

THE JERUSALEM CONFLICT AND ONTOLOGICAL SECURITY: OVERCOMING EXISTENTIAL ANXIETIES

KUDÜS SORUNU VE ONTOLOJİK GÜVENLİK: VAROLUŞSAL KAYGILARIN AŞILMASI¹

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Öz

Kudüs, dini, kültürel ve siyasi açıdan Filistin ve İsrail halklarının çatışma ve rekabet halinde olan kimliklerini şekillendirmeye devam eden güçlü bir sembol olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Kudüs sorununun çözüm süreci, şehir üzerindeki farklı talep ve iddiaları nedeniyle hem Filistin'i hem de İsrail'i tavizler vermeye zorlayabilecektir. Kentin, iki tarafa ait ulusal kimliklerin önemli bir bileşeni olması, sözkonusu tavizlerin gündeme gelmesiyle birlikte biyografik anlatılara bağlı sınamaları ortaya çıkarabilecektir. Makale, Ontolojik Güvenlik teorik çerçevesini kullanarak, sözkonusu biyografik anlatıları, muhtelif sınamalara rağmen, anlatı etkinleştirme veya devre dışı bırakma süreçleriyle değiştirmenin, dönüştürmenin veya geliştirmenin mümkün olduğunu iddia etmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler : Kudüs, Ontolojik Güvenlik, Biyografik Anlatılar, Anlatı Etkinleştirme, Anlatıları Devre Dışı Bırakma

JEL Kodları : Y9, F51, F52

Abstract

In the future, resolving the Jerusalem dispute might necessitate concessions from both Palestine and Israel due to their conflicting claims to the city. Since Jerusalem is integral to the national identities of both Palestinians and Israelis, any future peace agreement requiring concessions may pose challenges linked to biographical narratives that underscore the city's significance. Using the theoretical framework of Ontological Security, this article argues that it is possible to change, transform, or develop these biographical narratives through processes of narrative activation or deactivation, despite various challenges.

Keywords: Jerusalem, ontological security, biographical narratives, narrative activation, narrative deactivation

JEL Classification: Y9, F51, F52

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Extended Summary

The future status of Jerusalem city is expected to be one of the key components of a possible settlement of the Palestine issue. During such a settlement process, Israel and Palestine may eventually have to make "concessions" because of their conflicting claims to the city. However, such concessions may present problems for both sides as they might conflict with the national narratives that highlight Jerusalem's significance to each party's national identities.

In Palestine's national narrative, the city's historical and spiritual meaning comes mainly from Islamic tradition. As Islam's third holiest city—after Mecca and Medina—Jerusalem's sacred status is closely connected to the early days of Islam. Before the Qiblah (the direction of prayer) was changed to Mecca, early Muslims prayed toward Al-Masjid al-Aqsa in Jerusalem. The city is also well known as the site of the Dome of the Rock, where Islamic tradition says that Prophet Muhammad ascended to heaven during the event called Mi'raj. In a similar way, Jerusalem is central to Jewish identity in the Israeli national narrative. It is linked to ancient biblical traditions, such as King David's conquest of the city and the building of Solomon's Temple. There are numerous religious and cultural elements shaped throughout history that emphasize the importance of Jerusalem in Judaism.

Accordingly, Jerusalem stands as a powerful symbol for both nations. Its long history of religious, cultural, and political importance has a central place in biographic narratives of both Palestinians and Israelis. According to the assumptions of ontological security, shared biographic narratives provide a sense of history and stability. When these narratives are challenged, it can create ontological insecurity. This means that any peace agreement involving Jerusalem might require changes or new interpretations of these biographic narratives—a process which we can call narrative activation and deactivation.

Drawing on the framework of ontological security—that is, the fundamental need for a stable and continuous sense of identity—this article argues that transforming the Israeli and Palestinian narratives surrounding Jerusalem is an attainable objective, despite the significant challenges confronting narrative framers on both sides. In the event that prospects for peace materialize, it is plausible that narrative architects from both communities might, through sustained and deliberate

efforts, recalibrate the representation of Jerusalem within their national narratives, offering modifications that are acceptable to their respective societies.

