NATIONALIZING THE SACRED: SHRINES AND SHIFTING IDENTITIES IN THE ISRAELI-OCCUPIED TERRITORIES

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This article approaches transformations of social identity in situations of nationalist conflict through an examination of Christian and Muslim Palestinian interpretations of, and practices at, two shrines on the Israeli-Occupied West Bank. The semantic multivocality of one holy place, studied in the early 1980s, is seen to reflect the diversity of interests of the various communities which revere it. The other shrine, studied during the Palestinian uprising, is seen to be more 'fixed' in its meaning, and this apparent univalence is analysed as an expression of a new form of social identity generated by struggle against the Israeli occupation. The article contrasts the new secular nationalist identity to alternative forms of community founded on sectarian affiliation, and demonstrates how, in situations of radical social conflict between a multi-sectarian community and a 'foreign' enemy, perceptions of the antagonism of the Other can generate new forms of imagined community within which communal differences are subsumed but not elided. As a consequence of the formation of a 'national' identity, local Christian and Muslim traditions come to be seen as expressing simultaneously sectarian affiliation and an overarching national unity.

In this article I present a reading of Christian and Muslim Palestinian uses of two West Bank Christian holy places. The first is the Greek Orthodox monastery of Mar Elyas (the Prophet Elijah) located on the Hebron Road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem; the second is the municipal shrine of Bîr el-Saiyideh ('The Well of the Lady') in Beit Sahur, a mile to the east of Bethlehem. I elucidate how Palestinians of different sectarian affiliations engage the complicated processes of interpreting the significance of a holy place and defining their relationship to it. The investigation of the shrine activities around Mar Elyas on the prophet's feast day will show that the place has very different meanings for the various groups of people who attend the feast, and will set out how the members of these groups interpret the site and their engagement with it. This multivocality of place raises the issue of the politics involved in 'fixing' its meaning: moving both in space and time to Beit Sahur during the *intifada*, I will discuss how the Christians and Muslims who live in the town have elaborated a means of maintaining their religious relationship with a holy place that they see as a central feature of their town's identity without succumbing to the pressure, imposed upon them by religious hierarchies, to fix the identity of that place (and of themselves as users of the place) in sectarian terms.

The analysis raises the issue of the central role in constituting communities played by members' perceptions of 'antagonisms' mobilized against them (Laclau

& Mouffe 1985: 93-148). During my fieldwork (made up of a number of extended visits between 1983 and 1990), Muslim and Christian Beit Sahurans were in the process of defining the activities of both religious institutions and the state of Israel as equally threatening to what they perceived as their interests. In response to this perception, Beit Sahurans elaborated a secular nationalist collective identity which allowed them to reject communalism[1] and to unite against and resist the external forces of both 'foreign' religious institutions and the 'colonial settler state'. This identity is, however, neither inevitable nor fixed and is hegemonic only as long as it appears to offer a viable solution to the dilemmas of the peoples it constitutes as an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991: 5-7). The elements which make up communal identity – not only the persons brought together within the definition but also the interests which are seen to join them, the strategies perceived as best serving those interests and the antagonisms believed to beset them – are labile, and redefinitions of any of these can lead to a shifting of the entire field of identity, making enemies of former neighbours and allies of previous antagonists. To illustrate this I will, in closing, examine the appeal of the distinctly communalist programme of Hamas (the Islamic Resistance Movement).[2] In the wake of relatively successful state activities seeking to discredit the appeal of secular nationalism and to silence its advocates, Hamas has provided many Palestinians with new images of community (images which peripheralize Christian Palestinians) and offered alternative definitions of that community's needs, the antagonisms which threaten to deprive it of its requisites, and the strategies to follow in overcoming those antagonisms.

Robert Hertz's largely disregarded 'St Besse: a study of an Alpine cult', first published in 1913, raises the still salient issue of the way a single religious site is interpreted in very different ways by discrete communities engaging there in commemorative festivities (Hertz 1983). Hertz stressed that the holy place speaks for and of a community, and that therefore the meaning of such a site has to be analysed in terms not of the place itself, but in terms of the social practices of the communities which revere it and the identities generated by those activities. Following the trajectory mapped by Hertz, I explore the meaning of two Palestinian holy places in the light of the models of community brought to them by their worshippers. In doing so I consider the wider analytic domain of identity and the situations in which it is constituted.

'Identity', like 'ethnicity', became a central issue in anthropological inquiry in the wake of Fredrik Barth's programmatic assertion that we need to attend 'to problems of boundary maintenance' and to 'ask ourselves what is needed to make ethnic distinctions *emerge* in an area' (Barth 1969: 17). Many recent studies of ethnic and national identities (e.g. Madan 1972; Loizos 1981; Kapferer 1988; McDonald 1989) have emphasized the role of the 'other' who lies beyond those boundaries in defining the identity of the 'self' which lies within. In this article I develop that work in line with Laclau and Mouffe's theory of 'antagonism' (1985)[3] in order to explore the processes through which persons come to formulate identities for themselves and their communities in periods of radical social conflict.

In the contemporary situation, Palestinians are engaged in what is in effect a national liberation struggle. Palestinians under Israeli occupation are constructing

new forms of community and affiliation appropriate to confrontation with an enemy they see as dedicated to their extirpation. Significant similarities exist here between the creation of a 'Palestinian' entity in the face of Israeli antagonism and the unification by prophets of Nilotic tribes in the southern Sudan in the context of substantial foreign aggression (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 184-91; also Lienhardt 1961). Evans-Pritchard noted that the presence of prophets in Nuer society was a 'recent development' (1940: 186) and attributed

> the strong tendency towards federation between adjacent tribes ... to the new Arab-European menace. Opposition between Nuer and their neighbours had always been sectional. They were now confronted by a more formidable and a common enemy (Evans-Pritchard 1940: 189).

Lienhardt, in discussing the origins of the divinities who possessed various Dinka prophets, suggested that these divinities had recently come from outside the domain of the Dinka: the free divinity Deng kur 'was the Nuer prophet Ngungdeng, father of Gwek who rallied the Nuer against the British' (1961: 95) and other Western Dinka prophet-inspiring divinities were believed by the Dinka to have entered Dinkaland from areas in which the Mahdi, an Arab prophet who waged holy war against the British, had operated (1961: 72, 164-5). Implicit in both texts is the important recognition that novel forms of mobilization and affiliation were generated by confrontation with a powerful external antagonist. Lienhardt's recognition that the cultural borders between the Dinka and surrounding 'peoples' can be blurred by shared antagonisms suggests that those borders, and the identities constituted within them, were far from fixed. Nonetheless, Evans-Pritchard and, to a lesser degree, Lienhardt tended in their ethnographies to present events as though they had occurred in a stable ethnographic present. Both thus understated the impact of the British occupation of the Sudan on Nuer and Dinka societies (see Geertz 1988 and Clifford 1988: 32).

In consequence, the segmentary model bequeathed to anthropological theory by these works stressed the systematicity of pre-modern societies at the expense of attending to the processes of transformation imposed upon such 'systems' by the contingencies of conflict and historical change. In focusing on the historical context of the cultural transformations effected in contemporary Palestinian society, I demonstrate that segmentary opposition can be a useful model for understanding political mobilization in modern as well as in pre-modern societies. However, in using this model I shift emphasis from the systematic workings of the internal structures of society to the role of the outside enemy in forcing reformulation of the terrain 'inside'. In so doing I suggest that the inside is neither stable nor systematic but is itself a response to the assault on its inhabitants from outside. By considering changes in the meanings of holy places and traditions associated with them in contemporary Palestinian society, I will demonstrate how holy sites serve as monuments to imaginings of community and how such monuments prove to be as labile as are those communities themselves.

The shrine of Mar Elyas

In *Mohammedan saints and sanctuaries in Palestine*, the Palestinian folklorist Taufik Canaan not only details how Palestinian Muslims in the early part of this century inscribed central moments of their individual and collective lives on the Palestinian

landscape but also notes that 'the various ideas described in the following pages are common to both Mohammedans and Christians among the Palestinian peasantry; where the two groups differ the differences are only superficial' (Canaan 1927: vi). This assertion finds validation today in the practices of villagers and townspeople from the region of Bethlehem at the Greek Orthodox monastery of Mar Elyas, to take one of several local examples.

On the day preceding the saint's day, local Muslims accompany Christians to Mar Elyas, a holy place on the peripheries of Bethlehem district, both to visit the monastic chapel and to join friends, family and neighbours in the grounds of the nearly inoperative monastery. Outside the sixth-century building the area is bright with small groups of men, women and children picnicking under the olive trees and listening to the music of ouds (Arab lutes) and transistor radios. In front of the church is a mass of men, women and children waiting to enter the shrine, some of whom carry loaves of bread cooked with mastic, bottles of oil and candles (some three inches thick and as tall as the bearer). Once inside, the local people struggle through the priests and monks performing the divine offices specific to the coming feast day[4] to the front of the church where those bearing gifts light their candles, leave their olive oil before the icons and hand over their loaves to a novice monk who in turn distributes bits of sanctified bread – some of which is eaten on the spot and the rest of which is given away later to family and neighbours. The donors then join the others who have gone directly to wait their turn to place a chain attached to the wall of the church around their necks, kiss it three times and step through it. In the meantime, the resident monks and the visiting members of the Greek Orthodox Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre[5] struggle to amplify the Holy Word sufficiently to have it heard over the babble of thronging Palestinians and the perpetual clanking of the miraculous chain.

