

Israeli Islam Isn't a Contradiction, but It Isn't Easy

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Introduction

The term “Israeli Islam” may sound like an oxymoron, but Islam is present in Israeli society—and inside the Israeli state. Just [under one-fifth of Israelis are registered by the state as Muslims](#); [Muhammad has been the most common name](#) for Israeli babies for years. And a series of state structures oversees, supports, administers, monitors, and polices Islamic practices and institutions in the country.

But the relationship between the two parts of the term—Israeli and Islam—has never been easy. And the closer one looks, the more apparent these tensions are. The difficulties are political and social, of course, but they are also bureaucratic since the state of Israel inherited and administers a host of official structures for Muslim family life, education, charity, and worship. This article explores the tension by considering how the Israeli state has taken on and molded religious endowments, mosques, educations, and courts for Israeli Muslims.

Encountering Islam in Israel

One place to begin is the Israeli mixed city of Lod/Al-Lid. ([The term “mixed city” is officially defined](#) to include municipalities with Jewish majorities but substantial Arab populations.) In this case, the city not only has two names;¹ it also has two modern histories that tell its story in very different ways. Indeed, in recent years, debates about its history have taken place not only on the international stage—but in Lod/Al-Lid too. Contention is vividly recorded on the streets of the city. In the middle of town stands Kikar HaPalmach, a traffic

circle named for the elite force that, less than two months after the May 1948 proclamation of the state of Israel, took control of the then exclusively Arab (and largely but not exclusively Muslim) city. Any account of that event will prominently mention Yitzhak Rabin, Moshe Dayan, and Yigal Allon—three leading and sometimes admired figures in the politics of the Israeli state’s first several decades, whose names now adorn public places and institutions. But such accounts can no longer gloss over the well-documented expulsion of the city’s Arab population by the Palmach. Though many argue over the numbers of casualties, it is difficult to deny the massacre at the city’s Dahmash Mosque or the casualties suffered by a population forced to flee many miles on foot in the middle of summer. Subsequent events—including the dispossession of inhabitants who remained, the [detention of some Palestinians in work camps](#), and the destruction of their homes—continue the story into the following years.

Indeed, the story lives on today. The Dahmash Mosque is located on Kikar HaPalmach, making the choice of the square’s name appear pugnacious to those aware of the history. The house of prayer had been constructed a quarter-century before the 1948 battle [as part of an Islamic endowment](#); the construction included several adjoining shops, whose rent was to provide revenues for the mosque. A recently installed series of inscriptions (in full view of the traffic circle) narrates the mosque’s history in an accurate but dissonant fashion that is just as pugnacious as the name of the square on which it stands: “This mosque was constructed in the year 1342 AH/1923 CE at the hands of Khalil Dahmash. The mosque was closed as a result of the terrible massacre committed by the forces of the occupation in the year 1948 CE/1368 AH. Then it was partially reopened in the year 1996 CE/1417 AH” (author’s translation). The inscriptions proceed to explain that the rest of the mosque was “liberated” by local “mujahidin” six years later.

The juxtaposition is jarring for anyone who notices it. But perhaps even more disconcerting is that almost nobody does. The inscription may simply be tolerated by a municipal government that wishes to avoid public clashes, despite unambiguously representing the city’s Jewish majority more effectively than its Muslim and Christian minorities. Perhaps many who might object see nothing more than Arabic calligraphy.

On the day I visited in 2023, foot and street traffic simply proceeded as usual. Shoppers visited the attached shops—those originally constructed a century ago to help support the mosque—more concerned with their immediate needs than with a decades-old atrocity or the struggle over a plot of land. A short walk from the circle, a historic mosque and church lie next to a newer synagogue in a somewhat misleading suggestion of interfaith coexistence. Longtime residents—a collection of Jews, Muslims, and Christians who moved to the city after the expulsion of 1948—describe some measure of coexistence, to be sure, but in the midst of a very tense daily reality exacerbated by both the overall political context and the influx of a group of Jews from the nationalist religious right who are linked to vigilante factions of the settler movement.

In recent years, sporadic episodes of overt conflict have broken the resentful silence. In 2021, the city was the site of Jewish-Arab violence that occurred as part of what Palestinians refer to as the “Unity Intifada”; rival accounts of who was the aggressor and who was the victim [made international headlines](#).² But most tussles attract far less attention. In 2017, the mosque was the site of a brief confrontation when the city’s mayor burst in during an early morning Eid al-Adha prayer to demand that the volume of the mosque’s loudspeakers be turned down. In one sense, it was a conflict between a Jewish mayor and a Muslim prayer leader. But it was also a clash exhibiting tension within the state apparatus. The mayor was an official of the municipality. But the Israeli state, like most of its neighbors, treats many mosques as official spaces (monitoring and regulating even those not operated directly by the state). And the imam of the mosque was a figure who dealt with national and local bodies in a way that various officials sought to manage. He was, after all, associated not simply with Israel’s formally organized and visible Islamic Movement but also identified with the branch of that long-bifurcated movement that was willing to participate in and engage Israeli state institutions. The imam emerged as the short-term winner, with the mayor issuing a series of aggrieved statements before apologizing for the intrusion.

The history and politics of Israeli Muslims can place them in conflict with a state that proclaims itself to be Jewish and follows policies in a wide variety of areas—security, immigration, budget allocation, education, provision of public services, and even symbols—to put that proclaimed Jewish identity into minute practice. Israeli Muslims are often made aware of these practices in ways that are equally minute.

But Israeli Muslims also eat, pray, and love. And when they do, many of them wish to have educated scholars to help them distinguish *halal* from *haram*, places to pray communally and people to lead those prayers, and judges who will adjudicate their family’s legal issues in accordance with the Islamic sharia. Such Muslims get their wish—often through state channels. And those who wish by contrast to avoid or evade Islamic teachings as interpreted by sharia judges [find official obstacles](#). Israel is a Jewish state, but Islam has official status. This situation leads not only to conflict and confusion, on occasion, but also to a host of evolving bureaucratic devices to manage such situations.

In 2021, Carnegie scholars undertook a series of studies on the [relationship between Islamic institutions and Arab states](#). The major themes uncovered in that work—the effort of states to manage Islam; the securitization of some religious spaces (in the form, for instance, of monitoring sermons); the haziness of the line between official and unofficial Islam; and the way in which Islam can serve as an organizing principle for opposition—very much pertain to Israeli Islam as well. Moreover, the institutional foundation on which official Islam is built in Israel can generally be traced back to a common set of structures that was laid by the Ottoman state, generally in the nineteenth century, though it has certainly evolved in some distinctive directions.

