

## Origins of Zionism and Fate of the Contested City

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### ABSTRACT

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Jerusalem is a custodian of holy history and is famous as "the city of peace." Contrary to this, it has been a battleground for longer than history knows. Many wars have been fought for the authority over this city, and history has witnessed the dispersal of Jewish communities over centuries until they started returning to the holy land. However, when one tries to figure out the reasons behind their return, Zionism prompts. Do the Zionist views of nationhood and their Movement reflect Jewishness, or are they just another modus operandi. Why did Jews come to the Holy Land after a bi-millennial dispersal and absence, and why are they so obsessed with the holy city? These inquiries inextricably link to the nature of modus vivendi and changes in its natural order. Considering the divergent beliefs of Jews and Muslims, political and social distrust and a strong security challenge exist. Thus, the research requires a more logical approach. Through a mixed method to study the critical factors, this paper discusses the origins of the Zionist Movement and their desire to control Jerusalem absolutely and, based on this discussion, assesses the fate of this contested city.

**Keywords**

Zionism, Jews, Muslims, Palestine, Jerusalem

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### Introduction

#### Origins of the Zionist Movement

Mount Zion is stretched outside ancient Jerusalem, just beside the Western Wall. It is a hill bound by the fate of its inhabitants (the Israelites), central to their cult, and thus, it is the essence of beliefs and integrity of their confidence (Anderson, 1998). The Holy Bible says, "and the inhabitants of Jebus said to David, thou shalt not come hither. Nevertheless, David took the castle of Zion, which is the city of David" (1 Chronicle 11:5, King James Bible). But the term Zion has a long history that goes well beyond the reach of ancient scripts found today and much of which is now lost. However, by the end of the nineteenth century, Zion again came to the surface; precisely, it was in 1890 when 'Zionismus,' or Zionism, was coined. Nathan Birnbaum pioneered the Movement (Jewish-Virtual-Library, n.d.). Later, Theodor Herzl took the Movement and became the spirit of its political success (Laqueur, 2003).

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Born in 1860 in Hungary, Theodor Herzl was obsessed with telling stories. “He was the Paris correspondent of central Europe’s most prestigious newspaper, *Die Neue Freie Presse*, and the newspaper’s literary editor from 1895 until he died in 1904” (Penslar, 2020). There he covered court proceedings of a Case on a Jewish army man, captain Dreyfus, that later became the infamous *Dreyfus Affair* (Penslar, 2020). Theodore Herzl witnessed anti-Semitism; although he was known as a liberal Jew, some argue that the Dreyfus Affair made him Zionist (Laqueur, 2003). Herzl then began researching for a separate land for Jews and considered many options for a permanent settlement, such as Argentina, but for him, the only logical choice was the Land of Palestine, a place connected to Jews by default. He continuously went to persuade well-off and influential Jewish families about his idea, which he later wrote in his book *Der Judenstaat*, translated as *The Jewish State* (Herzl T. , 1989), in 1895. “The idea must make its way into the most distant miserable holes where our people dwell. They will awaken from gloomy brooding, for into their lives will come to a new significance” (Herzl T. , 1896). After a bimillennial dispersal and submissiveness of the Jewish diasporas, “Herzl was the first to achieve a breakthrough for Zionism in Jewish and world public opinion” (Avineri, 2017).

### **Is Past Prologue?**

For Herzl, the biggest problem in achieving the impossible was not the land in Palestine, but it was the majority of Muslim Arabs who owned that land, at least most of it. Besides, the Ottoman Caliphate ruled those lands. Herzl needed something creative when he produced two possible solutions to acquire the land from Arabs for Jewish settlements in Palestine.

- a. Bribe the Ottoman Empire through influential Jewish bankers as the Empire was facing a financial crunch at that time.
- b. If the option of bribery fails, put the Empire under pressure with the help of big European powers.