This cacophony of groups, contending within the same restricted space to perform actions deemed appropriate to the place and time, is echoed in the interpretations they impose upon those actions. One Orthodox priest explained to me that the chain was found in a cave beneath the monastery and that, since the cave like the monastery is dedicated to Elyas and believed to be the spot where the Old Testament prophet fled from the persecution of Jezebel (1 Kings 19),[6] local people see the chain as one which had bound the saint. According to the priest, their fervent attention to the chain is an expression of their deep devotion to the prophet: 'those who enchain themselves with it – around the neck and around the waist – bind themselves to the saint and make themselves one with him. All the sacrifices, like the oil for the lamps, the bread, the candles, express this self dedication. Elyas is a mediator between God and the people, and they can talk to him when they can't talk directly to God'. The priest explained, however, that this devotion, while spiritually correct, is actually misguided; the chain had bound Christians during Muslim persecutions and is associated with the monastery because in the past local Christians had hidden from their oppressors in the caves beneath the monastery.

The priest's story was echoed in the stories of some of the lay persons. George Halweh, a leader in the Greek Orthodox Boy Scout troop which comes from the nearby town of Beit Jala to help in the ceremonies, explained to me that Elyas

was a great protector of the Christians during their persecutions, and led me inside to show me an icon of Elijah killing the prophets of Baal. This he told me, with a blithe disregard for scriptural chronology, shows Elyas slaughtering the Jews and Muslims who persecuted the Christians. The chain, Halweh said, is an ancient chain found in a cave beneath the monastery which 'may have bound Elyas or ... may have bound persecuted Christians'. By revering the chain, people call on Elyas to deliver them from their afflictions, just as God delivered Elyas from his and Elyas delivered the Christians from theirs. The chain, Halweh added, is particularly useful for alleviating insanity.

Other local people, including two Muslim women who had just stepped through the chain, told me that it is 'linked' to another at the Greek Orthodox shrine of 'Khadr (St. George) in the nearby Muslim village of the same name. Canaan wrote that the chain at 'Khadr was used specifically to bind, and thereby cure, the mad (Canaan 1927: 79-80). Persons approaching the Mar Elyas chain, however, did not restrict the efficacy of that chain to curing insanity but asserted that it also alleviated a number of other afflictions: illness, bad luck, sinfulness, and even the evil eye. If the Mar Elyas chain ever had the specific function Canaan attributes to the chain at 'Khadr, that function has subsequently become more general; people using it claimed they did so because it 'gives good fortune'. While the 'Khadr chain may be 'linked' to the one at Mar Elyas because Mar Elyas is dedicated both to St George and to Elijah (icons of St George and Elijah flank the iconostasis), this was never proffered as an explanation. People stressed only the efficacy of the chains; what they had in common was that each served to turn bad fortune to good.

The links between the chain and the saint's day, the saint and even the place seemed by this time rather tenuous, and several constellations of conflicting interpretations were floating around the crowded interior of the small chapel. The priests and monks were involved through their ceremonies in articulating the small chapel within a nearly empty monastery into a network of religious institutions and practices they believed to be both universal and eternal. The offices of the day preceding the saint's day, and the liturgies on the saint's day itself, rehearsed the association of the Prophet Elijah with the sacred history of the Church, and, by so doing, legitimated in the eyes of God and of the worldwide Greek Orthodox community the officiants' presence and the existence of this small outpost of orthodoxy. The chain stood for them as both a relic and an emblem of the monastery's place in the general Orthodox struggle to survive and overcome disbelief and unbelievers. To the priest with whom I spoke, the spectacle of the local population binding itself within the church was an emblem of his and his colleagues' mission to promote amongst the general population the same obedience to God and his agents which bound them to their service.

In Halweh's interpretation, Elyas did not have the 'transparency' attributed to him by the priest; the saint, for Halweh, was a power in himself rather than an agent of God or a transmission line to Him.[7] One does not rally around Elyas in order to state one's allegiance to the god of Elyas, but rather because the prophet protects those who are devoted to him against whatever forces threaten them, be those religious or secular. Those forces were described as having operated in the past under the banners of Judaism and Islam. However, at the time of my

research they were not seen to be mobilized along denominational lines and were instead seen as aligned more generally against the possibility for local people to live decent, satisfying lives. The chain both reinvoked and signified the persecutions suffered by Elyas's community at the hands of its enemies, and asserted that the Prophet Elyas would overcome those who oppress his dependants.

Halweh's description of the icon as a portrayal of the prophet in ancient times, destroying the Jewish and Muslim enemies of the Christians, asserted a communal reading of antagonism and identity in accordance with the traditions he had imbibed during his upbringing within a Christian community and his education in a Christian (Lutheran) school. Nonetheless, Palestinian Orthodox communities in the latter half of the twentieth century have come to see the interests of the Greeks of the Orthodox church as inimical to their own, in part because of the legacy of antagonism to the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate granted them by the Arab Orthodox Movement.[8] As a result, Halweh's description of the contemporary Christian community excluded the priesthood from that community, and defined the Greek Christians as enemies of the community which Elyas protects. For Halweh, the priests who claimed to be the servants of the prophet and of his God were, in fact, the enemies of those who appeal to the saint for protection. Halweh and I discussed a Greek Orthodox man who thirty years earlier had come to Jerusalem from Athens on pilgrimage and settled there to work for the Church. The previous evening this resident pilgrim had told me that 'religion is more important than the land; I do not care for Palestine, I am a resident of the holy land'. Halweh's response to this statement was:

> people like this are a problem. The Greek church – like the Muslim Brotherhood [the Muslim Brothers of Palestine] – insists on considering everything in terms of religion. Palestinian Christians are allowed no place in the Church. The condition of being a [Palestinian] priest is that one must marry so that one cannot move up the hierarchy.[9] It feels like a foreign occupation. A couple of years ago the scouts here beat up a priest.

Halweh's identification of himself as a 'Palestinian Christian', rather than as an Orthodox Christian, indicated a formulation of identity tying him more closely to other Christians (regardless of denomination) among whom he lived than to co-religionists who were not Palestinian. After telling of the Patriarchate rules excluding Orthodox Christians from significant participation in the church, he discussed how the interests of the 'foreign' churches prevented local Christians from asserting their identities as Christians. The *firman* (an edict issued by the Turkish sultan) of the status quo, a set of regulations by which the various churches keep their holy feasts separate so that questions are not raised about which church has possession of specific holy places,[10] was seen by Halweh and other indigenous Christians with whom I spoke as a denial to them of Christian – as opposed to Greek, Armenian, Latin, etc. – identity. Halweh told me 'the most evil thing here is that we do not have one Christmas. All over the world Christmas is the twenty fifth except here – it is a shame for the Palestinians. We have tried to fight it by making the feast on one day, but they would not agree because of the question of who would go into the church first'.

The communalism evident in Halweh's description of the icon of Elijah and the prophets of Baal shadowed an imagined community bringing together all Christians living in his homeland in opposition to Jews and Muslims, but that sensed community was not acknowledged by the church to which he owed

formal allegiance. Furthermore, the activities of the foreigners who controlled that church served not only to deny fellow Orthodox Palestinians full membership of the church, but also forbade expression of the wider Christian community to which Halweh saw himself belonging. Thus, for Halweh, there was a substantial conflict between his religion, which provided him with supernatural protectors and granted him an identity as part of a particular people (Palestinian Christians) living in a particular land (Palestine), and that of the priests and monks dominating that religion's institutions, who saw him, his people and his people's lives as largely extraneous to their interests as Greeks in a Greek Orthodox holy land. His participation in a festival on the territory and under the legislation of the Greek Orthodox clergy therefore brought him onto contested ground. This contest was manifest in a discourse which both stressed his identity as a Christian dependent on the succour of Christian saints and distinguished between his Palestinian Christianity and the priests' and monks' Greek Christianity.

Halweh was not, however, led by this either to pull back from the religion or to withdraw from the festivities. The religion and the feast of Mar Elyas were important to him; he wore a cross around his neck which hung prominently outside his shirt and over his boy scout scarf, he frequently went to church and prayed to its tutelary saints, and he attended the feast with his fellow boy scouts – many of whom were Catholic – to protect the festivities from those who might, in the name of politics, deny his people the practice of their religion: 'we watch out for trouble; some nationalists may try to disrupt things because they say there is no place for celebration under occupation'. Just as Halweh saw the church leaders failing to represent the Christian Palestinians by refusing to recognize any aspect of their experiences which could not be interpreted in terms of the interests of the church, so too he believed that nationalists would disallow the full expression of local Christian identities by proscribing religious ceremonials and insisting that all manifestations must be explicitly and exclusively nationalist.[11] Halweh's identity as a Christian and a Palestinian located him, then, between mutually exclusive discourses on identity; that of the foreign church which, in providing a religion, denied national identity and that of the nationalists who, in working to realize a political identity, allowed no room for the expression of religious identity.

For all those Christians and Muslims who linked the Mar Elyas chain with the chain at the monastery of 'Khadr and thus indirectly with St George, the association of the miraculous chain, the feast, the monastery, the Prophet Elyas and the Greek Orthodox church appeared largely contingent. Stories told by Christians and Muslims attending the feast suggested that at Mar Elyas it was the wonder-working artefact which was important. There was no discussion of why the chain was empowered or about whose power it mediated; pilgrims simply referred to the chain as a source of health, good luck, sanity and freedom from the evil eye. The people who ritualistically handled the chain were at the monastery not because the day was holy to Elyas, nor because the day was holy at all. Rather, the chain was used throughout the year whenever there was access to it; the feast day was special because on that day the church was open.

