

# The Shared Destiny

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Islam emerged as a religion in the Arabian Peninsula and expanded geographically into what is known today as the Arab world. It spread without military conquest around the world. For instance, Indonesia, the largest Muslim-majority country, is outside the Arab region. While relations between Christians and Muslims can be approached from various angles, this article will focus on these relations in the Arab world. We will refer to the countries in the Arab world as Arab countries, not based on the origin, ancestry, or tribal affiliation of the people (as this is unrealistic), but rather because these countries share a common cultural foundation based on several dimensions, the most important of which is perhaps the common language, enjoyment of shared musical styles (such as Fairuz and Umm Kulthum), the religious majority that broadly influences the culture, traditional popular ways of approaching the world, and the shared destiny that we see as one, which we will focus on in what follows.

## Internal Crises

People in Arab countries share common internal crises. All of them, despite the diversity of their forms of government, suffer from autocratic rule (except Lebanon and Tunisia currently) and the use of a small group of people of wealth, lineage, or military power (an oligarchic group) to seize control of governance and the economy, plundering national resources. They do so in cooperation and solidarity with European and North American protectors. The result is the looting or seizure of the country's wealth, while a large proportion of the population, even in Gulf countries, suffers from poverty (the UAE is not an exception in this regard, as poverty is widespread despite the lack of official statistics on this issue). According to a report by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (2019), the poverty rate (less than \$5.5 per day) in the Arab world is about 38%. In 2015, the populations of conflict-affected countries in the region suffered from significantly higher poverty rates: Tunisia 20%, Jordan 24.5%, Morocco 30%, Iraq 56%, Egypt 61%, Syria 83.4%, Yemen 91.3% of the population. It is estimated that 80% of Lebanese people live in poverty, with 36% below the extreme poverty line, while 90% of Syrian refugees in Lebanon cannot meet their basic needs (European Union statistics).

The external protectors exert control over a country through military bases (this is the case in the Arabian Peninsula), an army of companies and advisors, and their representatives in the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (this is the case of poor Arab countries). They also exert control through their threat via "the largest American aircraft carrier in the world that cannot be sunk, does not carry even one American soldier, and is located in a critical region for American national security," i.e., "Israel," as accurately described by U.S. Secretary of State Alexander Haig between 1981 and 1982.

## External Threats

This brings us to the external threats faced by the inhabitants of Arab countries. To understand their situation, people in this region must focus on a fundamental issue that is absent from discussions, media, and public discourse, namely colonialism and its largest fortress in our land, the Zionist colonial and apartheid state in occupied Palestine. The term colonialism must be revived and brought back into popular consciousness and dialogue to fully understand our situation. Only then can a proper assessment of reality be made and an appropriate vision for liberation be formed.

In our first article in Telos magazine (Issue No 0), we showed how colonialism wages war on us every few years. Here, we update the table by adding Israeli genocidal wars on Palestinians in Gaza. North American and European colonialism views oil and gas as raw materials to be obtained at desired prices. It views Arab national wealth as an opportunity for its companies to accumulate profits. Therefore, it repeatedly wages wars either directly or through "Israel" (and recently through Arab countries that have disgracefully normalized relations with the Zionist colonial and apartheid state) in an attempt to subjugate the indigenous peoples of the region, plunder their resources, and occupy their lands (and also expel their inhabitants, as is the case in Palestine).

Table 1: Major invasions and wars waged on (and in) the Arab world since Napoleon Bonaparte's campaign in Egypt 1798.

No.	Year	Years Since Previous War	Aggressor Country	Country Attacked
1	1798		France	Egypt
2	1830	32	France	Algeria
3	1882	52	Britain	Egypt
4	1903	21	France	Tunisia
5	1911	8	France	Morocco
6	1911	0	Italy	Libya
7	1919	8	France	Lebanon
8	1919	0	Britain	Palestine
9	1920	1	France	Syria
10	1936	16	Britain - Palestinian Revolt	Palestine
11	1947	11	Israel (settler state) - Britain	Palestine
12	1956	9	France - Britain - Israel (settler state)	Egypt
13	1962	6	Civil War (Britain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan)	Yemen
14	1967	5	Israel (settler state)	Palestine (West Bank and Gaza), Egypt, Syria
15	1975	8	Civil War (regional and international intervention)	Lebanon
16	1978	3	Israel (settler state)	Lebanon
17	1980 - 1988	2	Iraq - Iran	Iran - Iraq