Both choices, however, are connected to exercising the Jewish “right,” as described by the “learned elders of Zion” that “our right lies in force.” “The word ‘right’ is an abstract thought and proved by nothing. The word means no more than giving me what I want so that thereby I may have proof that I am stronger than you” (Marsden, 1923). A milestone achieved by Herzl in this regard was the *Zionist Congress* of August 1897 in *Basel*. The conference was scheduled to be in Munich. The rabbis of both the Orthodox and the Liberals stood against Herzl. They exerted so much pressure that the meeting did not assemble at the prescribed venue and as scheduled. But, regardless of the negative factors, it was a success. The Jewish majority accepted Herzl’s propositions that they needed a homeland, that this homeland would be a country for the global Jewry, and that this country would be socially and politically forged in (what was being speculated) the land of their ancestors. The agenda and points of agreement of the First Zionist Congress, which later became the infamous *Basel Declaration*, stated the following (Stanislawski M. , 2017).

- 1) They will aggressively promote the desire to settle in Palestine.
- 2) They considered the institutional reach the best way to reach Jews, both domestically and abroad, for a call to action, organization, and unity
- 3) They agreed to make all efforts to foster the Jewish nationalism
- 4) They planned to access the governments globally to take their consent where necessary.

- 5) The primary goal is to achieve what Zionism considers the best for the people who trust in it.

The explanation may be found in Herzl's memoirs, where he explains that the Jewish state was the single most important thing, he took away from the Basel Conference (Stanislowski M. , 2017). After this, the Zionist Movement kept holding international conferences and continued their efforts to fulfill the Basel agenda, which gave rise to what is now the State of Israel.

However, there was not only the Zionist Movement that made their way through the impossibilities as "Israel was the result of a lucky conjuncture. In the early twentieth century, a variety of powerful forces supported the colonial enterprise of Western Jews in Palestine. Israel appears miraculous only if we fail to account for the forces working to make it succeed" (Alam, 2009). The most crucial time in the history of Zionism was the First World War. The Ottoman Empire had begun arresting Jews that settled in Tel Aviv, declaring them aliens, enemies of the state, and friends of evil. Then, a moment of historical meetings and lobbying fell into the hands of the Zionist Movement. The lobbyist, Chaim Weizmann, was a cunning Jew who took it to the next level (Avineri, 2017). Weizmann had meetings with His Majesty's government of the British Empire, prominent politicians, and key figures in the armed forces. The timing was crucial. It was only a matter of time before General Edmund Allenby reached Jerusalem, as he had moved towards the Gaza line along Beersheba by the end of October 1917 (Cline, 2005 ). It was at that time that lobbying worked. His majesty's government finally took a step that became the most critical moment in the History of Zionism; the Head of the Zionist faction in Britain, Lionel Walter Rothschild, received a letter on November 2, 1917, signed and dispatched by Lord Arthur James Balfour, under the subject *The Balfour Declaration* (Cline, 2005 ).

The Zionists had achieved what they wished as the most influential of the world powers of that time, the British Crown, had accepted the Zionists' requests and favored the establishment of "a national home" for them. Later, In December, British General Allenby took British troops to Jerusalem, which ended the Ottoman rule on the holy city and marked success for Britain. Mazza (2018) expressed that the urban citizenship shared by the inhabitants of Jerusalem was challenged by the new order brought by the British. Sectarianism was superimposed onto the Ottoman order; the city's diverse inhabitants were compartmentalized at the expense of Jerusalem as the holy city (Mazza, 2018).

### Literature Review

Shafir (2017) narrated the fifty-long years of the Israeli occupation of Palestine and talked about how the conflict between the stakeholders on the Holy Land got here in the present times. Three questions are primarily asked, i.e., the nature of the occupation, its duration, and the heart of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict. Shafir concluded all these three questions and produced rather practical answers.

Kattan (2009) took a different narrative to look beyond legalism to understand what initiated conflict between the two nations coexisted peacefully in the past. He constructed the case, allegedly blaming the British Empire of the eighteenth century for masterminding the plan for Jews to occupy land in Palestine by massive purchases and coined the term *Zionist* to back the Jewish occupation of Palestine. He implied that neither Palestinians nor the Israelites

are to be blamed for the 'never-ending conflict. But the powers had their agenda for this religiously and politically unstable region.

Adelman & Elman (2014) argued that Jerusalem should be a different city, unlike any other. This book, most importantly, presented different scholarly accounts to conceive an idea of what methods can be applied in a multicultural and multiethnic city like Jerusalem to avoid conflicts and improve cooperation and how, amidst violence, the town can function for all its communities.