So, yes, an Israeli Islam does exist. The Jewish state inherited it both from its predecessors and from its incorporation of Muslims as citizens who cannot be accommodated by those parts of the state designed specifically for Jews. Israeli Islam exists in a very uneasy relationship with the state and the broader society, but there are odd pockets of accommodation—often from officials who simply wish to avoid conflict, prefer to look the other way, or prefer by contrast that Islam operate in the open. And sometimes Islam gets an odd form of protection from Jewish religious groups and officials who wish to ensure that religious institutions (in their case, Jewish ones) have some autonomy and are not in the hands of nonreligious leaders. (A related form of indirect support comes from the official Rabbinate’s supervision of Jewish dietary laws, [which most Israeli Muslims also accept as valid.](#))

Official Israeli Islam not only exists but also is changing in some critical albeit subtle ways. These new forms in which it is asserting itself may not be immediately visible, but they will have long-term political effects for the country.

Inherited Islam

In the last century of its existence, the Ottoman state instituted far-reaching changes in Islamic institutions, centralizing administration and adjudication, codifying laws, building schools and writing their curricula, and extending and rearranging bureaucratic oversight. Successor rulers and states—some of them imperial in nature, especially in the period between the two world wars—inherited these arrangements and modified them from a common base. Thus, the ways that post-Ottoman states structure religion show some commonalities: ministries of religious endowments, personal status courts, and mandatory religious instruction are among the common features. They have evolved in distinctive ways, however, in each particular setting. The result is that Islam is part of the state apparatus in countries including Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Kuwait, Türkiye—and Israel.

Official Islamic establishments generally have four component parts, although many aspects (including the role they play, the way they are linked or not to each other, the autonomy they are granted, and their credibility among the population) vary considerably as a result of their particular historical evolution.

First, the Ottoman state established a state apparatus to oversee *awqaf* (singular *waqf*)—endowments that supported charitable causes, such as mosques, hospitals, soup kitchens, students, or even families. In combination with a nineteenth-century effort to survey and register landed property, the result was that a sizable (if varying from place to place) share of urban and rural property designated for such purposes came under direct and bureaucratized state oversight.

Second, mosques were also under state oversight. Often, this was a direct result of management of *awqaf* (since many mosques relied on such endowments for maintenance and operation). While direct administrative control over smaller mosques was less likely, larger ones, especially in urban settings, were likely to have a prayer leader and preacher who was accountable to a state structure. The personnel of non-Muslim houses of worship were not overseen directly, but their buildings were regulated, and the people associated with them were generally part of religious communities licensed by the state. The senior leaders of these communities were similarly officially recognized.

Third, the law and the courts were partially religious, but in a manner that evolved considerably over the final Ottoman century. A set of courts of general jurisdiction staffed with judges trained in Islamic sharia (but also guided by official decrees in many areas) was supplemented by a set of courts that operated primarily on the basis of law codes—partially (but not exclusively) drawing on the Islamic legal tradition as laid down by officially sanctioned scholars. The preexisting courts found large areas of their jurisdiction gradually transferred to these newer courts; the result was a system in which those courts (joined by those adjudicating cases among members of other recognized religious communities) came to be seen as so-called family courts, since their main remaining jurisdiction focused on marriage, divorce, guardianship, and inheritance.

Fourth, the state's educational apparatus expanded greatly in the final half-century of the Ottoman state, with an effort to build primary schools and require that all Ottoman subjects attend them or a private alternative. Higher education in some specialized fields required by the state (such as military or law) also grew. In these areas, religion was generally seen as a discrete part of the curriculum.

The complexity of the Ottoman state in the religious realm thus greatly increased in a manner that would be familiar to anyone studying the emergence of bureaucratic states elsewhere in the world at the same time. Specialized structures emerged, clear hierarchies were established, centralized oversight grew more robust, and various officials and bureaucracies interacted with each other in ways that were increasingly specified, with clearer demarcations of responsibilities and chains of commands. Individual inhabitants—or citizens, as the term came to be understood—found themselves facing not merely an occasional state official collecting a tax but a series of state structures, each with its own rules and regulations.

In the religious realm, such state building had three effects. First, the state increasingly came to distinguish religion as a field from nonreligious activities in matters ranging from law to education. The line was not always sharp, and the latter were hardly secular, as the term is sometimes used, since they focused on specific areas that were not concerned with worship or faith but still often incorporated religious ideas and subjects. (State schools, for instance, required some religious instruction, and law codes did draw on Islamic jurisprudence in some areas.) And the new fields folded in many personnel whose training was in religion.

Second, those nonreligious activities greatly expanded, meaning that the place for religion, labeled as such, was not only somewhat more clearly defined but also somewhat less central.

Third, the chief religious official of the Ottoman state, the Shaykh al-Islam, metamorphosed from an individual in the capital who appointed judges and other local officials into a vast bureaucracy. In the final decade of the Ottoman state, the structure was being redesigned, with some of its duties assigned to new and even more extensive structures.

Post-Ottoman states inherited this framework. But with the system rapidly evolving, in some cases the inheritance was ambiguous on key points. Most significantly, the Ottomans had issued a family law in 1917 that not only had provisions for Muslims but also separate ones for Christians and Jews. The law was just being put into effect as the Ottoman state was losing control of most of its Arab population to invading British forces. As a result, successive authorities—largely League of Nations mandates to Great Britain and France, after World War I—were left to sort out what law they wished to apply and to whom.

In the territory allotted to them under the Mandate for Palestine, British officials reassembled elements of the Ottoman state. They were guided in part by an inclination to keep existing structures in place and in part by specific pledges that were written into the text of the British Mandate to support a “Jewish National Home” and protect various religious communities and properties. They thus took a series of steps designed to maintain the status quo with important modifications.

First, Islam lost its special status. Under the Ottoman Empire, Islam was in effect the default religion. While other recognized religious communities were granted rights and some autonomy, the Ottoman sultan presented himself in part as a Muslim ruler; Islam informed laws, policies, and educational material.

Second, most provisions for Islamic institutions were detached from structures in Istanbul, the former Ottoman capital, and assigned to a new body within the mandate called the Supreme Muslim Council. This was headed by an official designated as the “mufti of Jerusalem” (perhaps because the Ottoman Shaykh al-Islam had originated in the office of the officially appointed mufti of Istanbul).

Third, mandatory officials affirmed the provisions of the 1917 Ottoman family law for Muslims but allowed officially designated religious leaders for Jews and recognized Christian denominations to oversee family law courts for those non-Muslim communities.

Fourth, the British constructed (slowly and unevenly) a public school system, effectively for Muslims and Christians, that contained some religious instructions.

Finally, they allowed Jewish structures autonomy in administering the affairs of the Jewish population in many areas of governance such as education, immigrant absorption, and even some measures of local governance and adjudication. (“Jewish” was sometimes an ethnic/national category in areas like education, but it was a religious one in family law.)