Introduction

The renewed violence between Palestine and Israel following the events of October 7, 2023, particularly the subsequent Israeli atrocities, has once again compelled the international community to confront the urgent necessity of achieving a lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A viable solution to the issue remains a two-state framework, grounded in international legal parameters, which envisions the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The future status of Jerusalem city is expected to be one of the key components of a possible settlement of the Palestine issue⁴. In light of ontological security theory, the deeply rooted national identities of both Israel and Palestine are crucial to understanding the potential challenges of such a settlement. Both sides' narratives are not only shaped by territorial claims but are also central to their sense of self and security. Jerusalem, as a symbolic anchor for both nations, represents more than just a city—it is intertwined with each party's existential needs and the stability of their identity. During the settlement process, Israel and Palestine may eventually have to make "concessions" due to their conflicting claims over the city. However, given the ontological security concerns of both parties, these concessions could present significant challenges. The need for security in their respective identities makes it difficult for both sides to accept changes that threaten the core aspects of their self-understanding. Since Jerusalem plays a central role in both Palestinian and Israeli national identities, any future peace deal that requires these concessions may face considerable resistance, as these compromises could conflict with the national narratives that elevate Jerusalem's significance to each group's existential security.

In this regard, if the Jerusalem issue is included in a peace process related to the Palestine conflict, politicians in Palestine and Israel might need to adjust their national narratives on symbolic role of Jerusalem within their identities. Actually, “peace processes inevitably involve reconfigurations of

⁴ This Article omits discussion of Christian perspectives on the settlement of the Jerusalem dispute, as the future negotiations and resolutions likely to arise between Palestinian and Israeli stakeholders.

who ‘we’ are, where we are from, and where we are going” (Gudgeon, 2024)”. As Jerusalem is embedded in Palestinian and Israeli national identities, peace negotiations between Palestine and Israel including the settlement of the Jerusalem dispute may lead to reconfigurations of all these fundamental questions. This article analyzes how one can theoretically examine the possibilities of activating or deactivating certain components of the “Jerusalem narratives” of Palestinians and Israelis, especially during a potential peace process. The study puts forward that Jerusalem is a part of the biographical narratives of both Palestinians and Israelis, thus their ontological securities.

A narrative is essentially a story in the form of an account of events and experiences, whether real or imagined. Individuals and societies construct identity frames or biographical narratives for themselves based on their perceptions vis-à-vis their milieu. These narratives help answer fundamental questions about who they are and provide stability and security over time. “They provide autobiographical justification and continuity with the good past.” (Subotic 2016). Biographical narratives play a critical role in understanding the past and maintaining a sense of continuity in human lives. When these stories are challenged or disrupted, it can threaten their sense of ontological security⁵.

Narratives are dynamic structures. They are activated and deactivated in the course of history. In this context, narrative activation can be defined as the process of bringing a particular narrative, story, or viewpoint to the attention of people in a way that influences their thoughts or feelings. This is done by emphasizing certain ideas or statements, making the narrative more visible or dominant, or repeatedly promoting it within society. For instance, a government might activate the narrative of national solidarity to gather public support for its policies during wartime. In contrast, narrative deactivation involves downplaying a specific narrative and presenting it as insignificant or unimportant. This can be done by treating the narrative’s components as nonexistent, irrelevant, obsolete, or wrong, effectively discrediting them. For example, during a peace process, narratives that support enmity may be deactivated to make reconciliation possible or to facilitate it.

⁵ Scholarly debates continue regarding the relationship between anxiety, fear, and ontological security. Kinnvall and Mitzen (2020) contend that anxiety stemming from ontological insecurity is a persistent phenomenon—a challenge that must be continuously managed as an inherent aspect of the human condition. Browning and Joenniemi (2017) also argue that such anxieties do not necessarily require escape; rather, they may offer opportunities for renewal.

When it comes to resolving the conflict in Jerusalem, both Palestinian and Israeli narrative architects may find themselves needing to activate or deactivate certain components of their nations' biographical narratives in connection with Jerusalem to support new conditions or to downplay elements that no longer fit the national objectives. Because existing narratives on Jerusalem and future resolutions might conflict with each other and this can pose immediate risks to the ontological security of societies.