Many persons, in fact, claimed that they came to the feast to be with their 'neighbours' rather than to revere the chain or Elyas. Such assertions, which

made even the devotions to the chain appear as a consequence rather than a cause of the gathering, were reiterated outside the church where people's attentions flowed from group to group rather than being channelled towards the miraculous or the sacred by the dynamics inside the chapel. In the crowded olive groves outside the monastery the strands of motives and meanings were woven into the tapestry of a multi-denominational community united by its perception of itself as a community with shared traditions and practices. The Muslim who had accompanied the Syrian Orthodox girl referred to in note 7 told me that 'the religious difference doesn't matter, we all come. It is for friendship and community as much as for religion'. Persons circulated from small group to small group, sharing food, drink and gossip. Some of these people told me they did not go into the church at all but simply came on this day, as they always had, to be with their neighbours. One man said 'we all come to be together around the saint's place'.

Clearly, there was considerable heterogeneity within this apparent unity; some attend the site just to picnic, others to take a blessing from the chain, others (Muslim and Christian) to redeem promises and ask blessings of St George and of the Prophet Elyas, and some to visit, and sacrifice to, the Prophet. Many persons seemed to attend to carry out more than one of these activities. Each person's attested motives, and the identities that devolved from those motives, shifted as the person moved from context to context. Halweh, who stressed his Christian identity while serving both as guide to a foreign anthropologist within the church and as guardian of the festivities in the company of his fellow scouts, became just another member of the mixed community which constituted itself around the monastery when he joined Muslim friends and neighbours in the small groups scattered around the olive groves.

The festivities at Mar Elyas, then, seemed to serve as a 'floating signifier'[12] for the people of the region. Each individual was able to attribute to the place and the gathering meanings personal to them, and yet, because the time and the place served as a place of inscription for so many diverse meanings and motives, the feast constituted a community. People recognized that community at the same time as they recognized the multiplexity of its character; it was, in a very real sense, a concentration of the community which they moved through day to day but in a more dilute form. The only people excluded from this sensed community were those who would make rigorous the criteria of participation: the priests who saw the celebration as specific to their own particular sect and, hence, as antithetical to all other religious persuasions (both other Christian communities and Muslims), and the nationalists who would deny this shared sense of communal identity in calling on a 'higher' national identity, exclusive of precisely that field of faith and local community which made the people feel at home.

The following day, the saint's day proper, effectively belonged to the church *per se*; there was a strong delegation present from the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, and the only local people were old women, very few accompanied by children, who quietly attended the liturgy and drifted off after the church ceremony was completed. The Brotherhood, and the liturgy with which it asserted its ecclesiastical identity and fixed the significance of the site in relation to that identity, hegemonized the time and place, and the only Palestinians who participated

were those who wished to assert themselves as Greek Orthodox believers dependent on the succour of a liturgy presented before them by a foreign clergy speaking in a language which they had never been taught to understand.

Religion and identity in Beit Sahur

The situation in Beit Sahur, a municipality with a mixed Christian-Muslim population of around 12,000 which gave rise to the shrine of Bîr el-Saiyideh in the 1980s, differed in significant ways from that described for the shrine of Mar Elyas. In some ways the demographic isolation of Mar Elyas contributed to this difference. While Bîr el-Saiyideh is located immediately below the main marketplace of Beit Sahur, Mar Elyas stands on an isolated promontory above the Judean Desert. Palestinian houses which had in the past stood within walking distance of the monastery have been abandoned, and for the most part bulldozed over the past decade or so because of the expansion of Israeli settlement in the area. Consequently, when Palestinians came to Mar Elyas they came from a number of discrete areas of settlement to a holy place *per se*, rather than to a holy place at the hub of other non-sacral community-defining activities. The identities at play at Mar Elyas tended, therefore, to be explicitly linked to interpretations of the monastery and its contents, even if those interpretations mobilized other elements of the pilgrims' lives only contingently connected to religion and religious artefacts. The sort of secular community observed in the olive fields around the shrine was, in a sense, an accident of proximity. It dissolved with the occasion, perhaps leaving behind a residue of good feeling towards others of other villages and religious affiliations, but did not provide sufficient ground for the building of political identities and programmes. The shrine of Bîr el-Saiyideh, in contrast, is not only a sign of the sacred but is a marker of sacrality located in the centre of a community in which sectarian and national identities are focal concerns. It is the wider field in which a shrine operates which gives the shrine both its character and its significance, and the differences of the fields surrounding Mar Elyas and Bîr el-Saiyideh lead people to interpret the places and to articulate their identities in relation to those places in very different ways. In presenting a sense of the particular context in which the shrine of Bîr el-Saiyideh has developed, I elaborate some of the conditions which have given rise to the Beit Sahuran project of rearticulating the place of religion in the assertion of communal identity.[13]

In 1983, Christian and Muslim Palestinians who had come to the Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem to participate in what they called 'the feast of Bethlehem' spoke to me of repeated sightings over the previous three weeks of the Virgin Mary, and two other figures, in the shadowed depths of an underground cistern beneath the market square of Beit Sahur. At the time I did not follow up these rumours of a 'miracle' and I did not visit the site of this apparition for another five years. Nevertheless, in the interim I learned enough about the local communities and their situation under occupation to make their response to the alleged intrusion of the sacred into the course of their daily lives seem signally important.

It was difficult to ignore the Palestinian presence at the commemoration of the Nativity of Christ. One of the more exciting aspects of Bethlehem's Christmas

Eve ceremonies was the massing of Palestinian scouts in Manger Square to greet the Latin Patriarch on his arrival from Jerusalem to prepare for midnight mass. Scout processions, which despite their military demeanour were permitted by the Israeli authorities, were a common sight at Muslim and Christian feast day ceremonies throughout the Occupied Territories before the intifada. There were, however, considerable differences between the deportment of Muslim and Christian troops. Muslim scouts marched in black-and-white 'Fatah' *keffiyas* and bore banners on which the nationalist tetrad of green, red, black and white was conspicuously manifest. Among the Christians, national emblems and colours were conspicuously absent, and the uniforms and banners of Christian scouts served solely to distinguish between the troops' various sectarian identities. Conversations with scouts and religious functionaries made it clear that it was the churches which restricted the public display of the Christian scouts to the celebration of religious identity. Church leaders, at the time exclusively foreign, were afraid of offending the Israeli authorities who maintained the 'status quo'[14] and loath to allow local Christians to denigrate the importance of the foreign-run churches by publicly asserting that their religious identities were only part of a larger national identity. At the Bethlehem Christmas procession no Muslim troops were allowed to march with the Christians, even though Muslim Bethlehemites also saw Christmas as the 'name day' of their city and despite the fact that local Muslim scout troops annually asked to participate. The Latin Patriarchate allowed Christian troops from various sectarian groupings (Catholic and non-Catholic alike) to march together, but the entire display (the order in which the scouts marched, the insignia of their costumes and the slogans on their banners) made manifest only the communal identities which distinguished between the groups; there was nothing to suggest that these young men and women shared a political identity with each other, and with the excluded Muslims.

There was, however, one exception. The Beit Sahur troops, although like the others organized into sectarian groups by the different churches which sponsored them, were uniformly dressed. All wore black-and-white *keffiyas* and webbed military caps. On their shoulders were patches (attached by snaps or safety pins) on which the scout *fleur de lis* was figured out in the Palestinian national colours of green, red, black and white. The difference was striking, and one person in the watching crowd remarked: 'they must be Muslims from Jerusalem'. Others would not allow that – there could not be Muslims marching with the Christians – but were clearly nonplussed by the scouts' overtly political appearance and by the uniformity manifested across the groups. The Beit Sahur scouts themselves considered the differences to be nominal; unlike the other scouts, who continually wished to know which of the troops were thought to be most impressive, the Beit Sahurans wanted only to know my impression of the town's contingent as a whole. They also wanted to know whether I would come to Beit Sahur the next day to see 'the real Christmas celebration'.

On Christmas Day the winding streets of the hilly town were crowded with local people and bereft of Israelis or foreigners. The focus of enthusiasm was the scout troops, as it had been the day before, but in Beit Sahur the procession was very different. For one thing, it was much more military; whereas in Bethlehem many of the scouts had seemed to be flirting with the crowd, calling out to

friends and family in the audience and showing off with bravura poses and exaggerated baton tosses, in Beit Sahur boys and girls, men and women marched in disciplined formation with their faces set and fixed firmly forward. More significant, however, was the fact that the various Christian troops from Beit Jala, Bethlehem and other towns were joined by a large contingent of Muslim troops, not only from Beit Sahur but also from as far away as Ramallah, Silwan and Jerusalem. Scout uniforms were less flamboyant, and where on the previous day the bright insignia of the various sectarian communities had stood out strongly, here all the scouts had covered the badges of their particular troops with the green, red, black and white *fleur de lis* patch previously worn only on the shoulders of the Beit Sahur contingent.