This system evolved, most notably when the Supreme Muslim Council became a focal point for Palestinian protests over the encouragement of Jewish immigration, effectively making it the leader of religious and nationalist opposition. It supported (and then led) a 1936 uprising against the British Mandate, which prompted mandatory officials to dismiss most council members and marginalize the body as a political actor. But they did not dismantle the structure or remove its administrative centrality.

A Jewish State Remolds, Contains, and Institutionalizes Islam

When the state of Israel was formed in 1948, it inherited this system that had been constructed by the Ottoman state and modified by the British Mandate—but now was to be reconfigured to meet the needs of a Jewish state. Administering Islam was not the foremost priority for the new state’s leaders, especially with the eviction of much of the Muslim population and internal displacement of some of those who remained. A policy of maintaining the status quo could guide official actors in many areas—but not in all.

Perhaps the most fundamental and consequential step was the abolishment of the Supreme Muslim Council, with no provision for a substitute body. (A rump body with the same name was recreated for East Jerusalem only when Israel occupied it in 1967.) Though this seemed technical in nature, it made much subsequent radical change possible. While Israelis often describe arrangements for religion as a continuation of the Ottoman millet system, they miss the fundamental changes that followed from dismantling any central structures for Muslims. The various structures and processes—legal, charitable, judicial, and educational—that had been attached to the Ottoman Shaykh al-Islam continued but no longer had any unified hierarchy overseeing them. Thus, the new Israeli state hardly disestablished Islam—the way Israeli Muslims practiced their religion often ran through state-controlled structures. But it did shatter the coherence of official Islam. The component parts could then be remolded in specific ways, sometimes with a degree of autonomy but generally in a manner consistent with the construction of a Jewish state.

The new Israeli leaders showed some concern over the state's Palestinian citizens, especially as a source of opposition or even a security threat. The medium-term approach was to maintain a measure of military rule over their towns and villages—a strategy that survived for nearly two decades. Over the longer term, a clear set of policies and stratagems emerged to pursue these general aims. Communal and religious structures were regarded as ones that should remain oriented narrowly toward their mission: allowing Palestinian citizens to be educated in Arabic with a distinct curriculum that included apolitical religious instruction, allowing communities to have their family matters adjudicated in accordance with the teachings of religious authorities, and allowing communal prayer. But education, religious structures, and gathering places were clearly treated as requiring official monitoring and steering to keep them away from political or national activity.

Some officials' concerns went beyond keeping Palestinian citizens quiet, instead meeting the new state's mission of constructing a Jewish state. This was especially true with regard to property. Individuals who had been driven outside the new state's borders (as defined by a series of 1949 armistice agreements)—and even many of those internally displaced—were simply deprived of land, with dwelling places and other buildings either reallocated by the state to Jews or demolished. So the new state maintained while restructuring the major Islamic institutions now under its jurisdiction. As the Israeli state apparatus established itself, endowments, mosques, education, and courts each underwent another set of changes.

Endowments

The Israeli state inherited a set of mandatory arrangements that it largely maintained with one significant change: with the abolition of the Supreme Muslim Council, oversight of most endowments was placed in the hands of new state bodies.³ Initially, the Ministry of Religious Affairs stepped into the breach—a standard move for a region where ministries of *awqaf* regularly oversee endowments. The Israeli innovation in regional terms was not to have a ministry for religion but to install a rabbi as the head of that ministry. (Since some Jewish endowments had been founded under Ottoman laws and procedures that were in turn based on Islamic legal categories, the shift to rabbinical oversight was not wholly anomalous, although those endowments were handled separately.) An office within the ministry oversaw Muslim affairs, though its influence was limited.

But alongside this measure, a more significant step was taken by establishing a complex set of procedures and legal mechanisms to transfer most Muslim endowments to public or Jewish ownership. These actions and their overall effects were public, but their actual operations remain obscure to this day. First, in 1950, a law on absentee property effectively classified all Palestinians who did not remain in their hometown or village during the 1948 war (even those who moved to other locations that remained under Israeli control) as absentee. Second, entities—including the Supreme Muslim Council—could qualify as absentee if most members were qualified as such. Third, an Office of the Israeli Custodian of Absentee Property was established and given oversight of any property declared absentee.

The office sold off much of the land to entities and through legal mechanisms, meaning that public entities or the Jewish Agency (technically a nonstate body but one that worked closely with the Israeli state to support Jewish immigration and development of Jewish institutions) were the chief beneficiaries.

Remarkably, for all the scholarly writing on the overall process or individual aspects, the precise extent of land that changed hands is the subject of only educated guesses. (One estimate is that two-thirds of the land held by Islamic endowments was sold.⁴) Part of the obscurity was a product of official embarrassment in international circles; part was also due to an attempt to escape vocal Muslim opposition, muted but real domestic criticism, and even legal challenges. Then prime minister David Ben-Gurion pledged to Palestinian parliamentarians in 1958 that the issue would be addressed.⁵ The strategy of obfuscation and delay was successful: the steps certainly violated any sharia-based legal framework, but sharia courts were long kept out of the matter. For the custodian to sell property under its care also seemed legally questionable under Israeli law, but challenges were turned back.

More comprehensively, the legal gaps were filled by a 1965 amendment to the law. The amendment appeared to establish a firmer legal basis for the continuation of surviving endowments, but it did so by effectively insulating rather than reversing past moves. Local committees (formed in mixed cities) that operated obscurely—and, by reputation, corruptly—were allowed to continue approving sales of endowments.⁶

Mosques

In 1948 and 1949, most of the Muslim population in areas that became part of the Israeli state was dislocated. Many were directly expelled by Israeli forces. Most of those displaced by fighting, fear, or force were barred from returning in a variety of ways. Muslims who had been driven to areas that remained outside Israeli control were also barred from returning. Those who had relocated to areas within territory controlled by Israel faced restrictions on their mobility and found their property reassigned to Jewish immigrants or destroyed. With the Muslim population removed and many *awqaf*-supporting mosques essentially liquidated, the provisional Israeli government established a commission under its new Ministry of Religious Affairs to survey, catalogue, and record the condition of all Muslim religious sites in the country. The [committee's report](#), while more concerned with identifying medieval architectural features than anything about recent usage, likely saved many of these structures. Mosques tended to meet one of four fates. First, those in areas where a considerable Muslim population remained simply continued operating. Second, smaller mosques in areas that had been depopulated were often destroyed, generally along with other buildings in the village. Third, larger or more sturdily built mosques in depopulated areas were often left standing but assigned to other purposes by authorities of the new state or by municipal governments. Finally, some of the larger mosques were simply left standing but abandoned.⁷

Over the past three decades, these larger or sturdily built structures have often been the subject of contention as some Israeli Muslims have sought to restore them as active mosques. In some places where the pre-1948 Muslim population was largely expelled, other Muslims, sometimes from nearby areas, have moved in (such as in Lod/Al-Lid). Other locales (like Beersheva) not only have a Muslim population inside the city but also a much larger population in the surrounding area.