With this understanding, the study first addresses the question, "What are the main highlights of the Palestinian and Israeli biographical narratives on Jerusalem, given their respective histories and religions?" The study then analyzes the second question: "Which components of these biographical narratives appear suitable for activation and deactivation?" Finally, the study aims to answer the question, "Is it possible to change, transform, and develop the Jerusalem component of the current Israeli and Palestinian national narratives within the framework of a future peace agreement?"

The main purpose of this article is to indicate that certain Palestinian and Israeli narrative components that are suitable for narrative activation and deactivation.⁶ To this end, a comprehensive historical account of Jerusalem's importance has been incorporated into the study to highlight the foundational narrative constructs.

Furthermore, the historical evaluations presented in this article did not require the adoption of a perspective grounded in the disciplinary framework of historical science. The primary objective is to highlight the narrative contexts surrounding both Palestine and Israel and the sources were selected or analyzed in this context. It is important to recognize that narratives, while influential, do not inherently determine historical truth. Rather, they are socially constructed, popularized, and disseminated through various agents of socialization, including family, educational institutions, religious organizations, peer groups, media, and political elites. These narratives function as mechanisms through which collective understandings of history are shaped and perpetuated within society.

⁶ While this article does not primarily aim to assess the role of cities in generating ontological (in)security, it may still contribute indirectly to future research on the connection between urban environments and ontological security. One such analysis for the relationship between ontological security and national icons has been done by Steele and Subotic in their article "Icons and ontological (in)security" (Steele & Subotic, 2023).

Biographical Narratives

In social sciences, there are still ongoing discussions about how to define the concept of narrative and how to analyze narratives. In fact, “the study of narratives began historically with the study of languages and later in terms of poetics and semantics and recent years have seen an increased interest in narratives, especially emerging from post-modernist and feminist literature”(Druckman, 2005).

The word “narrative” comes from the Indo-European root “gna,” meaning both “to tell” and “to know” (Dajani Daoudi, 2013)”. It is defined as “a story or account of events, experiences, or the like, whether true or fictitious” (Baskin, 2012). To date, there have been a wide array of frameworks employed in research related to conflict narratives such as “national narratives”, “historical narratives” or “meta-narratives”. One such framework was described by Anthony Giddens as “the biographical narrative” which he called the “narrative of the self”, “the story or stories by means of which self-identity is reflexively understood, both by the individual concerned and by others“(Giddens, 1991).

Self-identity is a complex concept connected with ontological security. It involves the personal story that each individual builds about himself/herself throughout their life. According to Giddens, biographical narratives are essentially how people define who they are and how they arrived at their current situation. He argues that self-identity is not only about the traits we display, or the characteristics others can see; rather, it's about how we personally understand our own life experiences. Similarly, even states create their own narratives, trying to keep a consistent story that reflects their identity and past (Steele, 2008). Individuals and nations want to maintain a coherent view of who they are over time. Therefore, one of the main features of biographical narratives is that they are continuous, and this continuity is ensured by the individual/state keeping a consistent story of who they are.

Based on Giddens’ definition of narratives, Jerusalem is a part of Palestinian or Israeli “stories of who they are, and how they came to be where they are now” especially with reference to Islamic and Jewish religious writings. At the same time, the Jerusalem question is a reflection of the clash of two different biographic narratives of Palestinians and Israelis.

On the other hand, the use of narratives in conflict resolution studies has recently gained more attention in the social sciences, especially due to the applicability of the narrative approach in various cultural contexts. According to Federman (2016), creating narrative spaces for dialogue 'adds a liberating quality to conflict resolution, cementing changes through the creation of shared futures,' due to its capacity to navigate the complexities of stories, reveal both mainstream and marginalized perspectives, and expose tales of oppression and suppression.

Therefore, a comparative study of Palestinian and Israeli biographic narratives on Jerusalem based on scientific assumptions can contribute to the peace efforts and scholarly studies in connection with Jerusalem and the broader Palestine issue.

