

Divergent Epistemologies in the Search for Co-Existence: The Jerusalem 2050 Project*

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As war and armed struggle continue to create turmoil in the greater Middle East, as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict simmers relentlessly in an environment where Palestinians are fighting each other as much as Israel, and as threats of escalated conflict still hang like a specter over the entire region, it is time to re-assert the importance of peacemaking if Israel and its surrounds are going to survive without suffering more instability and the sustained threat of future bloodshed. The recent meeting convened in Annapolis by President Bush, after several years of relative US administrative neglect of Palestinian-Israeli discord, is testament to this realization. But even more important are the continual and renewed efforts by citizens and academics to place peace and co-existence at the center of discussion and activity. The recent conference organized by

* *Just Jerusalem: Vision for a Place of Peace* is an interdisciplinary initiative sponsored by MIT's Center for International Studies (CIS) and Department of Urban Studies and Planning (DUSP). The competition began on March 2, 2007 and concluded on December 31, 2007. Winners will be announced on March 19, 2008. The competition has four entry tracks: physical, economic, civic, and symbolic infrastructure. An international panel of nine (9) jurists from a variety of disciplines and professional backgrounds will award five (5) prizes and five (5) honorable mentions. This reflects our belief that there is no single answer, no panacea. Jerusalem is multifaceted; the conflict is multifaceted; therefore, peace must be multifaceted. Winners will spend up to three (3) months at MIT as fellows during the Fall 2008 semester, in order to continue developing their proposals and to participate in ongoing dialogues, exchanges, and conferences. For more information on the competition guidelines, winners, upcoming events, the International Jury, and other relevant documents, please check our websites: <http://www.justjerusalem.org> and <http://web.mit.edu/CIS/jerusalem2050>.

¹ This paper is a revised version of a public presentation given by Diane Davis and Leila Farsakh, co-directors of the Jerusalem 2050 project, at the Children of Abraham conference. Materials related to mapping, demographics, and general political and economic statistics were compiled by Leila Farsakh, drawing partly on her own research, and have been modified for inclusion in this article. Special thanks to Leila for these and other contributions to the structure and content of this article, as well as to Amy Spelz for considerable editorial modification, conceptual elaboration, and overall assistance in the preparation of this text.

Moshe Ma'oz and his colleagues at Harvard University's Weatherhead Center is yet another example of these heroic efforts.

In considering what it would take to generate peaceful co-existence among all the "children of Abraham," Christians, Jews, and Muslims alike, the question at hand is not merely how to accomplish such goals, but where and how, exactly, to begin? Scholars from divergent disciplinary vantage points will no doubt answer this question differently. Historians will focus on the past, and debate among themselves whose past must be remembered, and how it is known or knowable. Religious scholars will focus on texts and principles embedded in these defining narratives of peoples and their religions, and use this as a starting or ending point for harmony or conflict. Political scientists and economists will examine the defining contracts that give order to society, whether between rules and ruled, producers and consumers, citizens and others. Anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists will focus on the everyday interactions of peoples in given locales, and they ways that identities, customs, and rituals may generate inclusion or exclusion, conflict or co-existence, or just mere tolerance. Then, of course, there are the geographers, who might debate about where these disciplinary perspectives most be applied, and with what implications for those from the three great religions who have histories and connections all over the world.

The Promise of the City

As a scholar who has studied cities and the relations between cities and nations for decades, I would like to propose yet another disciplinary perspective, one that draws on all the above social sciences, but focuses on their interactions in space. In conceptual terms, I consider this disciplinary vantage point to be that of **urbanism**, a field built on

both normative and analytical preoccupation with the urban experience and the so-called “promise of city.”² In this tradition, cities are not merely hosts for certain forms of architecture, the locus of population density, or the source of economic innovation and productivity. Cities also are key sites of tolerance, diversity, cosmopolitanism, expansive citizenship, and democratic inclusion. Such claims about the city not only have a grand lineage dating to Max Weber, among others, they still flower in many contemporary writings on the city. From Marshall Berman’s notion that the city offers perhaps the only kind of environment in which modern values [of tolerance, freedom, and so on] can be realized”³ to Andy Merrifield’s view of the city as host for “togetherness *in difference*”⁴ to Ira Katznelson’s sense that “the compound of liberalism and the city promote a liberalism of depth and complexity”⁵ to Richard Sennett’s idea that the city is a place where strangers meet and his attendant proposition that “people grow only by processes of encountering the unknown”⁶ (a view prefiguring the political theorist Iris Young’s views on the togetherness of strangers in cities), scholars have long celebrated the humanistic potential and endowments of the city. As David Harvey further reminds us, the “figures of ‘the city’ and of ‘Utopia’ have long been intertwined,” as have the notions of city and citizenship, such that “[p]rojects concerning what we want our cities to be are,

² For a synthetic view of this promise, and more discussion of difference, democracy, and the city, see Kian Tajikbakhsh, *The Promise of the City : Space, Identity, and Politics in Contemporary Social Thought*, (University of California, 2001).