In theory, there is official support for mosques since Islam is a recognized religion in Israel. State support is in part direct (by paying the salaries of many imams) and in part through the supervision of local committees, which administer those surviving *awqaf* that support mosques. [Theoretically, there is also state funding](#) for the construction of new houses of worship, but actual official funding for mosques has been miniscule. The official body responsible for such support has been shuffled around bureaucratically; most recently, in 2004, it shifted from the Ministry of Religious Affairs to the Ministry of Interior.

Education

For schools, a more seamless transition from the British Mandate was possible. Those areas that still had some Palestinian population generally saw primary and secondary education continue. The pattern of separate schooling based on religion and nationality thus also continued; a distinct curriculum for Muslim schools included religious instruction. Private schools, often Christian in origin and administration, continued as well, attracting some Muslim families who believed that the level of instruction was superior. School administration in the Israeli state generally devolved to the municipal level, so Palestinian villages and towns maintained their schools, and mixed cities generally had a separate Palestinian/Muslim set of schools. In such circumstances, Palestinian Muslims (and Christians) could attend schools with a Jewish/Hebrew curriculum, but few chose to do so. A fairly quiet but widely understood security vetting seems to be in place for teachers in schools for Israeli Palestinians, so quiet, indeed, that it remains difficult to ascertain how extensively it operates, but it does come into [public view](#) on rare occasion.

If primary and secondary education in Islam was accessible (indeed, just short of required) during this period for Israeli Muslims as part of their schooling, higher education was a different matter. The result was what one scholar terms a problem of “[succession](#)” of the first generation of Israeli Islamic officials: how would new officials be educated as older ones retired? Of course, leading Israeli academic institutions such as Hebrew University had faculty specializing in Islamic law, and some Muslims did indeed enroll—but even at present, a minority of the faculty are Muslim, and the curriculum is hardly designed to train religious professionals. An attempt to establish a Palestinian institution by the Supreme Muslim Council under the British Mandate was stillborn. And for two decades, it was difficult for Israeli Muslims to travel to other countries. The Israeli state simply deferred the question of how to train religious professionals, and no solution emerged until after the 1967 war.

Courts

Similarly to schools, those parts of the existing sharia court system that operated in what became the state of Israel also continued uninterrupted. With the Supreme Muslim Council abolished and not replaced, the Islamic judiciary found itself under the auspice of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (later moved in 2001 to the Ministry of Justice). Restricted to personal status issues, the courts were allowed some autonomy under a so-called appointments committee that had a Muslim majority but was initially chaired by the minister of religious affairs (and included other officials).

The formal continuity—and the autonomy of the sharia courts—did not mean they were somehow a free-floating body. Several steps were taken—such as a [1961 Qadis Law](#) that required judges to take an oath of allegiance to the state of Israel—to ensure that the courts were unambiguously part of the Israeli state. Judges were on the state payroll; court judgments that violated Israeli statutes could be overturned by other courts; and sharia courts were generally unable to enforce their judgments, meaning that civil courts often had to be involved (in matters such as inheritance). That feature sometimes has major, if rarely noticed, implications: the estate of a deceased Muslim is apportioned in shares determined by a sharia court, but the actual distribution can require a civil court—meaning that urban property in a mixed city owned by a Muslim is put for sale (so the proceeds can be divided). In a context in which some Jewish groups actively seek to alter the ethnic/religious character of mixed cities, that step can allow changes in neighborhood composition with formerly Muslim residences sold or rented to Jewish occupants.

Less tangibly, the isolation of Israeli Muslims after 1949 and the limited educational opportunities in Islamic law led to a situation in which there were few formal requirements for religious officials: the 1961 law, for example, required sharia judges to be married, thirty years old, of appropriate character, and with “suitable” training, but it did not specify any kind of degree. In general, it created the impression that judges were those with personal or family connections who could pass security vetting.

Islam Reasserted—With Limits

In the first quarter-century of the Israeli state, Islam was diminished, contained, compartmentalized, and administered. It was very much alive for many Israelis who professed the faith in defined areas of personal practice, family law, and education, but not very visible in public life for those who did not go looking for it.

That began to change in the late twentieth century as a result of several long-term trends. First, there was a gradual liberalization of controls over Palestinian citizens, especially with the abolition of martial rule in 1966: while movements and individuals were still subject to surveillance and sanction, it became easier for many to navigate within the boundaries laid down by security bodies.

Second, an Israeli Palestinian population decimated by the events of 1948—with most of its economic, political, and educated elite driven out—gradually produced professionals (in fields such as law, education, local administration, and medicine) with the skills and interest in building community structures and articulating demands through the available public channels.

Third, the religious apparatus of the Israeli state—which was largely Jewish in nature—consisted of those who wished for autonomy within that sphere and sometimes (especially within ultra-Orthodox circles) evinced a deep alienation from state institutions. While state bodies clearly favored Jewish religious institutions—and showed no interest in reversing the post-1948 actions that deinstitutionalized much of the framework for Islam in *awqaf* and mosques—their attitudes sometimes had the odd effect of placing Islamic institutions under the eyes of Jewish religious figures who either did not care about or wished to avoid precedents for strong state control. (Indeed, recognizing this, some religious Jewish parties have openly campaigned for votes in more conservative Muslim towns as defenders of common religious interests.)

Fourth, a distinct set of arrangements was derived for Jerusalem. When Israel annexed the eastern parts of the city after the 1967 war, it incorporated many Muslim residents, Islamic institutions, and Islamic sites.

Jordan, which had annexed the same area in 1950, folded the work of the British Mandate-era Supreme Muslim Council into its Ministry of Awqaf and sharia judiciary. [Israeli annexation](#) has modified the situation but not abolished the pre-1967 arrangements, meaning the link with Jordan has not been fully severed. There were immediate changes: the area immediately west of the Temple Mount/al-Haram al-Sharif (including dwelling places and religious sites) was immediately bulldozed, the inhabitants were evicted, and it was turned into a plaza for visitors to the Western Wall. But almost all other Islamic religious sites were maintained. Rather than appending them to Israeli structures, the preexisting sites operated under a *modus vivendi* with Jordan. A Supreme Muslim Council was recreated, for Jerusalem only, to oversee what is referred to as the Waqf—generally referring to holy places and those schools and other institutions supported by religious endowments. A branch of the Jordanian sharia courts was allowed to operate for East Jerusalem Muslims.

This situation shifted slightly after the signing of the Oslo Accords and the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty in the 1990s. The peace treaty formally acknowledged Jordan's role in Jerusalem; the accords led to a tug-of-war in which Palestinian Authority structures and officials tried to assert some role in Jerusalem. (In an initially secret part of the accords, Israel

promised to allow Palestinian institutions to continue operating in Jerusalem but generally reneged on that agreement in the 2000s.) Overall, Palestinian Authority efforts to assimilate Islamic institutions in Jerusalem into its administrative structures have been largely blocked by Israel. But they are not completely absent, as quietly deferential arrangements have sometimes been worked out between Palestinian and Jordanian officials. The odd effect is that Israeli Islam is probably weakest in the city proclaimed the country's eternal capital.