Ontological Security and Tolerable Change

Ontological security was first defined in sociology by Anthony Giddens at the individual level. According to Giddens, the individuals form themselves an identity frame or the selves based on their perceptions vis-à-vis their milieu. As mentioned in the foregoing section, these identity frames or selves are also called “biographies”. Giddens noted that “they form the individual’s very response to ontological questions in his/her surroundings and they constitute a secure ontological cycle” (Giddens, 1991).

In later phases of the social science studies, the theory of ontological security was applied to states. In her groundbreaking article, "Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma," Mitzen examined how states pursue ontological security—defined as the stability of their self-identity—by sustaining consistent relationships with other states, even when those relationships are adversarial. Departing from Mitzen’s ideas, Şimşek maintains that “an essential feature of societies is that their own identity is settled, as compared to other societies with a set of differences” (Şimşek, 2018). He notes that "societies establish these differences by routing their physical and cognitive relationships with other societies in a specific system and such inter-communal, inter-state and inter-national routine relationships help establish the integrity and cohesion of identity within each society and thus ensure ontological security”. He further argues that “from the idea that the state is the organized apparatus of society, the ontological security of a state is intertwined with its societies’ own ontological security”. The “loss of the identity and

identity of the state”, according to him, will also “threaten its citizens’ ontological security” (Şimşek).

Rumelili and Adısönmez (2020) assert that while ontological security theory is used to explain the continuity of state and group identity under changing conditions, in other studies, change is emphasized. Regardless of continuity and change aspects, ontological security is a dynamic aggregate of perceptions. These aggregate perceptions change over time and in response to historical circumstances and conditions. For example, in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine and Finland’s move to join NATO, Sweden’s long-standing policy of non-alignment began to clash with its national identity, and the new situation threatened to destabilize Sweden’s sense of self and its traditional identity constructs (Hjertström & Hagström, 2024). Besides, under certain circumstances, states might be willing to give up certain parts of their physical security to protect their identity and how they see themselves. This need stems from the idea that nations want to feel good about themselves and their past choices in order to effectively engage with others on the global stage (Subotic, 2016).

Continuity and tolerable change are the main characteristics of the state biographies. Tolerable changes are minor alterations. “A coherent narrative can include all sorts of change if a sensible link from “before” to “after” is maintained” (Berenskoetter, 2014, as cited by Subotic).

In evaluating whether the narratives of Jerusalem can undergo a tolerable change for both Palestine and Israel, it is considered important to address the historical developments that gave rise to these narratives as well as their religious roots. Accordingly, the relevant historical and religious factors are discussed below to address the first research question: 'What are the main highlights of the Palestinian and Israeli biographical narratives on Jerusalem, given their respective histories and religions?

2. An Overview of Historical and Religious Roots of Palestinian and Israeli Narratives on Jerusalem

According to the latest scientific findings, urban life existed in Jerusalem at least 3,800 years ago. The ancient Egyptian texts contain the first known references to the city under the names of

Rushalimum, Urusalim and Urushamem (Municipality of Jerusalem and Kristianssen). Archeologists and historians regard these references as the first proofs of Jerusalem's existence as a settlement (Armstrong, 2005; Cline, 2004). Both Palestinian and Israeli narratives agree that Jerusalem's earliest known inhabitants were the Canaanites.

It is mainly the religious writings that constitute the pillars of Jerusalem narratives of Palestinians and Israelis⁷. There are significant references to Jerusalem in religious texts of both Islam and Judaism including Quran and Tanakh⁸. This importance has further been underlined through the writings of religious scholars and their discourses.

From the 19th century onward, Jerusalem's symbolic importance to Islam and Judaism began to take on new dimensions. With the rise of the idea of "a Jewish home for Jews" among European Jews in the late 19th century and following Jewish settlements in Ottoman Palestine, Jerusalem and the wider Palestine have gradually become a political issue for Jews. Likewise, Jewish attempts to settle in Palestine in the late 19th century made the ownership of Jerusalem a political issue for Palestinians.

