalem was not a capital then it was not important and vice versa".

A respected English scholar, Karen Armstrong, disagrees very strongly with the Israeli claim and presents four pieces of evidence in support of her counter argument to reject their allegations. She argues that (Armstrong, 1997: 15):

It seems that the Umayyad Caliphs did consider the possibility of making [Islamic] Jerusalem their capital of Damascus. It is ironic that one of the first finds to be unearthed by Israeli archaeologists in (the walled city of) Jerusalem after 1967 was the great Umayyad palace and administrative centre (*Dar al-Imara*) adjoining the southern wall of the Haram (al-Aqsa Mosque). But the (Israeli) project was abandoned. Holy cities are seldom capital cities in the [Muslim] Islamic world. There was no thought of making Makkah the capital instead of Madinah in the early days, despite its superior sanctity. But in the case of [Islamic] Jerusalem, it would clearly also have been difficult to make a city in which Muslims formed only a minority the capital of either a country or a province. And the Christian and Jewish majority in [Islamic] Jerusalem was not the result of Muslim indifference to [Islamic] Jerusalem but of Muslim tolerance.

Indeed, the Muslim rules have not only shown great interest in Islamic Jerusalem but have paid a lot of attention to its sanctuary. Although they "did not even think" of making it "their capital" or "the administrative centre for Palestine" (Othman al-Tel, 2003: 227), they granted Islamic Jerusalem special administrative and organisational privileges. The author argues that one major reason for not "even thinking" of making Islamic Jerusalem a capital was, as one of the latest academic serious research findings has it,⁵ because it is not just a mere city but a region which includes several cities, towns, and villages. During Muslim rule, it was not only an important religious and cultural centre, but a political centre for a number of Muslim rulers and their activities, in particular their political engagements. Several Muslim rulers received their *Bay'ah* oath of allegiance in Islamic Jerusalem and some of them, such as Mu'awiyya Ibn Abī Sufyan, stayed there for a long period. The name of Aelia was engraved on their minted coins. All these privileges occurred without interfering in non-

Muslim affairs or bringing about any unnecessary changes which would contradict the Islamicjerusalem vision.

The Establishment of the Field of Islamicjerusalem Studies in the UK

This unbalanced formula led to the belief that there is a crucial need for a constructive, innovative, and creative academic alternative to address this unbalanced work and fill this gap in the available literature, while at the same time not affiliating itself to any political agenda, such as state or political party politics. It should also adopt the policy of escaping the trap of reacting to others and trying to engage with them through creating a new agenda, constructive dialogue and debate on the subject. The first step taken in this regard was the foundation of the new field of inquiry of Islamicjerusalem Studies in the UK in 1994.

The establishment of the new field of inquiry of Islamicjerusalem in the UK was a journey that took nearly a decade⁶ (1994-2003), adopting the principle of gradual development and travelling through several stages. It also went through a number of stages on the road to its establishment through an integrated programme which included a number of new academic initiatives and practical steps which included both developing an institutional framework and the modes of delivery of the new field in the UK.

As part of his vision for the new field, the founder (author) paid particular attention to establishing the concept of Islamicjerusalem in the building of its foundations. From the initial stages he was keen to provide practical steps to deliver the essential contributions of knowledge in the new field to the world of learning, and to encourage young researchers to specialise in this field. These have been delivered mainly through organising an annual international academic conference on Islamicjerusalem Studies (12th to date), the *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies*, and the securing of a good number of postgraduate research studentships in Islamicjerusalem Studies. These elements were very significant in creating the new frame of reference for the study of Islamicjerusalem. Indeed, both the annual conference and the

Journal have successfully "highlighted the gap in the available literature" on Islamicjerusalem Studies, provided the "necessary knowledge" to develop the field, and have become an international discussion forum for scholars who are interested in the field (Aish al-Ahlas, 2004:35). In its initial and crucial stage of development, ISRA also successfully secured funding for young students to pursue Islamicjerusalem Studies at postgraduate level at a number of Scottish universities. Aisha al-Ahlas argued that the "main reason behind the success" of establishing the new field of inquiry of Islamicjerusalem Studies in the UK was the co-operation "between knowledge and power" (Aish al-Ahlas, 2004:80).