A similar quiet struggle has taken place over education in Jerusalem. Israel has made several failed attempts to shift East Jerusalem schools over to the Israeli curriculum; in response, parents pulled their students out of school until they were allowed to continue following the Jordanian curriculum, as was the case throughout the West Bank until 2000. When the Palestinian Authority developed its own curriculum to replace the Jordanian curriculum beginning in 2000, East Jerusalem schools, though attached to the Israeli municipality, initially followed it until mounting pressure and even censorship from Israeli officials compelled them to switch back. Now, after two decades of such pressure, the Israeli curriculum is being imposed once again with strong financial incentives given to those schools that make the shift—and this time, many parents have let their students continue their education in the better-funded schools. The result is that Muslim students in Jerusalem are increasingly taught their religion from Israeli rather than Palestinian textbooks.

But perhaps the two most portentous changes have been developing very slowly.

First, contacts between Israeli Muslims and those in the West Bank, Gaza, and Jordan were renewed after 1967. The most significant impacts took place in higher education, as explored more fully below.

Second, a formal social movement based on increasing the role of Islam in the private and public life of Israeli Muslims became increasingly visible in the 1980s and 1990s. The Islamic movement can generally be understood variously in political terms (as an opposition movement and sometimes an electoral one), ideological terms (especially with the split between a so-called northern movement that evinces rejection of engagement with the Israeli state and a so-called southern movement willing to participate, especially in national elections), or security terms (for its linkages, potential or real, with Hamas or with Islamists in other countries). It may be most helpful to start instead with what seems to be its guiding ethos, akin to that of the Muslim Brotherhood in other countries.

Brotherhood movements typically prefer to operate openly and pursue a general mission of increasing religious practice and knowledge with a special emphasis on promoting Islam in public life. They tend to invest their energies wherever opportunities arise—which is exactly what the Israeli Islamic movement has done. Even the schism between the northern and southern branches—generally explained in ideological terms as stemming from a different attitude toward political participation in the Israeli state (especially national elections)—has come to resemble the same division between party and movement that has characterized some Brotherhood-inspired initiatives when openings for democratic participation seem

especially promising. The electoral success of the southern movement (the branch enthusiastic about participating in national elections)—and its willingness to support a broad governing coalition in 2021—certainly attracted attention. For the party leadership and its loyal followers, its actions secured concessions on practical matters; for its critics, such participation traded short-term material goals in a manner that enabled harsh Israeli policies toward Palestinians.

Israel's [2015 decision](#) to ban the northern movement (the branch that refuses a national electoral role) and affiliated organizations (along with periodic arrests of the movement's leader and some associated preachers) has limited its ability to operate formally above ground. But its activities, as well as local initiatives inspired or led by its former leaders, give it an enduring presence. The result also resembles the cat-and-mouse game played by regime officials and Islamists in Jordan and previously Egypt.

So, the real mark of the Islamic movement on Israeli Islam has come not through national electoral politics but at the social and institutional levels. Indeed, it often appears in full only to those who are particularly attentive to local developments. The movement has aligned itself with local community-based efforts to restore and build mosques, organize charitable campaigns, and construct educational institutions. In that sense, it fills some of the gap left by the abolition of the Supreme Muslim Council and does so autonomously from the state—but not completely. While the northern movement rejects national political participation and is formally banned, the Islamic movement in both its branches is a very active presence even within state institutions at the local level and informally. With regard to education, mosques, and charity, Israeli Islam crosses the line between what is public and what is private—and the Islamic movement forms part of the bridge.

Endowments

After two decades of endowments being sold off, countervailing trends began to place limitations on further liquidation. First, the Islamic movement began to take an interest in endowments, cataloguing and documenting the surviving ones and pursuing strategies to protect them. Second, the Islamists were supported by some non-Islamist organizations that took up the issue from a human rights perspective, including [Adalah](#) (a legal organization) and the Arab Association for Human Rights (now inactive). Third, a [new chief justice](#) of the sharia courts began to pursue the matter much more assertively, not only through individual decisions that insisted on the sharia courts' role but also by issuing a clear directive that sharia judges take seriously their responsibility to supervise those who oversee individual endowments. Such pressures—which straddled the border between state (with judges and imams involved) and society (the Islamic movement and human rights organizations) seem to have stopped the liquidation and revived oversight of state Islam by officially recognized Muslim actors.

Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence not only that the liquidation has stopped but that *awqaf* have been revived as an officially protected instrument of continuity—now for an ethnic group rather than for specific charitable purposes or institutions. In mixed cities, some groups (and even official actors) have articulated a goal of increasing Jewish demographic presence. When a Palestinian owner of urban property dies, an Israeli sharia court appor-tions shares to the heirs. Implementation of the ruling, however, lies with a civil court, which allows groups that wish to alter demography to outbid other potential buyers. Some Palestinian Muslims have shown interest in establishing endowments to avoid such fragmen-tation, but those involved have little appetite for publicity, making it difficult to ascertain how extensive the practice has become.

Mosques

Because of bureaucratic dispersion—and likely out of embarrassment over the discrimina-tory treatment—it is difficult to find precise information about Israeli mosques and state support for them. Overall, the per capita [state funding for non-Jewish religions](#) (Muslim, Christian, and Druze) is about one-third of that for Jews. The populations are handled separately. Jewish religious institutions and officials operate under what is now called the Ministry of Religious Services and associated local religious councils. All other religions are under the Ministry of Interior. [Official Israeli figures](#) count three hundred imams and muez-zins on the state payroll and four hundred total mosques, with the vast majority constructed after 1988.

Mosque construction is generally overseen locally, which explains the very diverse patterns in how new mosques are built. Almost all mosque construction that takes place in Israel today is privately financed, generally by local pious Muslims who form groups to support com-munal projects or specific buildings. Some are inspired by the Islamic movement or by local activists, but those with less direct or formal ties have been able to weather the prohibition of the northern branch of the movement.

In exclusively Palestinian municipalities, there are few bureaucratic obstacles to constructing, renovating, or expanding a mosque, though financing must come through private channels. One of the country's biggest mosques, in Abu Ghosh, was built with a [gift from Ramzan Kadyrov](#), the Chechen strongman and son of the mosque's namesake. More common are intensive local efforts that generally take years to collect sufficient donations.

