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Two Bus Lines to Bethlehem

Daniel Pipes

ALTHOUGH MORE than nineteen years have passed since Jerusalem was reunited in the 1967 war, the city remains divided. The international border, the high walls, and the armed forces have left, but less has changed than one might expect. Arabs live in East Jerusalem, Jews live in West Jerusalem, and they do not often mix. They live apart, work apart, and play apart.

This was brought home to me not long ago, when I needed to go from East to West Jerusalem. A taxi with Arabic script on the door of the car stopped; the driver was an Arab. He listened to my destination, a well-known restaurant in the center of Jewish Jerusalem, and looked at me blankly. I, the foreigner, explained to him in Arabic where it was and how he should get there. The driver tried to follow my directions but quickly got lost. We ended up in the wrong part of town—and I was an hour late for dinner. That an Arab taxi driver can be ignorant of Jewish Jerusalem, well over half the small city he lives in (population: 415,000), makes vivid the unlimited separateness of the two communities in Israel.

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The same pattern of separation holds—though to a lesser degree—in the rest of Israel. Arabs live in lower Nazareth, Jews in upper Nazareth. Arabs live in Jaffa and Jews in Tel Aviv. The two peoples almost never share a block of houses, much less the same building. In towns where they do sometimes live side-by-side, such as Haifa, Ramla, and Lod, insulation between Jews and Arabs is correspondingly strong. Jews who have moved into East Jerusalem have chosen a location physically isolated from the Arab population—the Jewish quarter of the Old City is virtually inaccessible from the Arab streets.

This pattern did not occur by accident. Since the inception of Zionism in the 1860s, Jewish-Arab segregation has been the rule, as Jewish settlers sought to minimize contact with Arabs, and Arabs preferred Jews to stay at a distance. From the first modern Jewish town of Rishon Letzion in 1882, Zionists almost never moved into existing Arab settlements but started from scratch in uninhabited areas. The establishment of Tel Aviv in 1909, Eilat in 1949, and Kiryat Arba in 1978 all fit this pattern. Similarly, small towns and villages tend to be populated almost entirely by Arabs or by Jews. Zionists made a point of purchasing wastelands and other uncultivated areas from the Arabs; thus, Jewish villages and fields throughout Israel are located

on the inhospitable terrain left vacant by the Arabs. The result is a quilt of separation all through the country.

Jewish settlements on the West Bank, which are unusually isolated from their Arab neighbors, epitomize the pattern. On this hill live Arabs, on that one Jews. Al-Azariya and Maale Adumim, for example, towns of about 10,000 inhabitants each, are set cheek-by-jowl on the West Bank outside Jerusalem. The former is entirely Arab, the latter wholly Jewish. The two have a bare minimum of contact; the Jewish town is located on a previously unused hill, and a swath of no-man's-land divides the two peoples' fields. Maale Adumim has even built roads that avoid the Arab areas in connecting the town to Israel proper. In effect, the West Bank has Arab roads and Jewish roads.

Occasional efforts to break these divisions meet strong resistance on both sides. Trouble invariably follows, whether Arabs try to improve their conditions by moving to the Jewish section of Nazareth, or whether Jews attempt to re-establish their historic presence in Hebron. Not surprisingly, experiments in integrated living win little favor among either Arabs or Jews. The most prominent effort to bring the two communities together is Neveh Shalom, founded in 1978 outside of Jerusalem. Despite considerable aid from abroad, it has only sixty residents, including seven Jewish families and six Arab families.

Separation in Israel extends to all aspects of life. Jews and Arabs not only live apart; they also worship, work, socialize, and play separately. The same American movie might show simultaneously in two theaters in Jerusalem, playing to a wholly Arab audience in one and to an all-Jewish audience in the other. Arabs tend to vote for Arab politicians, Jews for Jewish ones. This pattern is learned young; with the lone exception of Neveh Shalom, nowhere in Israel do Arab and Jewish children sit in the same classroom.