Other serious practical steps were needed to institutionalise the development, integration and promotion of the field in the UK. These were initiated by developing the first new course entitled "Islamic Jerusalem", which the author taught at undergraduate level at the University of Stirling in 1999. This course has been developed into taught Master's and PhD programmes at Al-Maktoum Institute since its inception in Dundee in 2001 and was accredited degrees from the University of Abertay Dundee and then Aberdeen University in the UK. Indeed, to pioneer the field, Al-Maktoum Institute embodied the founder's vision by inaugurating the first taught Master's and PhD programmes in Islamicjerusalem Studies worldwide. After the establishment of Al-Maktoum Institute in Dundee came the creation of its first academic post, the first chair in Islamicjerusalem Studies. The Centre for Islamicjerusalem Studies was founded to focus all its efforts, and to play a key role in developing the new field. This was a natural progressive development aimed at structuring the research and teaching of Islamicjerusalem Studies in the UK.

In short, with clear vision, passion, determination, and good team of young scholars in a variety of disciplines in Islamicjerusalem Studies, the new field of inquiry of Islamicjerusalem Studies was founded and developed, together with interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches, and a new frame of reference on Islamicjerusalem was established in the UK. Through the establishment of the Academy for Islamicjerusalem Studies ISRA

(formally the Islamic Research Academy) in the UK, the founder (author) planned that research and scholarship take place in building the foundation stones of his vision for the field. In addition, through taking practical steps, he institutionalised the development, integration and promotion of the new field within academia, especially within a number of British higher education establishments. Although the field was established in the UK in 1994 and taught firstly at a number of British universities, it is at present being taught at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels in a number of Arab and Muslim universities, including Palestine, Syria, Egypt, and Malaysia.

The Development of the New Terminology of Islamicjerusalem

Although he was the one who in 1994 had invented this new terminology⁷ of Islamicjerusalem, a coherent definition was not possible when the author was trying, especially between 2000 to 2005, to come to an understanding of what he specifically meant by Islamicjerusalem. This is due to the complex nature of the concept. However, after the initial research on 'Umar's Assurance of Safety to the people of Aelia, the author started from 2000 to develop his new findings. This helped to define both Islamicjerusalem⁸ and Islamicjerusalem Studies⁹. Although these definitions are one of the author's most important contributions to the field, they should be considered as working definitions, to set the scene for the field's future development. They by no means claim to be theological or divinity *Ilahiyyat* definitions which cannot be changed or developed, as some would claim. They are, as in the case of Islamicjerusalem Studies, characterised and defined as a new "branch of human knowledge". Indeed, there are human explanations and interpretations of new concepts and terminology which are continually subject to change and development based on the latest scholarly research in the field by scholars, experts, and specialists within the field of Islamicjerusalem Studies. They are not being imposed as a result of political and religious pressures on academics to change their academic view or justify any change. Indeed, any changes must be left to those academics within the

field *on academic grounds* and after free, constructive dialogue and intellectual debates and serious and sufficient discussions.

After the exploration of all the different terms (Bayt al-Maqdis, Holy Land, Aelia, Muslim Jerusalem) by the scholars, experts and specialists in the Field of IslamicJerusalem Studies for nearly a decade (2000-2009), it has been found by consensus that none has the same potential in representing the field and providing a better alternative to IslamicJerusalem *in English*. There has been various attempts to change this term; the alternative terms presented mainly rotate around two terminologies: "*Bayt al-Maqdis*" and "Jerusalem". Neither of these terms represent the field well: the first alienates the English speaking world which is unfamiliar with this terminology and the latter does not reflect the new findings of the research conducted to develop the field.

The Arabic term *Bayt al-Maqdis* has been used in the past in both core and early Muslim narratives and sources to refer to the Aelia region (Othman Ismael Al-Tel, 2003: 291). It may be claimed that Prophet Muhammad was the first to use the term *Bayt al-Maqdis* to refer to that region. Indeed he used both terms, Aelia and *Bayt al-Maqdis*, in many of his traditions. However, one can argue that the Arabs before the advent of Islam also used the same term to refer to the same region.

The word-for-word translation of the Arabic term *Bayt al-Maqdis* could be "the Holy House". This might be understood from a theological point of view, but it would definitely be difficult to understand from historical, geographical and geopolitical contexts. In addition, the use of the term *Bayt al-Maqdis* does not represent the definition.¹⁰ This is especially true since it became obvious that IslamicJerusalem is a new concept which carries historical, geographical, geopolitical, religious, cultural, and political backgrounds. In addition, it is also not only al-Aqsa Mosque nor the Walled City of Jerusalem, as some outdated arguments might suggest. Indeed, it is not just a city nor yet another urban settlement, but a region which includes several villages, towns, and cities with an inclusive multicultural vision. In short, the new

terminology of Islamicjerusalem cannot be understood without placing it in historical, geographical, geopolitical, and religious contexts.