In mixed cities with Jewish majorities but substantial Palestinian minorities, municipal governments take differing attitudes. There have been protracted battles in some locations but not others. In Nof HaGalil (a municipality founded as a Jewish alternative to neighbor-ing mixed Nazareth that ended up attracting Muslim residents too), the municipality has refused to [permit a mosque](#) or even an [Arabic-speaking school](#). In Acre and Haifa, historic

mosques have been maintained without incident. In Jaffa, a large, abandoned mosque was sold by the local *waqf* committee to developers; the outcry from Muslims led to a reversal of the sale and the restoration of the mosque. Some of these restorations have received funding from Muslim states. But what is acceptable to municipal governments is not always accepted by all members of Israeli society—mosques are regularly vandalized by vigilantes. Muslim houses of worship in mixed locations seem to attract especially hostile attention.

In cities where the Muslim population is insufficient to be considered a mixed municipality, the process for opening or restoring a mosque can be especially complicated. Pre-1948 mosques in municipalities that are devoid of significant Muslim communities—even highly visible ones in tourist locales such as Tiberias or Caesarea—still lie abandoned or have been designated for other use by local authorities. And state officials have made clear that one of the main problems they have with mosques is that Muslims gather there. Two recent examples, one in Beersheva and the other in Jerusalem, illustrate the point.

The effort to restore the early-twentieth-century mosque in Beersheva is a prominent example of the prolonged (and, in this case, unsuccessful) legal wrangling involved in such attempts. When the mosque was built in the early twentieth century by the Ottoman state with the assistance and for the use of local Muslims, it was constructed on state land. It does not seem to have been supported by a *waqf*. In 1948, the new Israeli army drove a small Egyptian army detachment from the town, which had been allocated to the Palestinian state under the partition plan. The population was expelled; under the absentee property law, even those who managed to remain within territory controlled by Israel (and thus were de facto Israeli citizens) lost their land (since the town had been briefly controlled by Egyptian forces) and were thus barred from return. The mosque, as state property, was used for various official purposes and then as a local museum, but it eventually fell into disrepair. A half-century later, a number of Muslims had moved to Beersheva (though not enough to technically be considered a mixed city) and many more resided in surrounding towns. Beersheva's Ben Gurion University also attracted a sizable number of Muslim students; many came to the city for medical care as well. A group of Muslims tried to restore the mosque, but the municipality resisted on the grounds that it would attract Muslims to pray in what was a predominantly Jewish town. City officials attempted to preempt the initiative by developing plans to restore it as a museum. Adalah, an organization protecting Arab rights, [took the case](#) all the way to the High Court. In what may have seemed like a compromise to the judicial majority, the court rejected efforts to revive the building as a mosque but did insist that the planned museum be devoted to Islam. The strange result is a [Museum of Islamic and Near Eastern Cultures](#), with no Muslims in its leadership, which hosts visitors today. Muslims (including Ben Gurion University students) who wish to pray are directed not to that building but to nearby towns or to the tiny [Ibrahim al-Khalil musalla](#) (prayer space), with a small adjoining room for ablutions, tucked into an alley in the city's Soroko Medical Center complex.

A second, equally complicated example is the mosque in Bayt Safafa, a largely Muslim village in the Jerusalem area that was divided by the 1949 armistice line (and now is regarded simply as a neighborhood within Jerusalem). The western part of the village was annexed

to the Israeli municipality, making it the only Muslim neighborhood in the Israeli part of the city; its residents became Israeli citizens. In 1967, when Israel annexed East Jerusalem and its environs, the village was reunited—with the residents of Bayt Safafa in the east classified as Jerusalem residents but not Israeli citizens. East Jerusalem had a special set of arrangements for mosques that involved Jordan, but western Bayt Safafa had a mosque that immediately abutted the pre-1967 border and therefore did not fall under that new system. After a half-century of population growth in the neighborhood, local residents raised sums to expand the mosque. But the municipality only provided permits for some parts of the construction. While unlicensed construction is common in Israel, some groups with the view that Jerusalem is exclusively a religiously Jewish city objected. The municipality threatened the mosque with a demolition order, arguing that the construction was unsafe. The resulting storm of controversy led the mosque leaders and the municipality to come to an understanding that allowed construction to continue as long as the dome was [lowered by three feet](#) and painted silver instead of gold—suggesting that the municipality’s concerns were less about any danger to worshipers underneath the dome and more a suspicion that the large golden dome was overly evocative of the nearby Dome of the Rock, a contentious site. The compromise was still not enough for one group that had helped goad the municipality into action against the mosque; that group’s [publicly stated preference](#) was that “an illegal structure that is illegally erected to symbolize the absolute opposition to the existence of the State of Israel should have been painted blue and thrown into the sea.” Such shrill rhetoric was not directly translated into policy. But it demonstrates the kind of social and political pressures that can affect outcomes, especially in mixed cities where municipal officials are responsive to majority sentiments.

Religious Leadership Positions

While prolonged wrangling over mosque restoration and construction occurs in mixed cities, a different and generally more muted conflict plays out over the position of imams. With many imams on the state payroll (an arrangement inherited from the Ottoman and mandatory practices but now operating under the Ministry of Interior), a quiet but [recently acknowledged](#) security vetting is in place. There are also some volunteer preachers and prayer leaders, but neither the Israeli state nor many mosques seem to have any interest in sharing information about how many are active. The Islamic movement—both the formally banned northern branch and the tolerated southern branch—has based itself in part on making its presence felt in religious spaces, and many of Israel’s imams are informally but clearly associated with it. The response of Israel’s security establishment seems to be to monitor all of them but to take disciplinary or legal action (generally for incitement) only in specific cases. Official diffidence perhaps stems from a concern that heavy-handedness will stir up more problems than it will solve, but there also seems to be a preference for keeping groups above ground where they can be more easily monitored.

Some prominent figures have still been subject to arrest, such as the imam of a mosque in Lod/Al-Lid after the May 2021 disturbances. Ra'id Salah—a leader of the northern branch of the Islamic movement who is generally referred to as “shaykh” for his religious education (at Hebron University) and preaching (on a volunteer basis)—was barred for security reasons from state employment. He did serve as an official, but only at the local level, as mayor of Umm al-Fahm for a dozen years. Over his [career](#), he has been arrested, sentenced to prison, and restricted in travel several times.

The overall effect is to make mosques and sermons an odd hybrid (though not an uncommon one in the region): a space where the pious can gather and oppositional sentiments expressed but that tends to be monitored and policed. Security officials do not so much establish clear redlines as much as they exercise shifting judgments and communicate quiet and more forceful warnings in an effort to limit opposition without driving it totally from public view (and official monitoring).

Education

Formally, little has changed in Islamic education in Israel in the past half-century. Informally, matters have changed dramatically, especially at the level of higher education.