The Arabic-language telephone directory for Jerusalem highlights another aspect of this segregation. Israel's telephone company does

not publish a directory in Arabic, so Arab entrepreneurs have published their own directory for Jerusalem. They omitted all Jewish names and published only Arab names. The assumption behind the omission—that Arabs do not call Jews—implies a great deal about daily life.

Bus lines are equally revealing. Arabs travel on buses owned and driven by fellow Arabs; Jews use buses owned and staffed by Jews. The two people travel apart whenever possible, even when their routes overlap. Two separate companies, for example, serve the route between Jerusalem and Bethlehem; the one Arabs patronize leaves from a station in East Jerusalem; Jews patronize one that leaves from West Jerusalem. An Arab encounters no difficulties traveling on the Jewish line, nor a Jew on the Arab line, but the two peoples prefer to avoid contact with each other.

As these many examples suggest, the paths of Arabs and Jews cross only when a specific purpose takes one of them to the alien side of the city. Arabs do not routinely spend time in the Jewish parts of cities; they go to West Jerusalem or to Tel Aviv for work. Similarly, Jews stay away from the Arab sector; they pass through East Jerusalem mainly on their way to pray at the Western Wall; they go to Jaffa for the nightlife in the recently refurbished (and Jewish-owned) Old City. When Arab and Jew do encounter each other, they usually pass wordlessly. Each acts as though the other were invisible or nonexistent. Physically, they must share a street; mentally, each lives in his own world.

Peoples everywhere associate with their own sort and keep away from those who differ, but the segregation that exists in Israel is of a different magnitude from any to be found in the Western world. Paris has its *quartiers* and Chicago has its neighborhoods, to be sure, but these divisions are only partial. Israel's two peoples keep further apart than do comparable communities in the West, where a whole range of pressures—suburban life, public schools, business activities, amusements, transportation—work to counter parochial habits.

The pattern of separation is even greater than in divided cities of the West. A 1984 study by the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies explains:

The inter-relationships between the Jewish and Arab sectors of Jerusalem after 1967 reveal a pattern of separation that is much more far-reaching and unusual than in other comparable situations. The separation between the Jewish and Arab sectors and populations was found to be much more extreme than in other "mixed cities" such as Belfast, Nicosia, Montreal, and Brussels.

Even in cities in which different national identities are accompanied by varying degrees of political conflict, the degree of separation, as defined by the indicators [used in the study] and by the quality of functional relations, is nowhere as great as in united Jerusalem. In all the relevant comparisons, residential segregation is nowhere as total, and not every bus and taxicab have sectoral identities, not even in cities where the political conflict expresses itself in day to day life in much more extreme fashion than that which characterizes co-existence in Jerusalem since the reunification.

The study also notes the absence of "joint voluntary activities, neighborly relations, or intermarriage" in Jerusalem.

Translated from the language of social science, this report states that while the Jews and Arabs of Jerusalem enjoy more peaceful co-existence than the inhabitants of other cities torn by strife, they avoid each other more systematically.

WHY SO overwhelming a pattern of separation? In part, the reason has to do with the mutual mistrust and fear between the two peoples of Israel. Arab hostility has fueled the extremist politics of the PLO and caused innumerable terrorist incidents. Feelings on the Jewish side are moving in the same direction. According to a poll released in January 1986, 58 percent of Jewish Israelis believe it is "impossible to trust most Arabs." Meir Kahane may express what is on many Israelis' minds when he

argues that fraternization leads to mixed marriages.

More important than mutual distaste, however, is a tradition of segregation that has long prevailed in the Muslim world. However much living patterns in Israel differ from those of the West, they closely resemble the norm throughout the Middle East. Lebanon's many communities live apart, retaining their own way of life and their own leaders. As in Israel, they interact only to the extent they must. Maronites, Greek Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Armenians, Sunnis, Shi'ites, and Druze have their own districts, schools, social life, and businesses. Ethnic and religious divisions led to the civil war that began in 1975 and still continues.