3.1 Jerusalem as a part of Palestinian National Identity

As far as the Palestinian national narrative is concerned, the historical significance of Jerusalem is overwhelmingly associated with Islamic beliefs and Islamic understanding of history. First and foremost, Jerusalem is Islam's third holiest city after Mekka and Medina. Muslims prayed towards the Mosque of Al-Aqsa (or Al Masjid Al Aqsa) before the prayer direction (Qiblah) was changed to the mosque in Mekka. The Dome of the Rock, one of the holiest places in Islam, from where the Prophet Muhammad departed for his night journey to heaven is also located in Jerusalem.

After the death of the Islam's Prophet, the Caliph Omar conquered the city in 637/638 AD. When he arrived at Al Masjid Al Aqsa, he discovered that the area was being treated as a garbage dump by the Romans instead of a place of worship and he assumed the duty of cleaning up the mess and

⁷ In addition to historical and religious elements, there are also political and cultural elements that support the Palestinian and Israeli national narratives emphasizes on the importance of Jerusalem, which should be considered in further detailed analysis.

⁸ Jerusalem is not explicitly mentioned in Quran. Yet it is widely accepted in Islamic tradition that the city was referred to in Quran as remote Mascid's (Al Mascid Al Aksa) holy vicinity. There are also many hadits about the holy nature of Jerusalem.

rebuild the mosque. (Sadaqah Project, 2018). Caliph Omar identified the Rock, which holds importance in Islamic tradition as the site from which the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven. Before leaving Jerusalem, he built a mosque near the Rock (Abu Amr, 1995). Later, in 691/692 AD, another Muslim leader, Abd'al Malik bin Marwan, began constructing the Dome of the Rock on top of the Rock. Abu Amr⁹ asserts that after about fifty years, Jerusalem established its place as the third holiest city in Islam and eventually became known as al-Quds ash-Sharif, meaning the Holy and Noble City.

In AD 1099, the Crusaders conquered the city and for much of the twelfth century it served as the Latin Kingdom's capital. The Muslims led by Salah al-Din recaptured the city in 1187. Muslim sources highlight the compassionate governance of Salah al-Din during that time, stating that he ensured after the conquest that those who wished to leave were allowed to do so with all their possessions and those who chose to remain were assured protection for their lives, property, and places of worship (Aljazeera). Having not allowed a massacre of civilians or soldiers, Salah al-Din also cleaned the Al Masjid Al Aqsa with his own hands.

According to Palestine sources, after the Crusades, Muslims again became the sovereign administrators of Jerusalem, a role they held for many centuries. The Palestinian national narratives take pride in the fact that during this period, the Islamic rule was characterized by peace, justice and prosperity. Masjid Al-Aqsa served as a grand center of Islamic scholarly work hosting pundits from all over the world (Sadaqah Project, 2018).

During the Mamluk and the subsequent Ottoman era, Jerusalem was rebuilt and restored. Süleyman the II (also known as Süleyman the Magnificent) of the Ottoman Empire constructed walls, towers, and gates. Thus, the current city character of Jerusalem was mainly shaped by the Muslims who paid special care to Masjid Al-Aqsa. Palestinians also praise the fair treatment meted out by the Ottoman Empire to non-Muslims in Jerusalem under its Millet system, which granted religious freedom and security to Jewish and Christian communities by regarding them as “people of book”. This harmonious cohabitation, according to Palestinian Muslims, was destroyed after the

⁹ Ziad Abu Amr is a Palestinian politician, author, and former Foreign Minister of the Palestinian National Authority

emergence of the Zionist movement in Europe which aimed at establishing an independent Jewish state in the land of Palestine (Sadaqah Project, 2018).

During the British Mandate, resolution number 181 adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1947, divided Palestine into two states; one Arab and the other Jewish. It envisaged the formation of a special whole in Jerusalem. Jerusalem was defined as the municipal district and surrounding villages and towns. According to Palestinian views, Israel's presence in West Jerusalem and East Jerusalem is not legally legitimate because of the UNGA Resolution 181.