Cline (2005) guided the reader through the course of history, i.e., how Jerusalem witnessed a series of extraordinary conflicts, wars, fallen kingdoms, and rising crowns even when the region is neither gifted by any substantial wealth nor has arguable strategic importance. The author took a geologist's and a journalist's manner of narrating accounts and put forth military history. Besides this, Cline avoided hardcore political discussion while he waded through the ocean of history the city of Jerusalem offers.

White (2018) analyzed that there is growing resentment against the policies of Israel's government in the Middle East. This situation favors Palestinian's points of view and disturbs the supporters of Zion and its allies. Israel has not much to offer in return for what it intends to take from Muslims of Palestine. What went wrong must be fixed, both for the sake of politics and society, and so that the relevant parties do not make the same mistakes twice. The entire population must work together for the greater good. Unity is the only way to achieve peace in Palestinian territory; both stakeholders can live peacefully side by side. It is argued that sharing should be on the agenda rather than apartheid.

### **Objectives**

The State of Israel came into being in 1948, altering the nature of existing regional disputes in the Middle East. Inevitably, political dimensions were redefined, alliances shuffled, and courses of economic, political, and military conflicts were revised. After the Israeli occupation, continuously shrinking Palestine became a war-torn region, hungry for peace and tired of tyranny, poverty, and anxiety. No solution to the existing conflicts between Israel and Palestine currently seems implementable. Although it is important to discuss whether Jerusalem is passing through an apartheid era or whether a proper sharing of religious or sacred sites and historical assets is being observed, a diagnosis to determine the causes of this chronic conflict between Jews and Muslims should first be conducted. The reasons preventing Israel and the Palestinians from choosing between the notions of 'peace' and 'authority' over Jerusalem must be fully understood.

### **Methodology**

This study will underline critical historical events associated with the timeline of the Zionist Movement and their ambitions to occupy Jerusalem fully. It is, therefore, essential to assess why peace in Jerusalem is necessary for the Middle East. The journey of Jewish settlers from 1880, and how they pioneered a whole country out of nothing, is significant, and sketches should be drawn to comprehend the history of settlements, progress, planning, and economic and military development of Israelites, right in the heart of a highly volatile and historically erratic region. Apart from the known history of the area of Palestine, the nature of literature

found is religious, politically motivated, or speculative. The propaganda can be easily incorporated, and opinions can be shaped. The existence of political maneuvering, distrust and intense security dilemma cannot be overlooked, keeping in view the conflicting opinions of both sides, i.e., Jews and Muslims; the very situation demands a more deductive approach to comprehend what is required for this research and why. So, the current study is quantitative. However, qualitative aspects are also integrated to support the logical ends. This research is primarily descriptive and analytical, which contains historical details. In this regard, sources of data include all kinds of literature concerning the topic, regional, historical, and critical conflicting issues, religious beliefs, and ideologies.

### **Major Deductions**

- Before the start of the 20th century, Jews had been exiled, kicked out of Europe and other regions, and even killed; Zionism made them want to live in Palestine instead of the countries around it.
- Interestingly, before the Zionist Movement, the idea of making Jerusalem a permanent settlement or even a home was seen as unlikely, even though movements like Bilu, Love of Zion, and Haskalah were already pushing Jewish diasporas to decide their fate in exile.
- Before the Zionists came along, Jews in Western and Eastern Europe could go about their lives without trouble.
- From the outside, many conditions and essential factors in the early 1800s gave people hope that Jews would move back to Jerusalem.
- Israeli Jews come from many walks of life and different regions.
- The Qur'an, the Muslims' holy book, talks about what is happening with the Jews in the Sacred Land.
- Muslims believe that Allah will punish Jews harshly before the world end.
- Jews, on the other hand, see their return to Jerusalem as a sign that their messiah is coming, who will set up a permanent Jewish kingdom and free them from all their chains.
- Jerusalem has been slated to take center stage at the close of history.
- Because of these prophecies, the Zionists want complete control over Jerusalem's holy city.

### **Discussion**

#### **Zionists in the Holy Land**

Jews had passed through exile, exclusion, and execution many times before the 20<sup>th</sup> century even started but instead of carrying on the previous practices of migration and settlements, i.e., moving towards neighboring countries (and not the Holy Land), Zionism led them to choose Palestine at whatever cost. Although movements like Bilu, Love of Zion, and Haskalah, were already pushing Jewish diasporas to decide their fate in exile (Stanislowski M. , 2017), interestingly, before the Zionist Movement, choosing Jerusalem as home or as a permanent settlement, was seemed farfetched. Regarding this, “the Zionist ideologues would have to justify their violent mission, glorify it, and eventually place it beyond criticism” (Alam, 2009).