³ Marshall Berman, *All that is Solid Melts into the Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Penguin Press, 1988), p. 318.

⁴ Italics in original. Andy Merrifield, “Social Justice and Communities of Difference: a Snapshot from Liverpool” in Andrew Merrifield and Eric Swyngedouw, *The Urbanization of Injustice* (New York University Press, 1997), p. 201.

⁵ Ira Katznelson, “Social Justice, Liberalism, and the City: Considerations on David Harvey, John Rawls, and Karl Polanyi” in Andrew Merrifield and Eric Swyngedouw, *The Urbanization of Injustice* (New York University Press, 1997), p. 49. Katznelson defines liberalism as the divide between public and private; guarantee of individual and group rights; moral pluralism.

⁶ Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), p. 295.

therefore, projects concerning human possibilities, who we want, or perhaps even more pertinently, who we do not want to become.”⁷

Many of these same hopes and ideals sustain Henri Lefebvre’s seminal writings as well, especially his notion of “the right to the city,” a proposition which holds great resonance to those living in divided cities like Jerusalem, where mobility and access to everyday activities and the urban built environment are hindered or strongly curtailed. It is worth remembering that Lefebvre conceives of the city as “gathering the interests of the whole society” as much as those who physically inhabit it.⁸ But what may be most significant about Lefebvre’s formulation is his use of society -- not the state or nation -- as the conceptual reference point for the city’s humanitarian promise. Moreover, for Lefebvre a city’s “inhabitants” are not necessarily bounded in space or in the formal confines of the city proper. Arbitrary territorial boundaries coercively imposed by national or other state authorities are antithetical to this proposition, and would violate Lefebvre’s notion of the right to the city if they also restricted the flows, the “place(s) of encounter,” the “priority of use value,” and the natural spaces in and surrounding formally-drawn city borders.⁹ In this sense, Lefebvre is highlighting “the right to urban life” as much as to the city itself, a presupposition that sustains a desire to place the notion of urbanism as central to any emancipatory political vision.

Lefebvre’s views of urbanism rest not merely on a recognition of the importance of individual access to a wide range of places and spaces, on the exposure to social and class diversity, or on myriad other ways to ‘rightfully’ partake of the city. They also build

⁷ Harvey, *Spaces of Hope*, p. 157, 158.

⁸ Henri Lefebvre, “The Right to the City,” pp. 158 in H. Lefebvre, *Writing on Cities* (Blackwell Publishers, 1996).

⁹ *Ibid.* 158.

heavily on a specific understanding of the relations between cities and nation-states in a way that is particularly relevant for understanding the problems of Jerusalem. Not unlike the classical arguments formulated by Max Weber and paralleled more recently in work by Manuel Castells,¹⁰ Lefebvre suggests that where cities are dominated by or fused with states one is likely to see violence and a “vacillat[ion] between democracy and tyranny.”¹¹ The assumption here is that in order to eliminate violence and tyranny, and restore the possibilities for democracy in both city and society at large, this fusion must be challenged. Of course, given the nature of this challenge and the fact that states are not about to disappear, any progress in disarticulating city and state (national or otherwise) must be best measured in degrees rather than as a total break. Still, Lefebvre is not alone in advocating for a conception of the city as operating on its own terms in order to sustain a society’s greatest potential; nor is he alone in seeing cities as the territorial location most likely to generate democratic institutions and practices.

Writing about an entirely different time and place, urban legal theorist Gerald Frug comes to similar conclusions about the challenges to democracy and social justice that arise when cities are dominated by states or not allowed to flower as autonomous domains of decision-making that “gather” – to use Lefebvre’s notion -- the multiple localities and social collectivities that constitute society. Taking the U.S. as his focus for study, Frug argues that overbearing “state control has reduced the importance of cities as instruments of public policy and thereby diminished the opportunity for widespread

¹⁰ See Manuel Castells’ discussion of the *comunidades de Castilla* in *The City and the Grassroots: A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Social Movements* (University of California, 1983).