In Bethlehem the troops had been brought together to receive the Patriarch, and when the Patriarch had withdrawn (to meet local dignitaries, including the military governor of the Occupied Territories) the scouts dispersed. In Beit Sahur, in contrast, the Christmas parade from the Greek Orthodox church through the town to the community hall in the basement of the Latin Church was merely the ceremonial facet of what was a larger, and distinctly extra-ecclesiastic, project. In this instance religion provided the occasion – not the reason – for a public manifestation exceeding, both in duration, rhetoric and purpose, the bounds set by the ceremonial event. After the parade had ended the mingled troops gathered for two hours to chant nationalist slogans, dance with their *keffiyas* wrapped around their heads and enthusiastically applaud a succession of speakers (scout and civilian alike) who referred to them as 'rifles for the pleasure of Abu-Ammar's [Yasser Arafat's] eyes' while discussing the complexities of organizing a united Muslim and Christian 'Pan-Palestinian Scout Movement' in the face of opposition from church and mosque. The *fleur de lis* scout emblems which I had seen pinned or snapped onto scout uniforms were the markers of this movement, and they were removable precisely because the movement was an anathema to the religious authorities on which the troops depended both for funding and for legal status.

The central role played by the Beit Sahur scouts in uniting Muslims and Christians within a political organization explicitly intended to substitute nationalist union for sectarian divisiveness[15] was not something exceptional for Beit Sahur; the demography of the town brings Muslims and Christians together in their economic pursuits, and the strength of the town's economy (based on small factories producing plastics and various craft goods) has led local Christians to commit themselves to remaining there rather than emigrating to the Palestinian diaspora, as have many Christians from other mixed towns such as Bethlehem and Beit Jala. Beit Sahur is a largely Christian town, although there is some question about the precise proportions of Muslims and Christians in the population. The most recent survey was carried out in 1984, when Father Pena of the Franciscan Order estimated that 83 per cent. of the town's population was Christian, largely Greek Orthodox but with substantial numbers of Latin and Greek Catholics and much smaller Lutheran and Syrian Orthodox populations (Pena 1984).[16] Christians and Muslims with whom I spoke in Beit Sahur in 1990 tended to quote much higher figures for the Muslim population – between 25 and 30 per cent. – but just as Pena's interest in Christian communities and his

dependence on local parish priests for his information may have caused him to underestimate the number of Muslims in Beit Sahur, so Beit Sahurans' pride in having overcome the opportunities for fragmentation thrown up by religious differences may have led them to inflate Muslim numbers. Whatever the actual proportions, in 1990 two members out of eight on the municipal committee were Muslim, and people were quick to point out that these were on the committee not as representatives of the Muslim population but as spokespersons for major family groups which happened to be Muslim. The distinction was significant; Beit Sahurans saw themselves as Palestinians who happen to be either Christian or Muslim, rather than as Christians or Muslims who happen to live in Palestine.

An alternative reading of identity, which would define people by religious affiliation rather than in terms of the place in which they live and the neighbours with whom they share that life, was promulgated then, as now, by three significant forces in the Occupied Territories: the Israeli government, the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), and the foreign churches. Israeli encouragement of Palestinian sectarianism is not simply an extension of Israel's own imaging of itself as the Jewish nation for the Jewish people; it is perhaps more saliently a continuation of the policy of divide-and-rule it has used against 'non-Jewish minorities' in Israel and the Occupied Territories since 1948 (Lustick 1980; Tamari 1982). The state's covert support of the 'Muslim Brothers of Palestine' through the mid-eighties, and the free rein it gave to the Hamas movement until May 1988, are widely recognized by Palestinians as facets of a general Israeli strategy of dividing Palestinians along sectarian lines, so as to undermine the foundations of the nationalist movement (Litani 1989; Taraki 1989: 31; Schiff & Ya'ari 1990: 233-4; Dumper 1992: 422-3).

Hamas, which opposes Palestinian nationalism and advocates liberating the entirety of Palestine from 'Jewish' rule so that it can be set up as a trust (*waqf*) for the Islamic peoples of the world, built up a strong following in Gaza after the 1982 invasion of Lebanon on the basis of welfare and education projects funded with money from Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Between 1982 and 1988 Hamas orchestrated a campaign of violence and intimidation against the secularist movements which effectively drove them into hiding in Gaza, and severely disrupted their activities on university campuses throughout the Occupied Territories. Even Fatah (the centrist party of the Palestine Liberation Organisation led by Yasser Arafat), which had supported Hamas's Gazan campaign against the Communist Party and the Popular and Democratic Fronts, suffered the onslaughts of the movement just prior to the outbreak of the intifada.[17] Hamas's hostility is, however, directed only against nationalists (whom it terms 'communists' or 'secularists') and not against the Palestinian communities which it is able to accommodate within its religious purview. Palestinian Christians are not attacked as Christians *per se*, and would have a protected status within an Islamic state as a 'People of the Book'. Israeli attempts to isolate Christian Palestinians by leading them to think that the Muslims, led by Hamas, were turning against them were easily recognized, as of January 1990. Christians in Bethlehem, Ramallah and Jerusalem spoke of Israelis who 'dress up as Hamas' to daub anti-Christian graffiti on West Bank walls, and a 1989 'Hamas' communique condemning 'the wealthy

Christians of Beit Sahur' for having 'drunk and danced with the Israelis since the beginning of the intifada' was identified by Beit Sahurans as an Israeli forgery.

In large part, the churches of Israel and of the Occupied Territories define the land and its peoples in terms that have more in common with the vocabulary of the Islamic fundamentalists than with that of Palestinians engaged in struggling for self-determination. Just as Hamas argues that Palestine is holy ground for Muslims and should be kept in perpetuity as an Islamic trust, so the foreign-dominated churches define Palestine as the 'Holy Land' and treat it as a repository of sanctity for the edification of priests and pilgrims. Since the sixteenth century, when Patriarch Germanos expelled local Christian clergy from the Greek Orthodox Church and transformed the parochial churches into monastic holy places for the Greeks (Bertram & Young 1926: 34-78), the Latin and Orthodox churches have been for the most part indifferent to the condition and fate of local Christians. In the past, when foreign churches needed 'bargaining counters' in diplomatic struggles for hegemony over the holy places, they would 'buy' local Christians into their folds with offers of housing, employment and the like. This was especially true after Ali Pasha opened Palestine to increased Western intervention, when the Western nations, for secular as well as religious reasons, engaged in well-funded programmes to court disaffected Greek Orthodox Palestinians into the Protestant, Latin and Russian Orthodox churches (Tibawi 1961; Hopwood 1969; Horner 1989; Scholch 1989). The establishment of the state of Israel and the consolidation of the Occupied Territories (wherein lie most of the sites revered by foreign pilgrims) under its control changed the nature of the struggles. Subsequently the churches found that the best way to maintain and expand their property holdings, gain residence permits for monks, nuns and clergy, and facilitate the flow of their pilgrims was to nurture good relations with the state, and that meant, even more than before, ignoring the plight of Christian Palestinians.[18] One man in Beit Sahur, where over 80 per cent. of the Christian population is Greek Orthodox, told me 'we have two imperialisms here – the Zionists and the Greeks ... They [the Greeks] are more interested in religion than in us'.

While the Israeli state, Hamas and the dominant Christian churches strive to impose religious boundaries on a land populated by peoples of different religious affiliations, Beit Sahurans attested commitment to the idea of unifying different religious communities within the borders of a single secular state, both in interviews and in their establishment of non-sectarian organizations such as the Pan-Palestinian Scout Movement and the popular committees (the latter provided models for intifada organisation to communities throughout the West Bank and Gaza Strip; see Hiltermann 1991). One Beit Sahuran Christian told me 'we are ready in our own state to live as Christians, Muslims and Jews in one nation' and this was echoed in numerous other statements such as that of a Muslim who said 'we hope for liberation with one community with many religions. God is for one, the nation for all. Zionists changed Palestinian Jews to Israelis'. In this rhetoric religious identity is subsumed under national identity. In an interesting temporal reversal of the segmentary system of establishing common identity by tracing genealogies back to an apical ancestor, the nationalist rhetoric posits a common identity by projecting forward to a future moment in which all

persons, be they Christian, Muslim or Jew, will share citizenship in a common secular state. The only persons excluded from this process are those who see their national identity as devolving from their communalist identity and thus refuse to allow that their religious identity will be subsumed within an overarching secular national identity. Thus Zionists, who see national and religious identity as inextricably linked, are future foreigners and present-day enemies. Although future developments will tell how well this rhetoric translates into political reality, at the time of my research the Beit Sahur municipality and political activists within the town had established, and were maintaining, strong links with 'non-Zionist' Israeli communists and peace activists.

The sectarian tendency to define public space and public identities in religious terms was rejected in Beit Sahur. Traditionally mixed Palestinian towns were cognitively divided into the 'Quarters' in which the various religious communities in large part resided; Jerusalem's old city, for instance, is still mapped in terms of Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Armenian Quarters (Ben-Arieh 1984: 15-16; see also Eickelman 1989: 100-7). This nomenclature is an inheritance of the Ottoman *millet* system wherein the various non-Muslim religious communities within the *dar al Islam* (realm of Islam) were granted relative autonomy by the state. This led their respective members to cluster around the residences of the religious leader whom the Ottoman authorities recognized for each:

> as long as they paid their taxes, the minorities, Christians and Jews, were left to administer their own internal affairs within the framework of Islamic law which gave them the status of *ahl al-dhimma* [protected peoples]. Their religious affairs [which included laws pertaining to marriage, property and the like] were regulated by their respective heads of communities (Asali 1989: 206; see also Abu-Jaber 1967; Cohen & Lewis 1978).