Jews had lived freely in Western and Eastern Europe before the Zionists intervened. They were given the right to live, study, work, even free marriages, establish synagogues, and publish the *Torah*. They were enjoying almost equal rights until there was a push by politically motivated movements to decide for their own country. “They would have to motivate Jewish communities in the West, who were most satisfied with their lives and prospects, to become pioneers in Palestine” (Alam, 2009). The resentment in the European countries against Jews during that time was due to that great push which can be called “a great conspiracy.”

A peripheral point of view of the Judeans returning to Zion can count several circumstances and considerable determinants in the early nineteenth century, which ignited a belief in their return to Jerusalem. Initially, it seemed impossible to pursue, but Jews were already fed up with the catastrophic incidents related to anti-Semitism in Western societies after the growing activities of preaching Jewishness and promoting Zionism.

The Jewish society in Israel is heterogenic. People from many nations, from different beliefs in the book, even with contradicting ideologies, and sects with dissimilar systems of a synagogue within the same faith, with contrasting colors, uttering non-identical languages, and conflicting races, now dwell in Eretz Israel. Muslims’ holy book, the Qur’an, has also discussed the state of Jews in the holy land; “And after that, We said unto the children of Israel: Dwell now securely on earth - but [remember that] when the promise of the Last Day shall come to pass, We will bring you forth as [parts of] a motley crowd!” (Asad, 1980). It is also logical to quote the discussion between the Prophet Nathan and King David about the fate of the people who dwell in the Holy Land and what the future holds. The verses say, “when your days are over, and you go to be with your ancestors, I will raise your offspring to succeed you, one of your sons, and I will establish his kingdom” (1 Chronicles 17:11-15, New International Version). Moreover, the verses say, “and I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God” (Genesis 17:8, King James Version). Zionists had assimilated these verses by futuristically implying their struggle for Eretz Israel and the future of the Israeli state and using them for their political benefits.

The return of Jews to the Holy land is usually quoted as an example of the fulfillment of messianic predictions by the religious scholars belonging to both religions, i.e., Islam and Judaism. Did God make Herzl stand and guide his people to gather in the Holy Land? Muslims believe that Allah intends to punish Jews before the end time and that the punishment would be much more severe than ever, whereas Jews believe that their return to Jerusalem is a sign of the arrival of their messiah, who will set them free of all chains forever and the Jewish reign will prevail. Both ideas, however contradictory, seem to have a primary linkage. In a conversation with the chairperson of the Muslim Institute Islamabad, Sahibzada Syed Ahmed Ali (personal communication, February 11, 2020) mentioned that it had already been prophesized that Jews would return to the Holy Land and Muslims would lose the entire Arab world, except Makkah and Madinah. Jews, eventually, will establish a global government. And, just before the end, the earth’s inhabitants will witness various calamities, and the Jewish government would be one among these calamities. It would be a sign of evil, a drum of war continuously beaten in the Middle East. It would be the beginning of the end. Jerusalem “is destined to play the most significant of all roles at the End of History. *Islam*, Christianity, and Judaism are all agreed on this. Signs are abundant, plainly visible to those blessed with spiritual

insight” (Hosein, 2003). The Zionists’ desire to establish absolute control over Jerusalem comes from these predictions.

### **Ambitions of Zionism**

Zionists were nation-less and stateless until they made their way to the Holy Land. The Orthodox Jews had already been living in Jerusalem and other areas in Palestine. For them, it was a matter of coexistence, not the exclusion of the different religions, their followers, and the inhabitants of the Holy Land. They had been living among Muslims and Christians as Jews and not in disguise. What the Zionists produced was not a similar idea of coexistence. It was an idea of exceptionalism, exclusionism, and imperialism that did not believe in coexistence scenarios. Several mass migrations or Aliyahs (Britannica) of Jews who left their homes for one cause; seize the land in Palestine and deny their owners the right to their lands.