¹¹ “Rhythmanalysis of Mediterranean Cities,” in *Ibid.*, p.232. This formulation comes from Lefebvre’s analysis of Mediterranean cities. He further notes that in city-states, or places where there is a fusion of city and state, “the State, whether it be inside or outside the city, always remains brutal and powerless, violent but weak, unified by always undermined, under threat.” *Ibid.* p. 233.

participation in public decision making” in a way that challenges basic fundamentals of liberal democracy. But in a departure from many other urban democratic theorists, especially those who build on the Tocquevillian tradition of reifying neighborhoods, communities, and other smaller-scale territorial units as the bedrock of democracy, Frug is clear in advocating for empowerment and autonomy on the level of the city -- understood as a jurisdictional, legal, and spatial entity larger than the neighborhood but smaller than the nation and sub-national states. In fact, Frug goes so far as to suggest that the legal contours of overly localized power, which in the U.S. rest on the asserted superiority of private interests, both individual and corporate, prevent cities from fulfilling their democratic and civil society function by turning them into “vehicles for separating and dividing different kinds of people rather than bringing them together, withdrawal from public life rather than engagement with others, and the multiplication of private spaces instead of walkable streets and public parks.”¹² And the reason for this, he argues, is that this legal context of localism “treats autonomous individuals and the nation-state...as interested in pursuing their own self-interest” in ways that challenge the independent capacity of cities to guarantee the collective urban interest.¹³

To be sure, given his focus on the U.S., what Frug has in mind when he uses the notion of city is the metropolitan area, not so much a given city’s formally cast political boundaries -- many of which trace to earlier historical moments when transportation technology and other political requisites kept cities relatively circumscribed in size. One of his main concerns is that the divisions between central cities and their suburbs help

¹² Frug, *City Making: Building Communities without Building Walls*, pp. 8-9. Again, it is worth emphasizing that when Frug uses the word city in contradistinction to locality he has in mind the idea of cities as metropolitan bodies which extend in space to include a variety of (fragmented) localities where some form of deliberative power rests.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

reinforce fragmentation and spatial separation on the basis of race, income, or other forms of privilege that together undermine democratic deliberation in the urban area as whole. But such concerns – in addition to replicating Lefebvre's intent to envision cities as reflections of society in all its diversity -- merely underscore the importance of thinking of how and on what basis to define the urban unit of analysis around which claims for the right to the city might be forged. They also are relevant to all cities where questions and concerns about the distinction between the city and the metropolitan area now dominate the urban, social, and political agenda.

Jerusalem as Promised Land, or “The Promise” of Jerusalem?

In the case of longstanding and virulent conflicts among Muslims, Christians, and Jews, it is not difficult to see how the theoretical and normative path of urbanism could lead directly to the gates of Jerusalem, an important spiritual center for all. Jerusalem is not only a city where the question of boundaries remains politically and socially contested, and where claims of cultural or religious “ownership” have led to conflict; it is also a city whose historical diversity, tolerance, and cosmopolitanism are as famous as its more recent division and persistent instances of intolerance. In this sense, it may be the single most important key to peace among the “children of Abraham,” not to mention the larger region as a whole. It is often said that the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict depends in large part on Jerusalem, and this clearly is the impression left in the wake of prior peace dialogues and attempted diplomatic settlements, most recently the Oslo Accords. If this is true, then the city of Jerusalem is a natural starting point for peace-building. But can change and improvements in Jerusalem be achieved independent of a final Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement? Are there issues to be addressed that are

important to the local residents and could also contribute to a politically negotiated agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority?

As an urban locale, Jerusalem has modern infrastructure, spectacular new housing complexes, historic beauty, and deep religious meaning. But it also is a site of resource scarcity, ecological degradation, segmented areas of built space, social tensions, fear, and insecurity. The local economy lags behind those of neighboring cities, particularly Tel Aviv and Haifa. Jerusalem is one of the poorest cities in Israel, with the per capita income being one-third that of the Israeli national average. Within the municipal city, 42% of Palestinian and 22% of Israeli households live under the poverty line. This is in part due to the fact that 30% of its Jewish population are Haredi, ultra-orthodox Jews, who are not economically active, in the formal definition of the term, and tend to be poor, while 41% of the Palestinian population is under the age of 15.¹⁴ Additionally, the city has an economy based predominantly on services (tourism and commerce) rather than manufacturing. Meanwhile, many middle and upper class families are moving out of municipal Jerusalem and relocating to the metropolitan area or to other cities.

Socially, the city is divided ethnically and economically; housing is increasingly unaffordable. The desire for security and freedom from terror and the nature of occupation, combined with a fragmented transportation system, have slowed, if not prohibited, free movement within the city for all its residents. Many live in constant fear of violence, whether by suicide bombers or by military and police forces. Though some of these qualities could describe many other cities in the region, Jerusalem's location and the historical struggles of Palestinians to claim the city as their capital have created unique and unavoidable tensions over the city's built environment and among its peoples.

¹⁴ ICBS, [Statistical Abstract of Jerusalem](#).

For all these reasons, one possible way to make progress on peaceful co-existence is to think about new ways to make the city of Jerusalem a more livable, sustainable, and harmonious place for all its residents. If quality of life in this contested locale could improve, and the city could show itself to be a model for future generations who seek to live together in peace and harmony, then some progress in the current national and regional conflict just might accrue. In many ways, the challenge here is to make a city claimed by two nations and central to three religions `just' a city, albeit a dynamic, historically unique, and prosperous one, a place of difference and diversity in which contending ideas and citizenries could co-exist in benign yet creative ways.