In Egypt, Christians inhabit their own villages in upper Egypt and their own sections of Cairo. Communal relations are also extremely fractured in Syria and Iraq. Similar divisions exist in Morocco, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. As far away as Malaysia and Indonesia, the same rules govern relations between the Chinese minorities and the Muslim majorities.

In Israel, not only have Arabs and Jews been segregated for centuries—as shown by the quarters of the Old City in Jerusalem—but this same pattern extends to the various non-Jewish communities. Some towns, such as Bethlehem, are predominantly Christian; others, such as Nablus, are mostly Muslim. Jerusalem has Christian Arab and Armenian sectors. The Druze inhabit their own villages, as do other small minorities, such as the Circassians.

In all these cases, the pattern of segregation derives from a common source—the precepts of Islam. In Islamic doctrine, Jews, Christians, and adherents of certain other religions have a special status. While inferior to Muslims, they have, nonetheless, a right to practice their faiths and live in countries controlled by Muslims. Even when Muslims rule a country, they must allow Jews and Christians the freedom to retain their religious identity. This precept has usually been followed.

At the same time, Muslims are discouraged from associating closely with non-Muslims or from mixing socially with them. Practices differ from one region to another, but the general rule has been for non-Muslim communities to live apart from Muslims. In cities, the many religious communities typically inhabited separate quarters. (Scholars trace the Jewish ghetto of European cities to a North African prototype.) In the countryside, they usually lived in different villages. This pattern has become traditional in the Middle East and wherever Muslims have ruled, from West Africa to Southeast Asia. Even where Muslims no longer rule, as in Cyprus, Israel, or India, the pattern has assumed a life of its own, and the separation continues.

Historically, segregation has had many consequences. For one, living apart and maintaining their own distinct customs facilitated the survival of Jewish and Christian communities through nearly fourteen centuries of Muslim domination. Separation enabled the minorities to withstand the constant pressure exerted by the Muslim majority to convert.

For another, separation focused loyalty on the religious and ethnic community rather than on the state. To the despair of many Middle Eastern governments, communal allegiances even today usually remain stronger than bonds to the central governments. Communal loyalties lie behind the Lebanese civil war that began in 1975; they divide the body politic in Syria between the ruling Alawis and the resentful Sunni Muslims; being an Iraqi is less important than belonging to one of the ethnic blocs that split the country; and so forth.

Segregated living also has many implications for Jewish-Arab relations in Israel. On a very practical level, it facilitates terrorism by providing discrete targets. That each people sticks to its own bus line explains why terrorists so often choose to attack buses. The

PLO hijacked an Israeli bus in March 1978, killing thirty-two Israelis and provoking a large-scale Israeli attack on the PLO in Lebanon, and in September 1984 it wounded seven Jews in a bus on the West Bank. On the other side, twenty-five Jews were arrested on terrorism charges in May 1984, accused of plotting to place bombs in a fleet of Arab buses. And in October 1984, a young Israeli soldier was arrested for blowing up a bus in central Jerusalem, killing three Arabs.

Separation renders unlikely the possibility of a true rapprochement between Arabs and Jews. The two peoples merely coexist. They are not getting to know each other, to respect each other, or to like one another. Any plan for the future of Israel that stipulates more than mutual toleration is therefore probably unrealistic. The notion of a binational state in which Arabs and Jews share power seems especially unworkable.

But separation reduces frictions and so holds out real advantages as well. Contact is so limited that many Arabs and Jews go about their daily affairs without ever dealing with each other. Cases of violence, theft, and vandalism occur much less between Arabs and Jews than within each community. The same goes for civil court cases, family fights, tensions between union and employer, and the myriad other problems of everyday life. In effect, the two peoples are already living peaceably side-by-side. The intractable disagreements between Arabs and Jews concern abstract questions of power. Problems that politicians must handle involve only the great issues of sovereignty and ultimate control, not mundane matters of daily existence.

Separation is a proven way of dealing with a historic challenge. Though not the solution we in the West would prefer, nor by any means an ideal solution, it does work. It offers an authentic, indigenous answer to a characteristic Middle Eastern problem: how two peoples can coexist at close quarters.