It is worth mentioning that, since its launch in the winter of 1997, the *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies* has also carried the Arabic term *Al-Quds al-Islamiyyah* or Islamic Quds. However, the author's new findings on 'Umar's Assurance of Safety to the people of Aelia have led to a change in the use of that Arabic term. The change of the Arabic title of the *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies* from *Al-Quds al-Islamiyyah* to *Bayt al-Maqdis* occurred in the summer 2000 issue. This was the same issue of the *Journal* which published the author's article on 'Umar's Assurance in both the English and Arabic languages.

In addition, the terminology Islamicjerusalem was a new concept which appeared and was used in its comprehensive sense for the first time originally in the English language by this author in 1994. It should be noted that Islamicjerusalem is one word not two separate words, i.e. Islamic and Jerusalem. It should also be made clear that Islamicjerusalem is not the same as Jerusalem or Islamic Quds *al-Quds al-Islamiyyah*. It is also different from Muslim Jerusalem as in Jewish Jerusalem and Christian Jerusalem. The historical period when the Muslims (Arab and non-Arab) ruled Islamicjerusalem for several centuries should be called Muslim or Arab Jerusalem and not Islamicjerusalem. Islamicjerusalem is a new concept, whereas Muslim Jerusalem or Arab Jerusalem refers to the periods when Muslims or Arabs ruled Islamicjerusalem. To illustrate this point, 'Umar Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb's *Fath* of the region is the first Arab Muslim *Fath* of Islamicjerusalem. Indeed, this should also apply to the later Muslim period up to 1917 and to any Arab or Muslim rule of Islamicjerusalem in the future. In addition, contemporary Arab Jerusalem is shaped in part by dialogue with the concept of Islamicjerusalem, the classical and modern history of Arab and Muslims, and in part by response to external interests, influences, and occupation of the region. Accordingly, contemporary Arabs and Muslims seek to relate their heritage in

Arab and Muslim Jerusalem from the concept of Islamicjerusalem and the Arab Muslim past to the radical situation of today.

It must also be noted that this term Islamicjerusalem (one or two words), has been used widely by scholars since 1994, is now established and has created its modest legacy. To support this argument, one could argue that the term became the norm in which degrees were awarded, books were printed, etc. It was, for example, used in the subsequent titles of the International Academic Conferences on Islamicjerusalem Studies (12 to date) which attracted prominent international speakers from the Western and Muslim worlds. It was used in the title of the refereed Journal *Journal of Islamicjerusalem Studies*, as well as prizes and awards; and in Masters and PhD degrees initially awarded by the University of Abertay Dundee (Islamic Jerusalem Studies, two separate words) and then with the University of Aberdeen in the UK (Islamic Jerusalem Studies, one word). Many academics who attended the Islamicjerusalem annual international academic conference and published articles used this term. One recent example of a scholar who published with the term as one word is Ghazarian of Oxford University on the *Armenians of Islamicjerusalem*. This has also now been adopted by several academic publishers and refereed journals who have published books and articles using this term in its new form as a single word. Some national and international academics have accepted this new terminology and adopted it in their articles in some internationally referred journals such as the *American Journal of Islamic Social Scientists*. Also publishers such as Sophia University Press and Cambridge Scholars Publishing have adopted the term in their publications. In addition, the term has been used as two separate words by various renowned scholars from different disciplines such as Armstrong (1997), Grabar (1996), Walls (1990) and Aist (2009) amongst others.

Reception of the New Terminology of Islamicjerusalem

In the recent past and during the establishment of the Field of Islamicjerusalem Studies in the UK, in particular from 1994 to 1999, a number of scholars were concerned about the reception of

this new terminology, especially linking the term "Islamic" with "Jerusalem". Their main worry was that the use of this term, in particular the word "Islamic", could open up hostility and non-acceptance by some Orientalists and Israeli academics on religious and political grounds. This may be seen as provocative and challenging for those in academic, religious, and political establishments who are interested in the region and who may not accept the term on the basis that it goes beyond their political and religious agenda and attachments, or for those who cannot go along with innovation and new ideas. Indeed, if you have a political agenda, it is difficult to adopt a neutral approach in the case of Islamicjerusalem, where the competing claims of the adherents of the three world religions and the international interest meet and clashed. Accordingly, the founder, for a long time, has been adamant that "the political agenda and its activisms and scholarship be separate". He argues very strongly that "political movements, religious or secular in any country in the world (including Western countries), restrict the intellectual development of scholars and impose restrictions on their freedom of thought" in some issues, such as Islamicjerusalem. He also argues, "To be taken seriously, any academic agenda should be taken away from religious or political agendas" (Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, 2007: 3).