While the nationalist politics of the greater Israeli-Palestinian conflict certainly cannot be completely ignored, Jerusalem's political or sovereignty status is not the only factor to be considered. We must remember that this city is also a place in which people live, work, shop, worship, and play. Far more than being merely the contested terrain upon which seemingly irreconcilable nation-states struggle for power, the city of Jerusalem¹⁵ has produced its own unique mix of urban cultures, spatial practices, physical connections, economic activities, and political institutions, many of which existed long before twentieth century efforts to classify its peoples in terms of particular national identities. During the Ottoman period, in fact, long before struggles for the creation of a single sovereign national state in this territory, a multiplicity of institutional arrangements governed servicing and representation in the city, and they operated in ways that led to relatively peacefully co-existence among the city's Jews, Muslims, and

¹⁵ In this text I purposely employ the term Jerusalem, and not Al-Quds (Arabic) or Jerushalayim (Hebrew), because I seek to move beyond binary identity claims that have torn the city apart, and to rediscover the primarily "urban" identities that peoples of different religions, ethnicities, and nationalities can share together.

Christians. It is this undeniable historical fact and the promise that it holds for re-envisioning the city that offers some hope for Jerusalem's future – and hopefully in ways that can help ease the Palestinian-Israeli conflict more generally.

By no means is this to suggest that scholars or citizens consider an uncritical return to frameworks generated under a period of imperialism. At the end of the Ottoman rule the city was suffering from lack of basic services and most of its residents had neither civil rights nor economic autonomy. However, in this early period the binary -- or even tripartite -- understanding of space and identity that now generates so much controversy was almost completely absent.¹⁶ This is said not in order to diminish what has happened in the Jerusalem during the last several decades, but to suggest that the linking of land, people, and nationality -- which now serves as the unquestioned basis for almost all negotiations -- is just one of the many possible ways the city could and has been organized. In fact, as a blueprint for current and future actions, it has very little grounding in Jerusalem's own long history. Such observations suggest the importance of thinking about alternative models for organizing and managing the city, including those that disappeared when competing nation-states hijacked the discourses and practices of urban organization.

¹⁶ The people of Jerusalem at the beginning of the twentieth century did not identify themselves simply as Christians, Muslims or Jewish; they constructed their religious identity with a zealotry and specificity that entailed drawing very circumscribed sub-boundaries within larger ecclesiastical groupings. Folks identified themselves as Latins, Franciscans, Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, Armenians, Syrians, Jacobites, Copts, Abyssinians, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Arabs, Muslims, Sunnis, Turks, Bedouins, Ashkenazis, Yemenites, Bagdadim, Persians, Karaim and Sephardim, among others, and acted as distinctive groups in their daily demands for Jerusalem spaces. In addition, their religious identity was crisscrossed by different nationalities. Holy City residents responded to different earthly laws, using the legal codes of Turkey, France, Britain, Germany, Greece, Russia, Italy or United States to judge their actions. For more on the city under Ottoman rule, see Nora Libertun de Duren, "Jerusalem at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century," unpublished manuscript, Department of Urban Studies and Planning, MIT, 2004. For more on the city in the key transition between imperial (Ottoman) and colonial (British) rule, see Amy Dockser Marcus, *Jerusalem 1913*, New York: Penguin Press, 2007.

In particular, would it be possible for contending protagonists in the search for harmony in Jerusalem to recast their understanding of conflicts or tensions, and possible solutions to these problems, not in light of questions about competing nations, but in light of questions about what might make Jerusalem a vibrant, democratic, and peaceful city? What if they cast their eyes towards the types of urban institutions and built environmental patterns that would host a vibrant metropolis, rather than the types of political arrangements that sustain a certain form of state legitimacy and sovereignty? Rather than always being hamstrung by the “national question,” might there be constructs of *urban* place and city meaning to be imagined that could lead to peace, and by so doing, perhaps even help reconcile seemingly intractable national claims?