Today most 'Quarters' tend to be integrated as the collapse of Ottoman rule has rendered the apparatus of the *millet* system largely extraneous, and economic and social developments have led persons of the various denominations to settle in areas traditionally populated by other groups (an exception is the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem's old city which, because of planned developments carried out in the 1970s and 1980s, is almost exclusively inhabited by Jews). After the 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the Beit Sahur municipality renamed the sectors of the town so as to memorialize locales the war had rendered significant as moments of Palestinian national resistance to Israel; locals now call the highest section of town Shqaif Castle (the site of an important battle) and refer to other sectors with the names of two of the most important Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, Tal el-Za'atar and Shatila.

Religious difference, which is not inscribed across the landscape, was also not a factor determining the character of interaction between individuals in public spheres. The following quotations are drawn from interviews with Beit Sahur residents (both Christian and Muslim):

> We do not remember we are from different religions unless somebody from outside reminds us ... we are Christians and Muslims in spirit and in our hearts, but in public we are Palestinian;

> It is you outside who try to make a difference between the Christians and the Muslims. We are a people; we all go to each other's feasts, we visit with each other, we live the same life. We are one people;

> My relation with my god is in my heart and my house; it does not concern the public. In the street I am Ahmed.

These assertions, like numerous others I recorded, signal an awareness of contextual identities and suggest that the programme of constructing a national identity, to which all of the Beit Sahurans I interviewed[19] showed a commitment, is precisely one of redefining the contexts in which sectarian identities are manifested. This redefinition creates a new public domain in which non-religious, nationalist identities can be evidenced.

The repudiation of 'public' markers of religious identity in these quotations does not signal a renunciation of religion itself; it is instead symptomatic of a rearticulation of the place of religion in the formulation of identity. From the evidence I was able to gather in visits to their houses, Beit Sahurans remained committed to the 'faiths of their fathers'. The interiors of the houses in which I listened to the most virulent rejections of sectarianism were dense with signs of religiosity; pictures of the Virgin Mary (in both Christian and Muslim houses) or of Mecca (in Muslim houses) were hung next to photographs of family members and members of neighbours' families who had been jailed or killed by the Israelis. A 3 ft-high statue of the Virgin Mary graced a corner of the living room of one house belonging to a self-avowed secular nationalist who was an organizer of local committees. I was unable to uncover evidence of any increase in the extremely rare occurrence of 'mixed' (Muslim-Christian) marriages in the town; unlike in Ramallah, where residents perceived the incidence of such marriages in 1990 to have increased over the past decade, in Beit Sahur I was told that mixed marriages occur only when a Beit Sahuran emigrates and becomes involved with a member of another community 'outside'. This suggests that religion and sectarian traditions retained hegemony over areas of life such as faith, worship and marriage and that they there framed the appropriate practices and ceremonials. Thus many of the aspects of communal identity fostered by the *millet* system were retained *within the domain* of home, family and kinship relations. What had changed, I will argue, was that another domain had opened up and had come to be seen as constituting another, supplementary yet subsuming, field of identity.

The sectarianism fostered by the Ottoman *millet* system provided each religious community with a space in which to operate in relative autonomy and insisted that sectarian identity always be emphasized by strictly defining the way the *dhimmi* (protected religious minorities) could dress and deport themselves in all contexts. All aspects of personal life were subsumed under sectarian identity and few, if any, alternative contexts were available in which to enunciate other identities which might allow for collaboration and identification with persons from outside one's own *millet* (for twentieth-century examples see Joseph [1978] on the Lebanon, and Webber [1985] and Bowman [1986] on Jerusalem). Even in relations between men in the market place, roles and interaction were choreographed by sectarian identities so that exchanges of goods and services could occur without separate identities being merged. The Beit Sahuran project of rearticulating the religious and the secular led to an expansion of the 'neutral' space of the market (see Gilsenan 1982: 173-7) so that that space came to provide not only for economic necessities but also for new modalities of identity appropriate to the situation of occupation.

Chapman *et al.*, following Ardener (1972), discuss the way in which the perception of some 'novelty' in a community's experience can impel it to 'pick up

behind it a new trajectory to replace or modify the old' (Chapman *et al.* 1989: 8). Beit Sahur has a long history of Muslim-Christian interaction and, because there are traditions recounted which trace that admixture back to the town's mythical foundations, it was easy for Beit Sahurans to rearticulate their past in the light of the imagining of the present community brought about by the Israeli occupation (Bowman 1990: 51-2). The new form of 'imagined community' constituted in the context of occupation was, however, substantially different from the identities which had preceded it. In the past, Muslims and Christians had worked together but had seen themselves as Muslims and Christians who happened to be involved in economic exchanges rather than as Palestinians who happened to be Muslim or Christian. The new identity – 'We are Palestinians first, then Muslims or Christians' – came not from a market situation which brought them into contact with each other, but from a situation of confrontation which forced them to recognize that 'outside' their realm of co-operation was an antagonist equally threatening to all townspeople, regardless of their religious affiliation. In the light of the struggle against this antagonist, certain elements of the town's past were rendered significant and were memorialized in the production of a 'new' history. Various residents told me stories of Muslims and Christians marching together to Nebi Musa (an Islamic shrine in the Jordan Valley which became the focus of Islamic dissatisfaction with British rule), and of Baathist, Nasserite and Communist demonstrations against the Jordanian occupation. They spoke, in addition, of the long history of support for the 'Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine' and the 'Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine' during the period of Israeli occupation. What is significant in these histories was not that Beit Sahur had a long history of resistance to various occupiers of the land but that the fractiousness of that resistance, in which residents' allegiances to different factions of the struggles often turned the town into an arena of struggle between parties rather than a united front against the 'outside', was here elided so that the entirety of the community could be constituted as an 'us' which had always resisted the incursions of 'foreign' rule.

The Israeli occupation provided a space for identification that differed from that provided by other occupiers, all of which – as Christian or Muslim regimes supporting capitalist property owners – presented opportunities to factions of the Beit Sahur population for identification and collaboration. The Israeli forces, which viewed 'Arabs' as enemies and saw 'Arab' capitalist successes as a strengthening of 'Arab' power, demonstrated to Christians and Muslims (both employers and workers) that 'there is another who is enemy to us both'[20]. The portrait of a young man, Basem Rishmawi, was hung on the walls of many houses in Beit Sahur and his name was often mentioned in conversations. On the evening of 11 April 1981 Rishmawi had disappeared while returning home from his fiancee's house. A week later Israeli soldiers had returned his body, severely mutilated, its wrists cut from having been bound with wire. They claimed that he had been killed when a bomb he had been making exploded prematurely. No one had believed the story, and word had spread through the town that he had been kidnapped, tortured and finally killed either by settlers or the army. Many residents considered Rishmawi's death to have been arbitrary; they believed any Beit Sahuran could expect a similar fate at the hands of the occupation's agents:

'it could have happened to anybody, and by chance the victim was Basem'. Subsequent experiences strengthened that assumption. In 1989 Edmond Ghanem was killed while walking down the main street of the town, when a soldier dropped a stone on him from a third floor guard post in the municipality building. As far as Beit Sahurans are concerned, the arbitrariness revealed in the tax raids, which Al-Haq has described as constituting 'a sustained campaign of aggression against the town's residents under the guise of compliance with the law' (Al-Haq 1989: 1), has exposed behind the mask of occupiers' law the face of a conquering army engaged in pillage. One Beit Sahuran told me amidst the detritus of a neighbour's house which that morning had been 'searched': 'this is plunder, looting, it's indiscriminate. ... All they want is money from us'. It appeared to the residents that they were all equivalent in the eyes of the occupying forces: 'We see that one day it is one person and the next day another. The following day it may be us, so we say *hellas* (enough) and begin to work to stop it'. The existence of the entire community and the lives of all its members were seen as being at risk, and in that context the differences between individuals, families, religious communities and political affiliations became insignificant: 'If I want to throw a stone I will not call to my neighbour to say "become a Muslim and then we will throw stones together". We forget our religion; we forget our political groups. The bullets do not differentiate between Christian and Muslim, P.L.O., D.F.L.P., etc.'

At issue here was not the continuance of public co-operation in economic projects which had been a central feature of Beit Sahuran life for the past several centuries, but the question of the survival of any form of Palestinian community at all on the site. The 'space' of co-operation is thus transformed and extended, and in that space – which was now that in which Beit Sahurans faced an Other across a boundary which had come to mark the difference between 'the community' and 'the foreigners' intent on destroying that community – Beit Sahuran Muslims and Christians became 'Palestinians' mobilized in a struggle for survival against 'Israelis'. It was, therefore, the antagonist which provided the 'novelty' discussed by Chapman *et al.* (1989) and which delineated the 'boundary' which Barth (1969) saw as constituting the ethnic group; Beit Sahurans 'invented' an identity which encompassed all aspects of their lives in the face of an antagonist they saw as threatening those lives in all their diversities. As a result, a political project of resistance was elaborated which went beyond the quotidian sectarian co-existence which had characterized intercommunal interaction in the past. The antagonism to the community perceived by Beit Sahurans in the policies and practices of the Israeli state, and the settlers it defended, had led them to reify the inter-communal co-operation which had marked their everyday life. The diffuse sense of community Beit Sahurans had shared in the past – a loose sense of the communal not unlike that described above as having taken place among Palestinian participants at the feast of Mar Elyas – coagulated, under the mobilizing threat of state antagonism, into an 'identity' which penetrated, constituted and united self, community and nation.[21] This fixing of identity transformed the elements of everyday community life into emblems of a communal self *per se* and, as such, all these elements – regardless of whether they were originally Christian or Muslim, sacred or secular – came to signify 'Palestinian life'. Politicization was

fundamental to the constitution of this new, subsuming, identity; the 'Palestinian' entity took form as something which had to be protected, and people envisaged in its survival or destruction not only the fate of the 'imagined community' of Palestine, but also their own.