In 1967, Israeli Muslims wishing for a higher education in Islam finally had an opportunity: they began traveling, chiefly to Jordan (which had just established a sharia college, later folded into the University of Jordan). In the 1970s, some universities emerged in the West Bank: in 1971, a sharia college was established in Hebron; by 1980, a full sharia department, and later college, had emerged at An-Najah National University in Nablus. Other less-popular options included studying in other Arab countries or at the Islamic University founded in Gaza in 1978. The Islamic movement spearheaded educational efforts inside Israel's 1967 borders, producing educational material for younger students to supplement what was felt to be meager and sanitized material used to teach Islam in public schools. It also spearheaded some higher education initiatives, most notably the College of Da'wa and Islamic Sciences in Umm al-Fahm. Other institutions offering postsecondary religious study were founded in Baqa al-Gharbiyya and Kafr Bara—all predominantly Muslim towns.

In recent years, efforts in the West Bank to recruit Israeli students have ramped up, especially in Hebron and Nablus. The motivations are both nationalistic and fiscal: West Bank universities, while classified as public, complain that they receive little support from the Palestinian Authority, leaving them heavily dependent on tuition revenues. Accordingly, in recent years, there have been special efforts made to recruit Israeli Palestinians. In Hebron, special programs allow students employed in Israel to attend classes during their weekend. An Israeli Palestinian with a diploma from a West Bank university can follow many career paths, not simply religious ones. A partial Palestinianization of the Israeli medical profession has been observed by many Israelis (though it has attracted little attention outside of the country). Law graduates also can practice in Israel with some supplementary legal and

Hebrew language training. And those with degrees in Islamic subjects (along with law and Arabic language) can work in the Islamic parts of the Israeli state as judges, teachers, preachers, and lawyers specializing in personal status cases.

Courts

Sharia courts have maintained some degree of autonomy, although their shift to being under the Ministry of Justice makes them more clearly part of the Israeli judicial apparatus. While sharia courts are indeed state courts, their grounding in Islamic law makes direct legal change difficult. Israel, like almost all states in the region, operates on the basis of a codified version of family law. But in the Israeli case, that law was promulgated by the Ottoman state and then reaffirmed by two political authorities that had no wish to present themselves as authoritative in matters of the Islamic religion: the British Mandate and the state of Israel. It is true that the Israeli Knesset can pass new legislation. The sharia courts ignore Israeli laws only at the risk of having their verdicts unenforced. But the Jewish state does not show any will to touch the core: the Ottoman-era family code remains unchanged since 1917 (nor would Orthodox Jewish leaders likely look kindly on any precedent suggesting that religious law can be modified by state officials). Implementation of that code is influenced by how judges educated in Islamic law understand its terms and underlying doctrines. But they do not amend the text itself: any change in prevailing interpretations of the Islamic sharia can come only informally or at the [directive of senior judges](#). (Such directives are not doctrinally binding in any religious sense but have been a device used to communicate to the judiciary as a whole that nonconforming judgments will be reversed on appeal.)

Israeli Islam and Global Islam: Reintegration and Its Limits

The past half-century has seen some reintegration of Israeli Islam into regional and global Islamic networks, but it has generally been in informal rather than institutional ways. Fragmentation between Gaza, West Bank, and East Jerusalem Islamic institutions has been even more acute since Israel took control of those areas in the 1967 war.

Israel's Islamic movement—both its branches—emulates Islamist movements elsewhere in the region in its efforts to Islamize society from below and its willingness to enter organizational spaces opened by the limitations of official Islam. The northern branch is more prominent internationally, since it eschews participation in central state institutions and thus more closely reflects the policy positions of anti-Zionist Islamist movements elsewhere. This allows it to play some role in linking individuals, but the official institutions where they are based are generally quite separate. Hizb al-Tahrir, a less prominent but quite active group,

also crosses the 1967 lines, though its low political profile makes this more difficult to trace. But as ideas and personal networks cross the 1967 lines, they can take on very different inflections. Some Israeli Muslim officials have expressed interest in *fiqh al-aqalliyat*, an approach developed by some jurists to take into account minority status (often in Europe) in their development of Islamic legal thought. Such ideas speak far less to the way that West Bank and Gazan Muslim officials and legal scholars think of their work.

Indeed, the formal separation created by the 1967 lines is quite marked. Islamic institutions in East Jerusalem are only loosely linked to those described here. Those in Gaza and the West Bank are also completely separate from East Jerusalem institutions and from each other, sometimes allowing creative litigants to make use of the gaps.

Only in education and law do formal (or semi-formal) links seem a bit more robust—either through the way in which Islamic higher education crosses the 1967 boundaries or in the way that Israeli sharia courts operate. In the latter regard, the sharia judiciary shows strong signs of following Jordanian and Palestinian developments (for instance, in changing interpretations of personal status law to increase women’s divorce rights or in appointing woman judges). It is still the case, however, that Palestinian courts will not recognize the verdicts of Israeli courts, leading to loopholes that creative litigants in family disputes can exploit (for example, by filing for divorce in one set of courts in order to remarry without notifying a spouse subject to a different jurisdiction, or by filing requests for support payments in two court systems). Sharia judges are aware of such tactics and take steps to undermine them (for instance, a Palestinian court barred from enforcing an Israeli court judgment might simply reissue that verdict in its own name without making that move explicit). The recent, sharp restrictions Israel has placed on marriages between Israeli Muslims and those classified as Palestinian have complicated but not eliminated the confusions of overlapping systems.

When it comes to international linkages, Jerusalem deserves special mention because it is not merely complicated but especially sensitive both domestically and internationally. It receives large numbers of Muslim visitors from other countries. Official Jordanian institutions have a presence in the city through the Waqf and a branch of its sharia court. A Palestinian court claims jurisdiction that it can only exercise in suburbs not annexed to Israel. And the Al-Aqsa Mosque is both a unifying symbol for much of the Islamic world and a flashpoint for conflict.

The Future of Israeli Islam

The state of Israel was born in 1948, but many of its component parts that define, organize, regulate, and administer religion precede that date by decades. The place of Islam within the state diminished in the transition from Ottoman rule to the British Mandate and then

even further with the creation of Israel, but it did not disappear entirely. In some symbolic ways, Islam became less prominent in much of public life: the call to prayer is heard only in areas with significant Muslim populations, and those areas have diminished; even public historical markings often refer to various periods without reference to Islam. (For example, the Tower of David, a popular tourist site in Jerusalem, is actually a minaret—a fact briefly mentioned in the [official history](#) but referred to as Turkish, as if it belongs to one of a long line of foreign occupiers rather than a structure that called Muslim residents of Jerusalem to prayer.) Islam can be accommodated safely in the historical past, but its presence in the state of Israel—and within the bureaucracy—has always sparked conflicts over property, human remains, public gatherings, loyalty, identity, and even sound.