The point here is to seek a new vantage point for entering into a decades-old conflict, one that may lie between - or across - the conventional points of entry used to address the conflict. Rather than thinking about Jerusalem in terms of the real or symbolic role it will play in the struggle over national sovereignty, why not think more seriously about the city in and of itself? If the superimposition of nationalist projects and aspirations on ethnically or religiously-diverse urban locales like Jerusalem has fanned the flames of aggression and violent conflict, could concerted efforts to think about what social, political, economic, or spatial practices would free this city from nationalist blueprints possibly serve as the solution, or, at minimum, help lay a partial foundation for greater tolerance and perhaps even peace? While utopian in conception, this question requires a new way of thinking, which is precisely our aim here. To paraphrase Arjun Appadurai in his reflection on Benedict Anderson’s claim that the nation is an imagined

thing, “we must be prepared to recognize the critical reciprocal of [Anderson’s] insight, that it is the imagination that will have to carry us beyond the nation.”¹⁷

From Jerusalem 2050 to Just Jerusalem and Back: Questioning Boundaries in Time and Space

Armed with these reflections, a group of MIT faculty, trained in political science, sociology, history, architecture, and urbanism transformed these epistemological premises into a scholarly, university-based project *Jerusalem 2050* aimed at finding new paths toward peace.¹⁸ Rather than promoting the standard route of negotiation between “representative” peoples, we as a group have turned instead to the liberating potential of imagination, vision, and design. Rather than aiming for unity or synthesis among competing parties, we encourage the production of bold and ‘non-negotiated’ visions for Jerusalem, with the assumption that through such methods there might potentially emerge a shared understanding of the basic urban livability conditions necessary for a tolerant, peaceful, just, and culturally vibrant urban public sphere to flower, independent of ethnic or religious partisanship. A second but related aim is to promote the use of creative imaginings of space as techniques for arriving at a more positive social, political and economic organization of the city, which we see as a location where publicity and democracy find most elective affinity.

A key feature that defines us as a collectivity is optimism that daily living conditions for the city’s inhabitants could get better in the future if enough creative and

¹⁷ Arjun Appadurai, “Sovereignty without Territoriality: Notes for a Post-national Geography” in Setha Low and Denise Lawrence-Zuñiga (eds.), *The Anthropology of Space and Place – Locating Culture* (Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 337. Appadurai is engaging the work of Benedict Anderson, author of a seminal work on nationalism titled *Imagined Communities*.

¹⁸ For more information on the specific faculty involved, the history of this project, and the academic seminars we have hosted over the past several years, please see our website: <http://web.mit.edu/CIS/jerusalem2050/index.html>

innovative thinking could be marshaled on behalf of this goal. This not only means that we are not engaged in efforts to rehash the past; nor are we allowing ourselves to become overly paralyzed by the terrible situation on the ground, whether it be fear of further occupation and isolation, fear of further terrorist attacks, or unwillingness to “sanction” the *status quo* that has generated these conditions.¹⁹ We feel one of the best and most effective ways forward is for those who care about Jerusalem and how its residents live to offer views of its potential as *just a city*, and about its foreseeable future.

It is essential that these points be clarified and spelled out systematically in terms of two basic principles that underlay this initiative. The *first* is that we want to address and understand problems in Jerusalem from the vantage point of the city and urban livability, and not necessarily from the nation – or the actions of competing nations – and their objectives. This does not mean that we intend to blind ourselves to the nationalistic, religious, and political debates over the city or the real power of nation-states (in the region and outside) to determine the fate of the city and its citizens. Nor does it mean that we give up the importance of thinking about concepts, like citizenship and meaning, that are often seen as the purview of the nation or religion. But it does underscore a desire to question the epistemologies and conventional ways of seeing or understanding the city that have taken as their vantage point the nation or religion, while treating Jerusalem primarily as the blueprint upon which these identities or struggles are fought or enacted.

As such, we think it is important to start from the point of view of the city and its resident. How might they live their lives in the near future; how could quality of life and

¹⁹ It is this same logic that often prevents Palestinians from exercising their democratic rights at the ballot box in the city, or from attending community meetings about housing or transportation policies. It is not that they do not care about the city; but rather, this response is seen as an act of protest at the larger sovereignty aims under which planning decisions for Jerusalem are being made.

urban conditions be better on a quotidian scale; and what might full urban citizenship look like, independent of other scales or references points of identity? We have coined the nomenclature *Just Jerusalem* for the international, juried competition that that Jerusalem 2050 project is hosting as in order to encourage and enable this envisioning process. With this competition, we ask ourselves and the world whether a focus on Jerusalem “just” as a city, rather than primarily as a space where nation-states fight their battles, might open up new windows of opportunity for peace. That is, we want to think about what might make Jerusalem a peaceful, prosperous, culturally vibrant, just and diverse cosmopolitan locale that people would want to live in, thereby giving testimony to its history as one of the world’s most spiritual and humanist locations. In this sense, the competition’s title is a *double entendre*: just as in justice, and just, as in solely, or only, the city.

The *second* key principle that informs and sustains this project is a focus on the future, as much as on the present. Stated another way, we would like competition entrants to try to understand what the city and urban citizenship might look like in the future (or by the year 2050), if justice, peace, and sustainability were the framing device for its functioning. The year 2050 is not as some arbitrary point in time, so much as metaphoric construct that suggests enough distance from the presence to allow a sense of optimism that things can change, and enough closeness to the presence that it will host the next generation of residents, whose lives will be most damaged if peace, justice, and sustainability are not achieved. In many ways, like other contributors to this volume, we are concerned with and oriented toward the Children of Abraham, with the emphasis being *children* themselves, and their future.