At that time, the founder's main contention was that, without the term "Islamic", the whole terminology would lose its niche, meaning and definition. In addition, if it were to be only "Jerusalem" without the term "Islamic", which Jerusalem would we be talking about? What sort of Jerusalem are we talking about? Is it simply the area of al-Aqşa Mosque? (This is only one fifth of the Old Walled City.) Is it the Old Walled city of Jerusalem, East Jerusalem, West Jerusalem, Greater Jerusalem, the whole of Palestine or part of Palestine? Is Islamicjerusalem the same as Jerusalem the city? These all address the question of a definition from a contemporary context. It is important however to link this to historical, geographical, and geopolitical contexts. Moreover, there were also many research and teaching programmes in Jerusalem Studies which meant that our contribution to knowledge would be very limited. However, Islamicjerusalem Studies opened

up a new area of specialisation with a new frame of reference. In short, within the English speaking world, the term Islamicjerusalem as one word seems to be the most appropriate term which was originally developed in the English language and represents the concept best, even with its problems.

Indeed, the use of the word "Islamic" in the English terminology Islamicjerusalem in the West is the right term to shock, confuse, and throw doubt on some of what has been taken for granted in the past by scholars representing various schools of thought, trends, and approaches. It also covers new ground, address some of the sensitive key issues, opens up and promotes constructive dialogue, initiating intellectual and academic debates that should shed light on new lines of explanation, new horizons of critical thinking, and enrich our understanding of this inimitable region. Indeed, to advance such knowledge, promote serious and constructive dialogue, as well as developing new horizons of critical thinking, is to challenge long-established Orientalist claims. For example, the author's definition of Islamicjerusalem, which takes into consideration the discussions he has had since 2000, contains the key three elements: its geographical location (land), its people (i.e.: who live or used to live there) and its vision to administer or to rule that land and its people. It is not possible to separate these three elements as they are interlinked. In addition, they are linked with their historical context (For the author, if geography is the theatre, history is the play). He argues that Islamicjerusalem is not a mere city or another urban settlement, but a region which includes several cities, towns and villages. From this definition, it can be seen that Islamicjerusalem has to be described as a region with three key interlinked elements. Identifying the centre of the *Barakah* led him to develop a new significant innovative theory for geopolitics, "the *Barakah* Circle Theory of Islamicjerusalem". Indeed, the unique creative vision of Islamicjerusalem is also one of the most important contributions to the field.

Conclusion

The Muslim policy towards Islamicjerusalem was based on a central principle of making it an open region for all people with diverse backgrounds. In one of his main conclusions, Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi (2008: 17) argues that

Islamicjerusalem is not exclusive but inclusive and should be opened up 'to everyone in the universe', as stated in the Qur'an *Lil'ālamīn* (Qur'an, 21:71) ... It gives the world a model of a common space in which people from different backgrounds can live together in peaceful co-existence and mutual respect. Indeed, it is not closed and insular, but a centre in which diversity and pluralism thrive through mutual respect and co-existence. This unique global common space of openness and *Barakah* (blessing) has made Islamicjerusalem an ideal region for *Amal* (hope) where the one human family can make (apply the Qur'anic concept) *Li ta'ārafu*, living together in *Aman* and enjoying this *Barakah*.

With this vision of inclusivity and plurality, the agenda for Islamicjerusalem is not the desire to achieve colonialist and imperialist goals of occupying lands and people which could be based either on economic ambitions or on racist nationalist and theological claims, or on any other interests and claims. If there is no vision, or a vision of exclusivity, in Islamicjerusalem, this would naturally lead internally to injustice, oppression, and divisions in its multicultural society. Such a repressive regime would work hard to subvert the wishes and aspirations of the people under its rule. Externally, it will mean the involvement of external powers to try to resolve these internal troubles and problems, which would lead to instability and barriers to the steady progress and prosperity of the region. Indeed, the unique aspect of Islamicjerusalem is highlighted through its vision, which presents a model for mutual respects and peaceful co-existence and a way for people from different religious and cultural backgrounds to live together in an environment of diversity, multiculturalism, and cultural engagement.