Beit Sahurans' recognition that Israeli occupation threatened the community as a whole led them to redefine the resources of the community so that these could be mobilized against that occupation. The resources of religion, so often used (by themselves as well as by others) to divide and oppose Palestinian people in the past, were appropriated and marshalled in the defence of local and national aspirations. In 1989 many Beit Sahurans sent out printed Christmas cards to churches and embassies throughout Israel and the Occupied Territories; cards which played off the bucolic and auspicious image of Christ's nativity against the darkness of the contemporary situation. On one side of the card was written 'Christmas 1989 in the Third Year of the Intifada' and on the other, beneath a drawing of a group of armed Israeli soldiers massed around a grotto in which an empty cradle stood over the prone body of a masked Palestinian, was written 'Silent Night, Holy Night, All is Dark, All is Sad', and 'From the City of Peace we Palestinians wish you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year'. These cards, like the municipality-organized 'Day of Prayer for Peace' in November 1989 to which were invited Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious leaders as well as Israeli peace groups and foreign diplomats, and the address to a similar audience by South African bishop Desmond Tutu on Christmas Eve of that year at Shepherd's Field Church in the town, all manifest a public face which Beit Sahurans turn to the 'outside'. In such instances the community presented itself as united in a sort of 'Popular Front' to garner support from the world outside the community. Such demonstrations, of course, might have been organized only for the delectation of outsiders and might not be intended to change internal perceptions of the lineaments of identity. As such, these would be border phenomena meant to mask for external eyes the fact that the internal community was still riven by sectarian and other divides.

'Palestinian traditions' and the shrine of Bîr el-Saiyideh

More interesting, therefore, and in the long run perhaps more significant, were transformations in how Beit Sahurans interpreted the elements of their everyday lives. In January 1990 I was told by a Muslim schoolteacher that 'we must nationalize our beliefs, should rebuild our customs so they reflect our national life'. This 'nationalization' of religion and custom involved a substantial redefinition of the field of religious belief and practice. Such a redefinition was not always fully visible on the ground, because religious belief retained its saliency in personal and familial identity. However, where in the past communal identity – rooted in a distrust of other religious communities fostered by the religious hierarchies and fed, particularly in the cities, by financial support from the churches and the *waqfs* – had provided the core of a person's sense of social self, what was occurring in Beit Sahur and other places in Palestine in the 1980s and early 1990s was a tendency to subsume that sectarian identity within an encompassing nationalist identity. Part of this was a matter of the withdrawal (forced or voluntary) of the support of religious foundations, as I have mentioned above, and as

Dumper discusses in his studies of the *waqfs* under Israel (Dumper 1991; 1992). More salient was the recognition that, for the first time, the survival of both Muslims and Christians was threatened by a common antagonist.

At this stage I can only point to some symptoms of that change. One, which I witnessed on several occasions between 1984 and 1990 during religious festivities in Jerusalem, was the tendency of Muslim and Christian Palestinians of most denominations[22] to join members of other religious communities in publicly celebrating religious feasts. One Muslim youth, who joined the riotous march of Christians along Christian Quarter Road to the Holy Sepulchre for the Holy Fire ceremony[23] remarked: 'this [the time of religious celebrations] is the only time you see the nation of Palestine on its streets; I am here to celebrate with my nation'. Such a 'national' interpretation of a sectarian celebration differs substantially from interpretations evident at the Mar Elyas feast. At the celebrations around Mar Elyas, groups were for the most part constituted around the particular rationales their members had for attending, and whatever sense of 'community' came into play was an accidental consequence of the fact that these motivations were focused on the same site. 'Community' was never recognized as a significant entity in itself, in large part because no antagonism threatened the whole and caused the participants to recognize their equivalency in the eyes of an enemy (the telling exception is referred to in note 21). For the Muslim taking part in the Christian Holy Fire ceremony, inter-communal 'manifestations' celebrated a national identity within which particular sectarian identities were incorporated. In this discourse, the Palestinian 'whole' is made up of a collocation of differences rendered equivalent by the recognition that all are equally threatened by Israeli state policies. In the context of that antagonism, the feast is defined as a manifestation of 'Palestinian' tradition and the gathering is seen as an assertion of the insistence of Palestinians in celebrating that tradition in the face of 'foreign' forces which would deny Palestinians the right to define themselves as members of a national community with a rich heritage of traditions.

Religious difference is not, however, elided by a nationalism insisting on full identification by all members of the nation. Difference is maintained, and while persons of different affiliations will take part in each other's celebrations, they will not participate in other sects' liturgies or rituals when those conflict with the articles or practices of faith of their own sectarian communities. A shift in context will, in other words, lead to a redefinition of identity; what is interpreted in a space read as 'public' as national and inclusive will be seen as religious and exclusive when participants are put into subject positions (Althusser 1971) emphasizing their identities as members of a specific religious community. Thus, while Muslims will participate in public aspects of Christian ceremonies such as the procession down the Mount of Olives on Latin Palm Sunday or the Holy Fire ceremony during Orthodox Holy Week, they will not take part in the liturgical celebrations of the Crucifixion or Resurrection within the churches. Christian Palestinians, joining Muslims on the Haram al-Sharif (the Temple Mount) to celebrate the birth of the Prophet Mohammed or the occasion of Mohammed's Ascent to Heaven, will, similarly, absent themselves when the Muslims pray. Palestinians who see themselves as active members of religious communities maintain the tenets of those communities in situations which are

defined in religious terms. Distinct religious identities and practices, rather than being homogenized as equivalent forms of 'Palestinian culture', are instead given supplementary meaning by the national discourse and come to be seen not only to signify the particular ways of life of sectarian communities, but also to bear witness to one of many facets of the way of life of the Palestinian nation. In this politicized instance, as in many others witnessed during fieldwork, identities are not exclusively sectarian or national but are both sectarian and national.

Another symptom of this change, in which transformations in the field of identity are actually monumentalized on the landscape, is the aforementioned shrine of Bîr el-Saiyideh. In 1988 I was taken to the underground cistern in the centre of Beit Sahur which had been the site of the visitation by the Virgin Mary in 1983. The Beit Sahur municipality had built a shrine over the cistern expressly for the use of both Muslims and Christians of all denominations. The exterior appeared distinctly modern, and, apart from the cross surmounting it, it bore less resemblance to a church than it did to a traditional Islamic *makam* (a building with a domed chamber characterizing a Muslim shrine). Inside, the walls were covered with icons and paintings of Christian subjects given by worshippers[24] but, profusely and randomly scattered among these were a significant number of gifts, paintings and pictures which were clearly Muslim. The cross and the predominance of a Christian tone were not surprising; the site was, after all, dedicated to a figure highly revered in Christian worship (although also venerated in Islam). What seems more important than a more thoroughgoing syncretism is the fact that in the shrine the exclusion of devotional objects of other religions which would be rigorously enforced by religious hierarchies in a church or mosque owned and operated by the religious institutions had here been violated, and that no one visiting the shrine (and there was a constant flow of local people passing through it) seemed offended by evident signs that a community wider than that of their religious community used the place.

I was told by both the caretaker, and the Greek Catholic priest who accompanied me on one visit to the site, that religious practices at the shrine reflect this heterogeneity. As the shrine belonged to the municipality, representatives of all local religious communities were able to book time in it. Since the stories surrounding the nativity of Jesus are celebrated by Muslims and Christians throughout the Bethlehem region as founding myths of the local communities, Muslims and Christians alike gathered at the shrine to celebrate their traditions in a place where the sacred had interacted with their locality. Sometimes these were shared celebrations, nominally organized according to the calendar of one of the religious communities, while at other times local Christian and Muslim officiants carried out ceremonies specific to their congregations. Moreover, as with the blessings available to all at Mar Elyas, water from the cistern in the back of the shrine is taken by both Muslim and Christian Beit Sahurans as a sacred substance for healing, blessing and providing good luck. I asked the caretaker why the Marian shrine was owned by the municipality and not, as one would expect, by one of the Christian churches. He indignantly replied: 'we are here Muslim and Christian, and there are two Christian groups. The municipality builds for all the people, and the people all own and use the well. *Hellas*.'

This statement suggests (as does the shrine's existence) that a new 'space' has been constituted which stands between the communalist domain of faith and family and the boundary which marks the separation of the residents of Beit Sahur from the 'outsiders' they perceive as working to destroy them. The fact that this new discursive space is articulated in nationalist rather than localist terms (people here identify themselves as members of a larger Palestinian community which stretches far beyond the municipal limits) points to the role of the enemy in constituting identity. Israeli soldiers and settlers, the most salient symbols of occupation to the people of Beit Sahur, see and treat Beit Sahurans as 'Arabs' in line with their own constitutive logic of antagonism and identity.[25] Beit Sahurans, well aware that what they define as a war waged against their town is simultaneously being waged against other communities throughout Israel and the Occupied Territories, and further afield into the Palestinian diaspora, are able to imagine a 'nation in waiting' constituted of other individuals and communities 'like' themselves in facing the same enemy. This similitude, however, is not imagined as literal; Beit Sahur residents do not imagine that all Palestinian communities have the same demographic mix as does their own and realize that many of the identifications and strategies of resistance they have developed are particular to the contingencies of their own situation. The equivalence that leads them to identify themselves as Palestinians is rendered in the same discursive space as is the perception of similitude which impels them to identify themselves as 'the same' as other Beit Sahurans who, despite being Muslim or Christian, nonetheless have been forced to engage in a collective struggle for mutual survival against an external antagonist.