One could ask why not focus on the present rather than the future, since conditions today also demand serious attention. The answer is that we do not consider these two time frames to be in opposition to each other, but rather, intricately connected. The hope is that an analytical focus on the future will generate ideas, materials, and a sense of common purpose that can be translated into action right now – almost a working backwards from the future to the present, in inverse order of the way the “road map” to peace is often conceptualized. We ask ourselves and competition entrants: what does peace look like; and once that is clear, the next steps are to determine how to get there.

We selected this strategy purposefully, and with much deliberation. Our sense as a group was that the present situation of Jerusalem is perceived to be so dire, so conflicted, so fraught with global and local power imbalances and militarized responses, that trying to get people to think about an alternative vision for Jerusalem today might be impossible if not foolhardy. It would too easily be dismissed as a utopian dream or even a heartless game, especially because change takes time, and because cities are comprised of bricks and mortar, and not merely people and institutions. Moreover, with a history of failed peace negotiations (from Oslo to Geneva), not to mention the problems of getting divergent “sides” to be able to sit down and negotiate over the present, we found ourselves looking for an alternative way of giving hope and a new vehicle for new, creative, out-of-the-box ideas about how to improve the situation for all the city’s residents.

With all these challenges in mind, we have opted to solicit ideas – through a global competition open to all – for a peaceful Jerusalem by the year 2050. One could

think of this as a Rawlsian experiment,²⁰ where those thinking about what would make a just city would not know in advance their own particular position, role, or power position, and would thus be encouraged to conceptualize the most equitable, fair, and inclusive arrangements for all.

Different “Ways of Seeing” Jerusalem and the Search for Defining Principles

Two key elements of this project are its focus on the *city*, or urban livability, and *the future*. We arrived at these “innovations” based on our own recognition that conventional ways of understanding the city -- as the contested space over and in which nations competed; as the repository of the historical past, be it imperial, national, or religious; and as the conflicted cauldron of the present struggle between nation-states and/or religions over future sovereignty and identity claims -- were precisely the problems that lay at the heart of violence and injustice in Jerusalem. Recognizing the difficulties inherent in the “old ways of seeing” the city pushed us to think about new conceptualizations as an epistemological counter-weight.

Among the conventional ways of seeing Jerusalem that have led to sustained conflict, most build on assumptions about the most appropriate **spatial (or territorial) boundaries** of influence, about the most appropriate **political boundaries or sovereignties**, and the most appropriate **symbolic content** for the city (i.e. whose religion, culture, or law should prevail, how, when, or where). Our aim is not to negate these defining epistemologies, but to examine each of them critically, and assess their limitations as much as their value in laying the foundations for peace and co-existence.

²⁰ In reference to the great political theorist, John Rawls, and his seminal book, [A Theory of Justice](#), Oxford University Press, 1999.

Physical boundaries are perhaps the third rail of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and for this reason any examination of the formal boundaries of the city is bound to be as controversial as are efforts to discuss sovereignty or symbolic content.²¹ But the purpose of doing so is to demonstrate that there are not any “natural” or uncontested manner in which boundaries have been drawn around Jerusalem, be they political or spatial. Indeed, a simple survey of maps from various time periods over the centuries clearly highlights the varying and changing identities of Jerusalem. Depending on who is the ruling government, what is dominant religion, who is portraying the city, whether it was done retrospectively or for the present, the boundaries have expanded and contracted; the prominent and identity-defining sites and buildings have changed, despite many of the buildings and monuments remaining. What maps also show, however, and indeed help us visualize, is the fact that many of the conflicts over the city derive from questions or competing assumptions about “what **IS** the city,” or *what constitutes Jerusalem* in spatial, political, or symbolic terms. As different persons and powers have answered this question differently over time; maps too have changed in their representation as Jerusalem grows, becomes more divided, and more religiously identified and complicated.²²

²¹ Even when restrictive boundaries persist, it is still worth considering whether and how the power of design can be harnessed to a more positive vision of the city. An analogous situation, echoing our project, could be found in the Hauptstadt Berlin competition of the late 1950s, when the West Germans attempted to envision what a unified city would look like in the future. The plan was never implemented, of course, since the East Germans would have nothing to do with its originating premises. Instead, not long afterwards, they erected the Berlin Wall. Even so, one can certainly argue that there was considerable value to the effort to conceptualize a future unified city, and that this kind of forward-looking thinking may well have been useful when, more than three decades later, the city was actually re-unified. Perhaps the Hauptstadt Berlin competition would have been more powerful had it been explicitly visionary and had attempted to project a “Berlin 1990” future, as we seek to do with Jerusalem. Is there not some value in offering the vision -- if not the tools -- for a city’s rebirth just at the moment it seems to have been irreparably torn apart?