Interestingly, it was a fundamentally ambitious move and can be called modern-day colonization, in which colonial masters, the British, who already had become exceedingly efficient at applying colonial procedures, helped them. Fast cultivation of people was done, especially after the ‘holocaust,’ which triggered hopeless Jews to try to save their lives by migrating to the Holy Land amid all the fears and discontentment. White (2012) described the Israeli land regime and its manner of dealing with Palestinian landowners as biased and called it *Judaization*. Up till 2012, hundreds of settlements were created for Jews in the areas that are objectively under better supervision and not even one for Palestinians, and this is “beyond inequality,” he mentions (White B. , 2012). A series of conscious efforts by Zionists have been made to grow up the number of Jews that live in the area to marginalize Palestinians more. The fathers of Zionism knew that if they believed in coexistence, a Jewish nation-state could not be possible (Hosein, 2003). As Shafir (2017) mentions, the most important question is, why is that such a long occupation if Palestine is under occupation? White (2012) describes this as a situation of marginalization, segregation, inequality, and work of (now) the Jewish majority towards (now) the Palestinian minority. Such a condition, he says, will only worsen the social sphere of the region, and a peaceful and secure livelihood, cannot be provided to the people of Palestine. Zionists are ready to seize land from the natives, who have lived there for millennia. They agreed to push them to the wall by exerting political, economic, and military pressures. “Zionism argues that Truth, in Judaism, had conferred on the Jewish people ‘exclusive,’ ‘eternal’ and ‘unconditional’ title to the Holy Land. Zionism argued that the restoration of the Jewish State of Israel, destroyed by Allah Most High some two thousand years ago, validated Judaism’s claim to ‘an imperialist version of Truth (Hosein, 2003).

As a result of religiously ambitious efforts and messianic interpretations of religious scriptures, Zionists became a target of criticism not only by the followers of other religions but also by several communities and sects of their own. It is true, especially for stubborn Orthodox and liberal Jews who became unavoidable obstacles for Zionists. Orthodox faith in religion and association with fundamental beliefs is still unbreakable. Orthodox see the occupation of the Holy Land as an act to pave the way for the messianic events to come to pass, which is forbidden in Judaism. Sahibzada Syed Ahmed Ali (personal communication, February 11, 2020) vocalized that Orthodox Jews, like Muslims, are now a target of Zionists. They are criticized and victimized. Orthodox voice is weak now, and it is not taken seriously. According to the holy scriptures of the Orthodox Jewry, Jews must wait for things to happen until the time comes, and no Jew can initiate a conscious effort to make things happen before they naturally

come to pass. For instance, they are not allowed to bring *Red Heifer* (Smith, 1909) to the Holy Land from anywhere, as importing Red Heifer is forbidden. Instead, they must wait for the Red Heifer to be born in the holy land to offer the long-awaited sacrifice, ask for God's forgiveness, and build the Third Temple (BBC). So, Zionists are criticized for initiating efforts to forge favorable scenarios in a desire to make things happen, i.e., pulling Jews to live in Israel, waging war on Palestinians and neighboring countries, importing Red Heifer's Chromosomes to scientifically give birth to the prescribed (Beaumont, 2015) Red Heifer in Israel.

## Conclusion

There are several troubling matters between Israel and Palestinian Arabs. Many efforts for peace in the region have been made, not only with the inclusion of various mediators but also by the primary stakeholders. However, none of the efforts has been successful so far. On the other hand, more troubles and conflicting issues have emerged, making peace more difficult to achieve. Why have all efforts for peace nearly failed? All answers to this question possess many gray areas, and the difficulty perhaps lies in Zionist *exclusivism*. Although the city is equally sacred for Muslims, this fact is ignored by the Zionist propaganda, and it is due to this exclusivism. As of now, when Zionists have achieved even more than they had expected, coexistence would be a more appropriate step they can include in their agenda. Many great cities were destroyed, and many were reborn from the ruins of their predecessors; humans must not pass-through suffering if there are ways to ease their pain. Palestinians are weak, more than ever, and they can only hope that the total exclusion of Palestinian Arabs from their lands is not an agenda of the Zionist regime. And how far will they go to fulfill their messianic occult and achieve their politically motivated desires in its shadow? From occupation to annexation, Zionist ideologues are in total control and rising. As of now, when Jerusalem has already been besieged, the future of Palestinian Arabs seems quite bleak.

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