Ziad Abu Amr emphasizes that the late PLO Chairman, Yasser Arafat referred to Jerusalem as the capital city of State of Palestine. He further notes that the site of the al-Aqsa Mosque and Prophet Muhammad's Miraj journey was a continuous element of Arafat's narrative on the Palestinian issue. On the other hand, Arafat and many other Palestinian political and religious figures claimed that Solomon's Temple is not in the city of Jerusalem and might be in Nablus or elsewhere.

3.2 Jewish Accounts of Jerusalem and Judaism

When it comes to Israeli narratives, it should be noted that there have been continuous efforts to incorporate the Jerusalem city into Israeli national narrative as a crucial part of Jewish identity especially after the 1967 Arab Israeli War. In 1980, a resolution was passed in Israeli Knesset referring to Jerusalem as Israel's indivisible and eternal capital¹⁰. In 1993, the year 1996 was declared as the Jerusalem's Trimillennium by the Government of Israel. The events were also called as "Jerusalem 3.000" by stating that "the events will establish Jerusalem's place as the heart of the Jewish nation in the collective consciousness of Israel and the world, they will enhance its status and image as the capital of Israel and they will contribute to economic development, tourism, infrastructure, and the cultural and social lives of the city's residents" (The Government of Israel, 1993).

The Israeli narrative stresses that the King David's conquest of Jerusalem made the city a central element of the Jewish religion and culture. According to Montefiore, when David conquered Jerusalem it was a small town without a city identity (Montefiore, 2011). Through the capture of

¹⁰ The decision which is tantamount to the illegal annexation of Jerusalem is not recognized by the international community.

Jerusalem, “David also gained control of other Canaanite city states in Palestine” (Bright, 1981). According to the biblical narrative, Solomon, the son of David, built the First Temple around 960 BC. in Jerusalem. The United Monarchy of the Hebrews survived till 928 BC when it was split into the Kingdom of Judea in the south and the Kingdom of Israel in the north (M. Avi-Yonah, 1956). In 586 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon destroyed the First Temple in the Kingdom of Judea 374 years after the establishment of the edifice by Solomon. The Hebrews were also taken into exile in Babylon.

About half a century later, King Cyrus of Persia permitted Jews to go back to Jerusalem and build their temple once again. Jewish sources proudly mention the establishment of the second Temple in Jerusalem by King Herod of the small Jewish state of Judea in 37 BC. After Herod’s demise in 4 BC, Romans began to rule Judea and they destroyed the second Temple in 70 AD as the Jews revolted against them.

In the fourth century, the Romans introduced Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire and this further increased the persecution of Jews especially because of the anti-Jewish legislation. Most of the Jews started to live in Babylon. Jewish scholars indicate that at the time of the Muslim conquest of Palestine in 636, Christians made up the majority of Jerusalem’s population.

A small Jewish community lived in Jerusalem during the following centuries when the city remained under the Persian, Arab, Fatimid, Seljuk, Crusader, Egyptian, Mamluk and the Ottoman rule. When the Great Britain took over the city in 1917 it was part of the region of Ottoman Palestine. British control of the city lasted until Israel’s independence in 1948. After the Arab Israeli War of 1948 Israel took control of West Jerusalem. It was the 1967 Six-Day War that enabled Israel to occupy the entire city of Jerusalem.

In 2017, on the fiftieth anniversary of the 1967 Arab Israeli War, events marking the "50th Anniversary of the Unification of Jerusalem" were held in Israel. According to Kristianssen, the 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbors led to “the inclusion of the Eastern parts of Jerusalem into the realm of the Zionist project” (Kristianssen, 2015). The events of 1967 are

described in a vast number of books as groundbreaking concerning both the Zionist project and Israeli territorial identity (Yiftachel, 2006; Jones & Murphy, 2002 as cited by Kristianssen).

However, Gilbert asserts that for two millennia the dream of returning to Jerusalem seemed a ‘fantasy’ for Israelis (Gilbert, 2008). Walter Laqueur also claims that the pre-state Zionist leaders, including Theodor Herzl, the father of political Zionism, did not want Jerusalem to be the capital of the new Jewish state. They feared becoming involved in the Jerusalem imbroglio and “their emotional attachment to the city was not overwhelming” (Laqueur, 2003). Additionally, many Israeli sources assert that the slogan "Jerusalem is the eternal and indivisible capital of Israel" was invented to be used as a bargaining chip in the future negotiations about the city’s status.