Conclusion

This particular elaboration of sectarian elements within an encompassing nationalist framework is not, however, the only possible articulation of religion and politics available to Palestinians under occupation. Hamas, for example, manifests a drive, itself motivated by the Israeli occupation, to mobilize religion towards the pursuit of political ends. It does not present a programme for returning to traditional Islamic identity but instead, by using Western modes of populist organization and demanding conformity with newly invented 'traditions' of Islamicity in markers of identity such as dress,[26] organizes a particular 'postmodern' activism which attempts to replace the 'modern' project manifest in Jewish-Western political hegemony over the region with another all-encompassing reconstruction of the world, this time in accordance with a vision of a new 'pan-Islamic' order. Hamas's Islam proposes to make the political and religious coterminous through an extension of a politico-theological discipline into all domains of life, from the state to the household, and with particular positions and disciplines for non-Islamic populations. Hamas ideologues claim to draw their model for the theological hegemonization of the political from early Islamic theories of the state (Rodinson 1971: 215-92) but are actually more determinately influenced by the particular anti-Western and anti-colonial articulation of politics and religion propounded by the Islamic revolutionaries in Iran (Mortimer 1982: 353-8).

Ironically, Hamas's model of state and religion shares the logic of the Likud right and Gush Emunim sectors of the Israeli population which provided the agenda for Israeli politics between 1981 and the 1992 elections (Sprinzak 1991: 300-5). Lustick describes the defining characteristic of 'fundamentalism' as the assumption that 'political action, dedicated toward rapid and comprehensive transformation of society ... express[es] uncompromisable, cosmically ordained, and more or less directly received imperatives' (Lustick 1992: 431). The Israeli religious right sees the real stake of the 'redemption of the land' (the extirpation of a Palestinian presence and the full settlement of the Occupied Territories with a Jewish population) as a

> metaphysical question of transcendental importance ... whether or not the process of God's redemption of the Jewish people, and of the world as a whole, including the advent of the Messiah himself, will be brought to its glorious conclusion in the relatively near future, or whether it will be tragically delayed or even halted (Lustick 1992: 434).

Hamas's project of driving Jews and foreigners out of Palestine calls upon similar metaphysical imperatives; 'the Islamic people has a consciousness of its duties before God in the defense of Palestine, God's blessed country and that of the prophets, eternal property (*waqf*) of the Islamic community' (Legrain 1990: 181). The cosmic certitude provided by these assumptions to advocates of each of these 'fundamentalist' movements not only ensures a passionate, and uncompromising, commitment to their respective causes but also allies them with a power far greater than anything available in the profane domain of struggle and politics. For Palestinian Muslims, outraged by the constant presence of an antagonistic state and frustrated with the apparent inefficacy of secularist solutions, the appeal of a programme which is profoundly political yet draws its legitimacy from the word of God rather than the formulations of men and women is powerful. The struggle against what the secularists call a 'colonial settler state' here becomes the age-old struggle of the faithful against the demonic: 'religion is ... placed at the service of the anti-Israeli struggle, which is depicted as the eschatological combat between Good and Evil' (Legrain 1990: 183). There is, consequently, no need for delicate strategies of compromise and confrontation, since all that is necessary is to take a purely rejectionist stance against co-habiting with the devil and his minions.

Hamas's religious definition of antagonism in terms of 'pollution' of God's land extends the battlefield beyond direct confrontation with the forces of the Israeli state to encompass issues of Palestinian deportment and moral rectitude. In this struggle to purify the land of 'evil', Jews and Western powers are only one manifestation of the enemy; secular and 'Westernized' Palestinians are another. Hamas's redefinition of the field of political struggle as a domain for the extirpation of 'corrupt morals' allows Hamas activists to feel fully engaged politically while taking on enemies who are far less dangerous than armed Israeli soldiers. Hammami writes that

> those who joined [Hamas] were attracted by the possibility of participating in a political community that claims to confront the occupation without (until very recently) exposing its members to danger. ... Politically unaffiliated *shabab* [youth] who felt left out found harassing these [unveiled] women a safe way to express nationalist sentiment (Hammami 1990: 25, 26).

Thus Hamas, in the face of a national enemy which shows little sign of having weakened after six bloody years of intifada, has rearticulated the confrontation

and its appropriate strategies by contending that the reason Palestinian Muslims have not been able to wrest Palestine from the hands of the infidels is that it has allowed itself to be weakened by internal pollutants. The first stage of struggle thus becomes the moral purification of the 'inside', and only after that goal has been achieved can the 'outside' be confronted successfully.

Hamas's redefinition of the struggle is as well a redefinition of the imagined community engaged in that struggle. This shift in the field of identity causes Christian Palestinians to query what sort of role they might play in a Palestinian entity in which a movement which defines 'Palestinian' as synonymous with 'Islamic' has substantial influence. Christian Palestinians, whose religion can in that discourse be seen as a betrayal of their national identity, can take little comfort from *The Covenant of the Islamic Resistance Movement* which cites a Hadith (written tradition alleging a statement or action of Mohammed) to assert that

> The people of [Greater] Syria are Allah's lash in His hand. He wreaks His vengeance through them against whomsoever He wishes among His slaves. It is unthinkable that those who are double-faced among them should prosper over the faithful. They will certainly die out of grief and desperation (Hamas 1988: 12).

A recent survey showed that 34.9 per cent. of Christian Palestinians in Jerusalem and the West Bank intended to emigrate in the near future (Kreutz 1992: 271) and, although most gave lack of job opportunities and a dearth of housing as their primary reasons for leaving, growing anxiety about the increasing influence of Hamas was voiced.

Tamari argues that a central weakness of the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Arab Nationalist movements in Greater Syria (the area which is now Lebanon, Syria and Israel and the Occupied Territories) was their failure to develop a popular culture in which images of secular identity could be celebrated (Tamari 1992). In the absence of such a domain for the recognition of trans-sectarian identities, the identities emphasized in periods of political struggle can only be those that arise from realms of personal and familial life and these, in a context such as that of the Middle East where religious confession plays such a central role, are almost exclusively sectarian. Antagonists, at such times, need only to exploit the differences between confessional groups in order to fragment and disperse the forces they oppose.[27] One of the most telling strengths of Israel, a national community constituted out of a wide diversity of potentially conflicting communities (Paine 1989), has been its state's success in programmatically constructing precisely such a domain of popular national identity (Handelman 1990: 160-233) which, by overarching and subsuming the multiple sectarian identities of its Jewish population, holds the nation together in times of stress.

I have argued that the shrine of Bîr el-Saiyideh must be seen as a manifestation of a similar programme, elaborated by a mixed Palestinian community, of creating public spaces in which residents of Beit Sahur can recognize and celebrate a binding image of a trans-communal identity. I have focused on the shrine in part because it is one of many salient manifestations of Beit Sahur's 'national' programme. More central, however, is the fact that a contemporary inquiry into the social significance of holy places connects with the work of Durkheim (1915), Halbwachs (1980) and Hertz (1983), work which elucidated the dialectical process through which social groups reify their sensed community in monuments and markers on the landscape they occupy, and in turn recognize the spirit and

power of that community when looking upon those edifices. In contrasting the interpretations imposed by Palestinian communities on Mar Elyas and Bîr el-Saiyideh, I have shown how the multivocality of a holy place in the interpretations of the diverse communities which approach it can become 'fixed' in periods of intense social conflict by the recognition of the members of those various communities of an external antagonism which endangers the survival of all of them. At such times, a shrine like that of Bîr el-Saiyideh not only reifies the new sense of community constituted through antagonism but also stands as a sign of the power of that new 'national' identity to impose its vision of community on the social and political landscape.

NOTES

This article is a revised version of a paper presented on a panel entitled 'The Politics of the Holy Places: Israel/Palestine' at the British Society for Middle Eastern Studies Annual Conference, University of St. Andrews, 8-10 July 1992, and printed in a limited distribution of the conference proceedings. Research was funded by grants from the Palestine Exploration Fund, the Lady Davis Foundation, the Deya Mediterranean Area Research Centre, Oxford University and the University of Kent at Canterbury. The Sociology and Social Anthropology Department of Hebrew University generously provided office space and library access during the first stages of my research. I am also indebted to Elizabeth Cowie and to the two anonymous reviewers appointed by *Man* for their comments on earlier versions of the text.

[1] Louis Dumont, in an important article setting out the genealogies of nationalism and communalism, defines the latter as 'that ideology which emphasizes as the social, political, and economic unit the group of adherents of each religion, and emphasizes the distinction, even the antagonism, between such groups' (Dumont 1970: 89).