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- ¹ Othman Ismael Al-Tel (2003), *The first Islamic conquest of Aelia (IslamicJerusalem): A critical analytical study of the early Islamic historical narrations and sources*, (Scotland: Al-Maktoum Institute Academic Press), p. 118. Jumada First or Second 16 AH is June or July 637 CE (e.g., 29 Jumada First 16 AH/1 July 637 CE) and not March or April as stated by Al-Tel.
- ² Wellhausen, *Skizzen und Vorarbeiten Heft IV*, cited by Israel Ben Zeev (Abu Zuaib) (1976: 37).
- ³ See also the same author (1986) 'Al-Kuds', *Encyclopaedia of Islam* (new edition).
- ⁴ Armstrong disagrees very strongly with this claim, as will be discussed later on. (Karen Armstrong, 1997: 15)
- ⁵ The background of this latest research started out as a discussion with Haithem al-Ratrout during my several supervisory meetings with him for his PhD thesis research. We found that this might not be a relevant point for his PhD research. However, as part of developing the definition of IslamicJerusalem, the author felt that defining its boundaries would make a significant contribution to our understanding of the historical events of the first Muslim conquest. Accordingly, the author, as Othman Al-Tel's supervisor for his PhD thesis, suggested to him that he develop a chapter on 'the Topography and Geographical boundaries of Aelia (IslamicJerusalem) region', which became chapter two of his PhD thesis.

Othman Ismael Al-Tel, *The first Islamic conquest of Aelia (IslamicJerusalem): A critical analytical study of the early Islamic historical narrations and sources*, pp. 41-68. Indeed, this helped him to resolve many of what had previously been viewed by many researchers and scholars as contradictions in Muslim accounts and sources regarding the first Muslim conquest of Aelia. This, then, was developed in August 2003 into a whole Master's dissertation by Khalid El-Awaisi, *Geographical boundaries of IslamicJerusalem*. From October 2003 to August 2006, Khalid developed this new finding into a PhD thesis, *The geographical extent of the land of Bayt al-Maqdis, the Holy Land and the Land of Barakab*. His monograph (2007) *Mapping IslamicJerusalem: a Rediscovery of Geographical Boundaries* (Al-Maktoum Institute Academic Press) is indeed a major contribution to our knowledge in the new field of inquiry of IslamicJerusalem Studies.

- 6 The background of the new field of inquiry of IslamicJerusalem Studies was based on Aisha al-Ahlas, 2004.
- 7 According to the Oxford English Dictionary, terminology means 'a set of terms relating to a subject'; term (s) means 'a word or phrase used to describe a thing or to express an idea'; concept means 'an abstract idea'; abstract means 'having to do with ideas or qualities rather than physical or concrete things'; nature means 'the typical qualities or character of a person, animal, or thing'; and vital means 'absolutely necessary'. The author is very grateful to Sarah Hassan, an MLitt postgraduate student in IslamicJerusalem Studies, for collecting these definitions from the Oxford English Dictionary.
- 8 'IslamicJerusalem is a new terminology for a new concept, which may be translated into the Arabic language as *Bayt al-Maqdis*. It can be fairly and eventually characterised and defined as a unique region laden with a rich historical background, religious significances, cultural attachments, competing political and religious claims, international interests and various aspects that affect the rest of the world in both historical and contemporary contexts. It has a central frame of reference and a vital nature with three principal intertwined elements: its geographical location (land and boundaries), its people (population), and its unique and creative inclusive vision, to administer that land and its people, as a model for multiculturalism.' (Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, 2007: 11)
- 9 'IslamicJerusalem Studies can be fairly eventually characterised and defined as a new branch of human knowledge based on interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches. It aims to investigate all matters related to the IslamicJerusalem region, explore and examine its various aspects, and provide a critical analytic understanding of the new frame of reference, in order to identify the nature of IslamicJerusalem and to understand the uniqueness of this region and its effects on the rest of the world in both historical and contemporary contexts.' (Abd al-Fattah El-Awaisi, 2007: 14). Indeed, IslamicJerusalem Studies is a field of inquiry which covers several disciplines, such as the study of Islam and Muslims, history and international relations, art and architecture, geography and geology, environment and politics, and other related disciplines. Accordingly, it has interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches which include historical and theological, theoretical and conceptual, empirical and cultural approaches. The new field not only provides an understanding of IslamicJerusalem but examines the new frame of reference within which Muslims approach IslamicJerusalem. Several questions are key to addressing this point: What are the reasons for Muslims having close links to and concern with IslamicJerusalem? What is the significance of IslamicJerusalem to

Islam and to Muslims? Does Islamicjerusalem have any special status compared with any other region? In-depth discussion of the various aspects and dimensions of Islamicjerusalem opens up new horizons for those interested in understanding its vision, nature and the reasons for its distinctness from other regions. One could argue that a definition should be short, precise and to the point, yet these definitions of Islamicjerusalem and Islamicjerusalem Studies are very long. However, what has been provided is a scholarly presentation of what can be fairly eventually characterised and defined of Islamicjerusalem and its field. So the definitions are not only the definitions but also the characteristics of these definitions. Such definitions also aim to raise questions and provide researchers and scholars in the field with the key aspects of Islamicjerusalem.

¹⁰ See footnote no. 8.