3. Narrative Activation, Deactivation and Jerusalem

Activation or deactivation of narratives are closely connected with policy changes of historical importance. Activations or deactivations are carried out in order to legitimize the policy shifts in critical historical junctures. Peace talks and reaching peace agreements are among these critical junctures. A future deal to be reached on Jerusalem might necessitate such narrative activation or deactivation processes on Israeli and Palestinian sides.

3.1 Dividing Lines and Common Denominators of the Palestinian and Israeli Biographical Narratives

The national narratives of Israel and Palestine agree that the Canaanites were the earliest settlers of the city. However, from the time of the Canaanites, the dividing line between two biographical narratives begins.

According to Israel's biographical narrative, Canaanites were the owners of the city before the Israelis arrived. According to Palestinians, the Canaanites were the ancestors of the Palestinian Arabs. The capture of Jerusalem by the Prophet David around 1000 B.C. reunites the two biographies after a serious divergence about the Canaanites in both narratives. Both Israel and Palestine agree that David and Solomon lived in the city.

In the biographical narratives, a significant difference of perspective emerges again about the year 637, the year when Omar conquered Jerusalem. According to Muslims, when the Caliph of Islam

wanted to pray at the site of Masjid al-Aqsa after his first entry into the city, the Christian inhabitants showed him the location of the Temple where it was found to be a garbage dump. Omar and the Muslims cleaned the site and later built a mosque. Therefore, when the Muslims took the city, there was no Jewish representative to engage with. According to the Jewish biographical narrative, however, this event marked the unjustified construction of a mosque by Muslims on the site of Solomon's Temple.

Another serious divergence in biographical narratives occurs in connection with the time when Jews began their attempts to settle in the land of Palestine and establish a state there in the late 19th century. According to Palestinians, Israelis have unjustly occupied lands owned by Palestinian Arabs with the support of the West. According to the Israelis, this land is already the holy land that God promised to the Israelites, and the Jews had the right to return to it.

Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, two characterizations have prevailed in biographical narratives as a new and more serious conflict: "the cruel Zionist Israeli regime that subjects Palestinians to genocide and forced migration" on the Palestinian side, and "Arab nationalist Palestinian terrorists attempting to destroy the legitimate state of the Jews" on the Israeli side.

Despite these obvious disagreements in biographical narratives, there are also unifying elements. To both Israelis and Palestinians, Jerusalem is the city of Adam, Abraham, David, and Solomon. God's will for Abraham not to sacrifice his son was conveyed in Jerusalem. There were times such as the Ottoman period that the Jewish, Muslim and Christian inhabitants of the city lived in peace and harmony. Eschatology also reunites Palestinians and Israelis. Narratives of Islam and Judaism emphasize that the city will be the scene of critical developments in the end days of humanity. In Islam, Jerusalem is the place where souls will gather on the Day of Judgment. The Bridge of Sirat, where believers and non-believers will be separated, will be built in this city. According to Judaism, in the last days of humanity, Messiah will establish the kingdom of God in these lands, and a heavenly Jerusalem will descend and replace the Jerusalem below.

Conclusion and Discussion

Whatever the elements that divide and unite the biographical narratives, it seems that Palestinians and Israelis need to find a sustainable formula for coexistence in Jerusalem. This formula will also be a key element of the Israeli Palestinian peace process. Without a solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestine, Israel will never be able to ensure its security. Likewise, in the absence of a viable peace, it will not be possible to end the oppression of the Palestinian people which has lasted for centuries.

In this regard, concerning the second question—"Which components of these biographical narratives appear suitable for activation and deactivation?"—it is possible to assert that, while it may not be feasible to compile an exhaustive list, a thorough examination of the narratives suggests that some components are suitable for activation or deactivation. Certain elements of the aforementioned biographical narratives involving Jerusalem are shaped by political motivations and structured in a "narrative and counter-narrative" format. For example, as the emotional attachment of the founders of political Zionism to the city was not overwhelming (Laqueur, 2003), Israeli politicians might emphasize this point during peace negotiations. Similarly, it could be argued that Israel did not intend to initiate the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, and thus its subsequent occupation of East Jerusalem was not a premeditated action by the Jewish people.