18	1982	2	Israel (settler state)	Lebanon
19	1990	8	Iraq	Kuwait
20	1991	1	United States	Iraq
21	1991	0	Civil War	Algeria
22	2003	12	United States	Iraq
23	2006	3	Israel (settler state)	Lebanon
24	2008	2	Israel (settler state)	Gaza
25	2011	3	United States - France - Britain - NATO - UAE	Libya
25	2011	0	United States, Saudi Arabia, Iran, UAE, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq, Israel (settler state)	Syria
26	2012	1	Israel (settler state)	Gaza
27	2014	2	Israel (settler state)	Gaza
28	2015	4	Saudi Arabia, UAE, Iran, United States	Yemen
29	2021	6	Israel (settler state)	Gaza
30	2023	2	Israel (settler state)	Gaza, Lebanon

Colonial powers view the Arab world as a whole that must be dismantled to plunder it and prevent it from emerging as a coherent unit that could threaten their capitalistic projects of land plundering and profit accumulation.

### **The Quest for Unity in Diversity**

**Awareness** of these two threats, the external colonial that seeks to subjugate and plunder our peoples and the internal exploitative and oppressive that seeks the same (with a caveat that most of the plundering will benefit the colonizer), is a fundamental element in the relations between Christians and Muslims in Arab countries.

The peoples of this region, regardless of their religions, beliefs, and local cultures, face the same threats, and their destiny is shared in terms of gain or loss, i.e., by the lived experience imposed on them. In addition to the common linguistic, popular cultural, and traditional bases, this shared destiny contributes to the unification of shared life and visions for a better future free from exploitation and oppression and for practical cooperation - necessarily diverse in means - to achieve liberation. People may differ on the nature of the ultimate goal, i.e., the system of government to be established; therefore, it is necessary to establish basic ethical principles to guide the unified pursuit of common liberation.

In my view, the basic ethical principle is that no internal or external oppression should be practiced. Therefore, states that respect freedom and reject all forms of oppression should be established. This principle can be based on faith principles in Islam and Christianity, such as freedom, consultation (Shura), and respect for people's faith choices.

However, states should also be built where structures of exploitation are eliminated, and people's rights to live in dignity are respected, including their rights to housing, health, and free education, among other economic and human rights. We can affirm this principle by drawing from a long history of solidarity (Takaful<sup>1</sup>) and charity (Christian communion<sup>2</sup>) principles in both religions.

Finally, those states should respect the diversity of human experiences, respect diverse local cultures, and refrain from restricting them. They should protect them not only because they must reject oppression but also because diversity is richness as long as it comes within unity and does not call for disintegration. This principle can be built on a faith principle in both religions, which states that diversity among people is an expression of a divine will that believers in God must respect<sup>3</sup>.

While the idea of a single Arab state is unrealistic in our current historical context, the realistic future is to build an Arab world characterized by cooperation among its states, similar to Latin America or the European Union.

## **Conclusion**

Concrete Christian-Muslim relations in the Arab world are linked to the shared destiny of Christians and Muslims in this region, and Palestine, in this context, is our central issue not only because it is a matter of justice but also because it is the primary center for the continuation of our colonized status in the Arab world. If we look – as we should ultimately – beyond the Arab world, what unites us all as humans is our shared destiny on this earth and the common challenges of oppression and exploitation, but urgently, there is the challenge of global warming and the threat of the annihilation of life that a capitalist system drives us towards by seeking an increased nature consumption to achieve continuous growth (by producing what we need and what we do not need).

As we have seen the phenomenon of human solidarity worldwide during the current Israeli genocidal war in Gaza, we can cooperate for good and collaborate for “righteousness” instead of cooperating in “sin and aggression” (Surah Al-Ma'idah 5:2) to avoid the annihilation of life.

## **References for statistics**

Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency statistics

<https://cdn.sida.se/app/uploads/2020/12/01095838/mena-multidimensional-poverty-analysis.pdf>

European Union statistics

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Surah Al-Hashr (59:9) Surah At-Tawbah (9:71)

<sup>2</sup> koinonia" (κοινωνία) This Greek word is often translated as "fellowship" or "communion" and signifies the sharing of common life and mutual support, including resources.

<sup>3</sup> Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13) and Surah Ar-Rum (30:22)

[https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/lebanon-eu60-million-humanitarian-aid-most-vulnerable-2023-03-30\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/lebanon-eu60-million-humanitarian-aid-most-vulnerable-2023-03-30_en)