²² Some of these complexities involve thinking about the nested boundaries of different “iterations of the city,” starting with the smallest but oldest unit, the old city, and moving up through municipal boundaries

For example, a Christian map of Jerusalem during the Crusades frequently shows churches, hospitals with Christian names, and Biblical sites, particularly those relating to the New Testament. A 1790 drawing of Biblical Jerusalem highlights David's palace, the city walls and the temple, with space instead of resident housing. The famous 6th Century Madaba mosaic map shows the walled city with lots of housing, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The mosaic also includes other cities in the region but Jerusalem is disproportionately large.²³ It is clear that the boundaries (or in ancient times, the actual walls) of the city and the maps more generally always denoted religious and symbolic content, but that the city itself was much larger than either of these aspects. Primarily starting at the end of the 19th century, we find boundaries and walls extend beyond the purely religious and symbolic. This has been largely the result of economic and political developments associated first with the Ottoman Empire, and then with British colonial rule. The story of Jerusalem's boundaries in the 20th century is all too well known, with its division in 1948, and its "reunification" and redefinition since 1967, such that today, many people talk of three "Jerusalems." But even these boundaries and the content of the city are ever changing as a result of globalization, immigration, urbanization, expanded settlements, the building of the wall, and the ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict, including the internal tensions within the Palestinian Authority.

These shifting and changing "Jerusalems" manifest themselves in political and social rhetoric as well as civic practice and identity, and are as evident in shifts in population within the bounds of the city as without. Municipal Jerusalem is often divided

and into the greater metropolitan area, etc. But many of these "locales" have more or less significance in symbolic or sovereignty terms, ranging from seeing parts of Jerusalem as a religious center for all three major world faiths, to seeing parts or all of the city as the capital of one state, two states, no states, etc.

²³ For pictures of Jerusalem maps, including the mosaic map, see http://jeru.huji.ac.il/jeru/maps_index.html or Hebrew University's online collection of Jerusalem maps (<http://maps-of-jerusalem.huji.ac.il>).

into East and West.²⁴ Of the municipal city's 680,000 residents, 60% live in East Jerusalem, of which more than half (232,000) are Palestinian. Meanwhile, almost all of West Jerusalem's residents are Israeli. These ethno-national and religious demographics, which speak to differences within the city, all too frequently influence one's perception of the city as a whole. Additionally, there is metropolitan Jerusalem which has 1,020,000 residents, 66% living in the municipal and 33% living in the metropolitan area. As a growing number residents move out of the city, 50% are choosing to live in the metropolitan area.²⁵ This is changing not only the physical, economic, and political landscape, it also is transforming the meaning of the city and challenging longstanding perceptions of Jerusalem's identity both from within and outside, including from the point of view of other cities in Israel.²⁶

While there is still contention and discussion about what constitutes Jerusalem, either in terms of its outer boundaries or its "inner" populations and activities, one thing is clear: the territorial boundaries of the city today go far beyond the religious and the symbolic core that was evident so many centuries ago. And within its new expanse, new demographic patterns and other symbolic identities or sovereignty concerns continue to materialize. Many of these changes, including the shifted meaning of old and new spaces, inspired Meron Benvenisti, former deputy mayor of Jerusalem, to remark that the city of Jerusalem was "dead," in urbanistic terms at least, and all that remained was an isolated, tourist-oriented old city surrounded by a declining urban fabric, fueled in part by the

²⁴ There are also many maps portraying Jerusalem in terms of East and West, and Municipal and Metropolitan. For some examples, please see the Foundation for Middle East Peace website (<http://www.fmep.org/maps/overview.html>).

²⁵ ICBS, *Statistical Abstract of Jerusalem*.

²⁶ Uri Ram, "Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and the Bifurcation of Israel." *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*. online version. 3 July 2007.

outmigration of younger generations to places like Tel Aviv.²⁷ While this perhaps seems like a bleak assessment of the situation, the point remains, as Salim Tamari recently noted, that over the course of just the past 100 years, Jerusalem has changed in form and content way beyond anyone's imagination.²⁸ The Jerusalem of 1922 is very different from Jerusalem 1948 and Jerusalem of 1967 is very different from the Jerusalem of 2007, even with just several decades of time separating these data points.

From Liability to Opportunity?

The above cited statistics and demographics do not give a comprehensive or complete picture of Jerusalem, its boundaries, residents or their identity.²⁹ But they do call attention to the city's complexity and the myriad ways in which it has been and continues to be presented and conceived. They also show that Jerusalem means many things to many people. The Jerusalem 2050 project has tried to incorporate these shifting and competing views, and to design a project that recognizes the multiplicity of ways that people will see and experience Jerusalem.