Similarly, in a possible peace process, Palestinian politicians could activate the Palestinian narrative that there were times in the Jerusalem history when Muslims, Jews and Christians lived together in peace and harmony. They could underline that peace will bring about the same harmony again. However, a central challenge in the study of narrative activation and deactivation lies in the operationalization of these processes. Notably, there exists no universal protocol or standardized methodological framework applicable to all narrative constructors. Rather, the efficacy of such processes is contingent upon a constellation of interdependent variables, including the sociopolitical positioning of the narrative constructor, their modes of shaping public discourse, and the broader political milieu that determines the receptivity of specific narratives. Furthermore, the success of narrative activation or deactivation hinges on intrinsic narrative qualities, such as the extent of societal internalization, as well as the narrative's capacity for adaptation in response to evolving sociopolitical dynamics.

This phenomenon is exemplified in the context of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. As mentioned before, during periods conducive to reconciliation, narrative constructors on both sides may strategically activate historical frameworks emphasizing “Jerusalem as a site of interreligious coexistence between Muslims and Christians,” thereby displacing exclusionary claims such as “Jerusalem as an exclusively Muslim or Jewish domain.” This dynamic parallels Subotić’s (2016) analysis of Kosovo’s independence movement, wherein Serbian political elites activated a victimization narrative (“Serbia oppressed by imperial powers”) while deactivating the aspirational narrative of national resurgence (“Serbs will rise again”). Subotić’s concept of *mnemonic warriors*—actors who strategically manipulate collective memory—underscores how narratives are not merely constructed but tactically mobilized or suppressed to align with political objectives and legitimacy demands.

The mechanisms driving narrative activation are multifaceted, encompassing discursive channels such as political rhetoric, media representation, scholarly discourse, religious edicts, and digital platforms. Subotić further emphasizes the role of performative acts, including public demonstrations, in amplifying narratives and materializing abstract ideologies into collective identity formations. Such acts transform discourse into visible markers of political agency, thereby reinforcing narrative salience. Consequently, narrative activation and deactivation must be conceptualized not as static or deterministic phenomena but as dynamic, contextually contingent strategies embedded within—and reciprocally shaping—broader sociopolitical structures.

Finally, regarding the third question—“Is it possible to change, transform, and develop the Jerusalem component of the current Israeli and Palestinian national narratives within the framework of a future peace agreement?”—the answer should be affirmative. According to the assumptions of Ontological Security, a stable identity does not always require a static one; national identities are dynamic structures that can evolve and adapt through new experiences. The processes of narrative activation and deactivation are fundamentally contingent upon the agency of key narrative framers, including political actors, historiographical authorities, religious institutions, media entities, non-governmental organizations, and intellectual elites. These agents exert considerable influence in constructing collective epistemologies by strategically foregrounding or suppressing specific narrative components through discursive interventions, historiographical

revisions, media representations, digital communications platforms, policy formulations, and performative public acts. Narrative activation entails the strategic amplification, reiteration, or hermeneutic reinterpretation of selected narrative elements to advance particular ideological agendas, political projects, or sociocultural objectives, thereby enhancing their discursive prominence within collective consciousness. Conversely, narrative deactivation is operationalized through techniques including strategic omission, epistemic delegitimization, and temporal-spatial recontextualization, which systematically erode the perceived validity and sociocultural resonance of targeted elements, ultimately displacing them from mainstream discursive spaces.

Despite the numerous challenges that narrative framers on both sides may face, reshaping the Israeli and Palestinian narratives surrounding the city does not seem out of reach. When the prospects for peace arise, narrative framers on both sides might work on adjusting the Jerusalem part of their national narratives through sustained efforts by offering tolerable changes to their peoples. They might also emphasize that these tolerable changes will ensure the continuity of Palestine and Israeli states. While this would undoubtedly be a difficult task, it is achievable if they genuinely desire peace and are prepared to confront the obstacles ahead.

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