The Dahmash Mosque in Lod/Al-Lid may be an example of how those conflicts are publicly expressed in a context in which ordinary citizens just want to lead their lives. Vociferous national debates about history, about the legitimacy of the state, and about loyalty are ever present, but much of daily life for Muslims focuses less on the existence of the state in principle and more on practical ways of working with official structures and coping with their limitations. Non-Muslim officials—such as municipal leaders in mixed cities or security officers nervously watching for signs of linkages with Hamas—seem to wish to preserve the status quo, allowing Israeli Islam to operate in specific areas (such as family law, education, and worship) that are officially regulated and publicly observable. Initiatives from Israeli Muslims to push changes on religious issues generally take the form of prolonged litigation and public pressure. The changes they secure are bounded and evolutionary.

The more serious and fundamental challenge to the status quo comes from the Israeli right, especially the religious right—where terms like “[fifth column](#)” and references to “[the threat from within](#)” are voiced in influential circles. Such viewpoints—that Muslims within Israeli society constitute a threat to the state and to the safety of individual Jews whom that state was constructed to protect—explain the string of proposals to [curtail acceptance](#) of Palestinian university degrees, construct a new security force in part to patrol the Negev, or increase security screening of Muslim preachers and teachers.

The vision behind such initiatives is based on a view that violent episodes, like in Lod/Al-Lid in 2021, [challenge](#) the existence of a Jewish state and must be forcefully met. The underlying attitude seems to be that for the free development of the Jewish people to take place, it is essential that all should know that non-Jews are in Palestine on [sufferance](#) and not as of right. The most effective check on such [Jewish supremacist impulses](#) so far has come in limited but powerful ways from parts of the Israeli state itself—particularly the security establishment and sometimes the judiciary. These bodies are certainly dedicated to the Jewish identity of the state and have done much to contain, regulate, and police Israeli Islam—but much less to eliminate it.

Should the effort to maintain something like the currently prevailing arrangements succeed, Israeli Islam will bear some common features with institutionalized forms of religion in neighboring states. The particular form that these features take—and their operation in a

Jewish state that openly and consistently favors a religion other than Islam—make Israeli Islam distinctive. But Israeli Islam is not simply a creature of the state’s senior political leadership. The institutionalization of Islam within the state generates a set of ongoing tensions. The official religious establishment is caught between expectations of autonomy by many believers and a desire by senior officials to watch what is being taught in schools and preached in mosques. Some official bodies hold a securitized view of religious spaces, some an accommodative view, others are wholly disinterested, and still more are overtly hostile. Finally, there is ongoing tension in official circles about Islamist social movements—whether to view them as a source of opposition to be contained and repressed or whether to keep them above ground where they can be observed.

About the Author

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Notes

- 1 There are slightly different versions of most place names in Hebrew and Arabic. For the places named in this article, there is generally little difference; the only one in which the difference is significant enough to mention is Lod/Al-Lid.
- 2 In this article, I use the term “Palestinian” to refer to a national category. Israeli citizens who speak Arabic as a first language will be termed Palestinians, though the number of terms used for those who fall into this category—by official actors and by those I am terming “Palestinian”—is large. Official Israeli discourse often distinguishes among Muslims, Christians, and Druze, and between Arabs and Bedouins. Israeli Palestinians also use these categories, though not always in a mutually exclusive way, and favored terminology has varied over time. While it is generally salutary to adopt the terminology used by individual members of the group—since these are terms of identity—in this case I have simply settled on “Palestinian” to refer to the national demographic category and “Muslim” to refer to the religious category. For some of those I term Israeli Palestinian, the other terms can have divide-and-rule connotations; for others, use of the term Palestinian as a national category can be taken to carry risks of lending itself to use as casting doubts on their citizenship rights in Israel.
- 3 Much of the effort to transfer endowments to serve state purposes and Jewish citizens is well-documented in terms of the legal and bureaucratic measures taken, but it is sometimes difficult to trace in specific cases, often because the efforts occurred in a manner that was localized and not easily accessible to researchers. There are still some good general treatments. The most comprehensive is Michael Dumper, *Islam and Israel: Muslim Religious Endowments and the Jewish State* (Washington: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1994). I have relied on that account most heavily. Sami Muhammad Salahat, *Al-awqaf al-islamiyya fi filastin wa-dawriha fi muwajibat al-ihtilal al-isra`ili* (Beirut Markaz al-Zaytuna li-l-Dirasat wa-l-istisharat, 2011) is able to provide information on specific endowments as well as policies. An older and useful, if somewhat tame, analysis is Habeeb Albert Khayat, *Waqfs in Palestine and Israel—From the Ottoman Reforms to the Present*, Ph. D. dissertation, American University political science and public administration, 1962. Alisa Rubin Peled, *Debating Islam in the Jewish State: The Development of Policy Toward Islamic Institutions in Israel* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001) is useful for setting the context of policy. Yitzhak Reiter, “The Waqf in Israel Since 1965: The Case of Acre Reconsidered,” in Marshall J. Breger, Yitzhak Reiter, and Leonard Hammer (editors), *Holy Places in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: Confrontation and Co-Existence* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) contains a commentary on scholarly discussion, a cogent general analysis, and a very detailed consideration of urban endowments in Acre. A particularly valuable critical analysis that focuses on law and politics can be found in Ahmad Natour, “Israel’s Seizure of Islamic Endowments,” in Nadim N. Rouhana and Areej Sabbagh-Khoury (editors), *The Palestinians in Israel: Readings in History, Politics and Society*. Haitem Suleiman and Robert Home, “God is an Absentee,

Too': The Treatment of Waqf (Islamic Trust) Land in Israel/Palestine," *Journal of Legal Pluralism and Unofficial Law* 41 (59, 2009): 49–65 also provide a useful overview. Because of the distinctive nature of endowments—not merely legally but perhaps even more politically and socially—there are few treatments that place them in the context of the general Israeli legal framework for trusts and nonprofit entities. One limited and partial exception is Adam Hofri-Winogradow, "Express Trusts in Israel/Palestine: A Pluralist Trusts Regime and Its History," in Lionel Smith (editor), *Trusts in Civil Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

4 Soleiman and Home, "God is an Absentee, Too," 58.

5 On domestic pressure and Ben Gurion's pledge, see Norman Bentwich, *Israel Resurgent* (London: Ernest Benn, 1960), 180–181.

6 Dumper, *Islam and Israel*; and Reiter, "Waqf in Israel" are particularly useful on the operation of the 1965 amendment. Some other detailed remarks are available in Mousa Abou Ramadan, "The Sharia in Israel: Islamization, Israelization and the Invented Islamic Law," *UCLA Journal of Islamic & Near Eastern Law* 5 (2007): 81–129.

7 For an in-depth presentation of some specific locations, see "Sanctity Denied: The Destruction and Abuse of Muslim and Christian Holy Places in Israel," Arab Association for Human Rights, 2004. The publication is not available on the web; I am grateful to Alexander Key, one of the report's authors, for providing me with a copy.

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