For some critics, the fact that what defines or constitutes Jerusalem is a constantly moving target, whose form and symbolic content are up for continual re-interpretation if not renewed efforts at "resolution" through negotiation, war, or other forms of violent struggle, might pose a non-trivial barrier to efforts to generate new and peaceful visions for the city. If there is no consensus on what exactly constitutes the city, how can progress be made? And if to address this concern one were to select one of the many

²⁷ Meron Benvenisti speaking at "The Jerusalem Visionaries Conference" hosted at MIT, 8 April 2005.

²⁸ Salim Tamari, speaking at the formal launch of the Just Jerusalem Competition, March 2007, MIT.

²⁹ For a more thorough listing of maps, demographics, statistics and histories, please see the registered webpages of the Just Jerusalem website (www.justjerusalem.org), *Palestinian Labour Migration to Israel* by Leila Farsakh, *Jerusalem: The Contested City* by Menachem Klein, or publication from the International Peace and Cooperation Center .

maps, definitions, or interpretations, would they not be privileging a particular interpretation of who was there first, or of who did or did not, does or does not, have the right to rule and to draw the boundaries, or of what Jerusalem is supposed to symbolize? Rather than finding ourselves intellectually paralyzed by these dilemmas, we have chosen to treat the multiplicity of boundaries, identities, and meanings that have comprised Jerusalem over the years as an opportunity, rather than a liability. That is, we openly recognize that Jerusalem means many things to many people, both in the region and around the world. And to give life to these different views, we have launched the *Just Jerusalem Competition*, so as to solicit and document as large a number of views as possible.

Through the competition we encourage all who care about the city, and peace in the region, to offer innovative definitions of Jerusalem in physical, symbolic, and even sovereignty terms, asking participants from anywhere in the world to define “their Jerusalem 2050” and to specify how this particular mapping (or understanding) of the city works with their proposal to enable peace, justice, and sustainability. We seek to reverse the conventional order of causality used to define and make plans for the city, encouraging a more interactive or dialectic way of establishing the relationship between physical, symbolic, and sovereignty boundaries and peace in the city. Likewise, in this competition we have opened the discussion of Jerusalem to the world, or global civil society as we prefer to call it, in order to unfetter the peace process – a process often hamstrung by the limited inclusion of a narrowly defined set actors via pre-ordained representatives who are frequently constrained by political allegiances or formal

diplomatic relationships.³⁰ Finally, the competition addresses the belief that the nature of the city, and the way out of its conflicts, cannot be reduced to a single, negotiated agreement or top-down master plan. In the case of Jerusalem, imposed blueprints and forced consensus-building strategies have often been part of the problem, leading to conflict over the terms and outcomes. By engaging global civil society in a bottom-up approach, our competition sidesteps the standard route of negotiation between small numbers of high level representatives and turns instead to the liberating and regenerative potential of individual imagination and vision. Our hope is that the competition results will serve as a platform from which a new dialogue on change in Jerusalem can occur and where worldwide support can help sustain local efforts for change.

Mindful of the current political implications of any project focused on Jerusalem, we have tread carefully in this project, protecting its scholarly and intellectual origins, building into its contours a critical examination of conventional epistemology, and offering transparency in our composition and aims. Our intent has and continues to be simple: to inspire and generate innovative ideas and new discussions about Jerusalem as it might be in the future -- a just city shared in peace by its residents, whether Muslim, Christian or Jewish, Palestinian or Israeli. The descendants of the children of Abraham will be the beneficiaries of these ideas and this project, whether they live in Jerusalem or not, but residents of Jerusalem 2050 will be the direct inheritors of any changes produced as a result of our efforts. We at the Jerusalem 2050 project believe that positive change

³⁰ Given Jerusalem's global emotional, spiritual, and political importance, its universality, and the fact that people from all over the world have personal connections to the city, we have not confined our competition only to "locals," that is only Palestinians and Israelis. It is not just that people around the world have an interest in peace in this city.. Having physical separation from Jerusalem allows citizens in and from other countries a certain amount of distance from the emotional and political tensions that can sometimes blind individuals from seeing new, alternative, and creative solutions. For all these reasons, the competition is open not just to Israeli and Palestinian civil society but to global civil society.

can occur by transcending the socially constructed frames that individuals have long used to interpret or understand the city, by recognizing the existence of a multiplicity of images, meanings, and understandings of the city, and by focusing on the future.

In the end, Jerusalemites will be the ultimate agents of their self-chosen and self-directed change. But to aid in this endeavor, the Jerusalem 2050 project through the *Just Jerusalem Competition* seeks to empower and inspire civil society and local government officials and planners through an inclusive global dialogue based on creative innovative ideas on all aspects of urban life, in the spirit of academic study and a shared common humanity.