[2] The 'Islamic Resistance Movement' or Hamas (the acronym of its Arabic title, *Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*) was known, from the late seventies until the opening months of the intifada, as the 'Muslim Brothers of Palestine' (an offshoot of the Egyptian 'Society of the Muslim Brothers'). During this period it engaged in political and educational work around mosques, schools and universities designed to educate youth in their moral responsibility as Muslims and to draw them away from the secular influence of the Palestinian nationalist parties. Through the 1980s, student members of the Islamic Resistance Movement attacked secular nationalist demonstrations on West Bank and Gaza Strip campuses. In 1988, as popular support for the nationalist uprising became irrefutable, the organization changed its name to Hamas and entered into open struggle with the Palestine Liberation Organization for leadership of the intifada. Its 'nationalism' is, however, actually 'communalism': Lisa Taraki, summarizing the 'Charter of the Islamic Resistance Movement', writes that Hamas sees 'the land of Palestine [a]s an Islamic trust (*waqf*), to be held as such for generations of Muslims until the Day of Judgement. No one has the authority to give up any part of Palestine. Nationalism is a function of religious belief, and the defense of Muslim land is the duty of every Muslim' (Taraki 1989: 31). The strategy which devolves from this religious interpretation of 'nationalism' is one of steadfast allegiance to perceived divine will rather than one of compromise and debate. In its assumption that Palestine is a divine trust granted to the Muslims in perpetuity, the membership of Hamas has much in common with Israeli settlers from fundamentalist movements such as Gush Emunim who say the same about the link of the land of Israel, God and the Jews (Taraki 1989: 31; Lustick 1988). Hamas, like the settlers, has steadfastly opposed the U.S. sponsored peace negotiations, and its attacks on Israeli soldiers and Israeli secret police operatives in December 1992, which resulted in the expulsion to Lebanon of 415 of its alleged supporters, were meant to stall the negotiations.

[3] '[I] in the case of antagonism ... the presence of the "Other" prevents me from being totally myself. ... (it is because a peasant *cannot be* a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner who is expelling him from his land). Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself' (Laclau & Mouffe 1985: 125).

[4] Although the saint's day in the Greek calendar is nominally on one day (25 August), it stretches over two days because of the saint-specific vespers of the preceding day and the saint-specific liturgy of the saint's day itself. The popular ceremonies, with some variations which will be described below, cover these two days. This description is based on my observations on 24 and 25 August 1984.

[5] The Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre, the ruling body of the Greek Orthodox Church in Israel and the Israeli Occupied Territories, is made up of Greek and Cypriot monks, and resides in the Patriarchate of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem. It has full control over the activities of the church in the region (as well as in Sinai and Jordan) which include not only liturgical and pastoral activities but also maintenance of considerable properties.

[6] There is no sign in the Bible, Old Testament or New, of Elyas (the Prophet Elijah) having been enchained. The use of 'Elyas' for 'Elijah' is interesting as a moment in the diacritical process whereby Christians mark themselves off as other than Jews; 'Elyas' is the New Testament form of 'Elijah' and is used by both priests and lay-persons to refer to biblical events prior to the period rendered by the New Testament.

[7] A Syrian Orthodox girl, who walked from Bethlehem to Mar Elyas (about 5 miles) with two co-religionists and a Muslim, told me that she had asked a favour of the saint and had promised to walk from Bethlehem to Mar Elyas and back in return. I asked: 'you have walked here to ask a favour of God?' and she rapidly and firmly corrected me, saying 'No, of St Elyas'. Canaan, discussing Palestinian Muslims, confirms this: 'According to Palestinian Arabic belief God is the Almighty One. ... But the saints are preferred. They are easier of access and stand nearer to men – as they all were once human beings. At the same time they know human needs, ailments and weaknesses very well. Therefore the belief in them and the fear of them has spread so widely among the Palestinians that gradually they have taken the place of God' (Canaan 1927: 132).

[8] One of the consequences of the pre-revolutionary Russian Orthodox church's attempts to extend its influence in Ottoman Palestine was that it systematically fomented dissatisfaction within Greek Orthodox Palestinian communities with the Greek church's failure to provide Palestinian congregations as well as with representation in the church, education and other forms of pastoral and social service (Hopwood 1969). Increased awareness of discrimination led to the lay creation of the Arab Orthodox Movement, an organization dedicated to wresting control of the church and its substantial properties from what it defined as a 'foreign' priesthood. After the Russian church's intervention was abruptly ended by the revolution, the Movement was strongly supported by the British mandate government (Bertram & Young 1926) and, after British withdrawal in 1948, by the Jordanian government which then appropriated the West Bank and Jerusalem. After the Israeli government took control of the West Bank in 1967, the Israeli state came to work closely with the Greek church (Nachmani 1987) in an attempt to subvert the Greek government's opposition to the Israeli occupation. As a result, the Movement became in large part quiescent since the church-state alliance made it evident to many Arab Orthodox activists that any gains that might be made by the Christian Palestinians would only be made after the Israeli occupation was ended (interview with Arab Orthodox Movement member, Bethlehem, March 1987). Nonetheless, one of the outstanding legacies of the Movement is the awareness among Christian Palestinians that the interests of the hierarchy of the Orthodox church are foreign and antagonistic to their own.

[9] Official Patriarchate policy is that one must be a Greek or Cypriot national in order to be a member of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre. Christian Palestinian men are allowed to become priests in the church but are forced to marry as a condition of being made priests. As a result, they cannot subsequently become monks and are therefore excluded from joining the powerful Brotherhood. This policy was overturned by the British during the mandate period and as a consequence two Palestinians had joined the Brotherhood. These had since died of old age, and Israeli support of the church had ensured that the old exclusionary policy had been reinstated and that no new Palestinians had entered the Brotherhood to replace them.

[10] The status quo agreements, finalized by an Ottoman *firman* in 1852, legislate over the conflicting claims of the various churches to rights and privileges within the holy places. The *firman*, adopted in turn by the British, the Jordanians and the Israelis, establishes the reigning government as perpetuator of the status quo fixed in 1852, and withdrawal by the government from its role could lead to an open-ended struggle between the churches over which would control the shrines.

[11] Salim Tamari points out that the Palestinian left, which dominated political activism along the Ramallah-Jerusalem-Bethlehem axis, maintained until the early 1990s 'a venerable tradition of divorcing the political from the cultural and social spheres in the agendas of socialist parties' (1992: 17-18). While on the one hand this meant that the left in large part failed to address issues of women's rights and the personal status code forbidding civil marriage, it meant on the other hand that its programme could encourage activists to define the domain of public expressions of identity such as festivals in purely political (i.e. national) terms. Whether or not this was actually the case, what is significant is that it was defined as such in Halweh's discourse.

[12] The term 'floating signifier', drawn from Lévi-Strauss' *Introduction to the work of Marcel Mauss* (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 63), is proposed by Jacques Derrida as an alternative to the classical idea of an essence which is held to stand at the centre of any discursive structure and which constitutes and determines the signification enabled by that structure. Derrida provides several examples of such 'transcendental signifiers' from the history of Western metaphysics such as '*eidos, archè, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *aletheia*, transcendentality, consciousness or conscience, God, man, and so forth' (Derrida 1972: 249). Derrida contends that Saussure's insight that all signs take on signification through opposition to other signs in a diacritical system invalidates the idea of such extra-linguistic essences standing outside of semantic structures and giving rise to those structures. The constitution of all meaning within language undermines all assertions of referentiality; things 'outside' language only come to have significance in language. Since there is no meaning outside of language which language elaborates and describes, all definitions of a field of discourse are effectively 'unfixed' and 'up for grabs': '[t]he absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely' (Derrida 1978: 280). By extension, we can understand that 'objects' of/in discourse, such as the festivities at Mar Elyas, are constituted in the way people talk about them and through the meanings they attribute to them. Unless the process of interpretation is stabilized or hegemonized by an uncontestable act of power, the 'object' itself 'floats', taking on a number of meanings from the ways it is read by the people who engage it.

[13] Systematic research on Beit Sahur took place in January 1990, while Beit Sahur was under siege by the Israeli Defense Force, and was funded by the Middle East Research Information Project. Some of this material has already appeared in Bowman 1990: 50-3.

[14] In 1987 Michel Sabbah, a Palestinian from Nazareth, was appointed as Latin Patriarch because, lay persons and priests said, the Catholic church had decided in the face of growing antipathy to the church by Catholic Palestinians to make a significant concession to local Christians. On the outbreak of the intifada Sabbah announced that he was cancelling the Christmas Eve procession in Manger Square and restricting the ceremony to the midnight mass, out of sympathy with the Palestinian people. In response, Israeli officials warned that if the procession was not held as usual 'it might result in the erosion of some of the rights of the Roman Catholics in the Holy Land' (*Jerusalem Post* 24 December 1987). *Al-Tali'a*, a Palestinian weekly, reported in the same week that Shimon Peres had contacted the Vatican and threatened that the Israeli government would stop carrying out its obligations as the ruling authority in the holy land in maintaining the status quo agreement. In consequence, Sabbah withdrew his threat. At present the Christmas Eve procession is formally carried out, but scouts and local people do not attend.

[15] Between 1983 and 1987 I maintained contact with the 'Pan-Palestinian Scout Movement' which, in that period, expanded considerably. In March 1987 it was working in close collusion with Mubarak Awad's 'Centre for Non-Violence' in organizing a West Bank boycott of Israeli goods (a forerunner of intifada strategies of non-co-operation and resistance). In January 1990 I asked about the scouts and was told by a young man taking me around Beit Sahur that 'the scouts have closed up their buildings. ... They made the connexions, and will open again when they are needed'.

[16] Pena estimates that Beit Sahur in 1984 had a population of 8,900 of which 7,400 were Christian (6,000 Greek Orthodox, 670 Latin Catholics, 500 Greek Catholics, 200 Lutherans and 30 Syrian Orthodox).

[17] The protected status enjoyed by Hamas was reversed in May 1988 when the government outlawed the organization after Hamas activists claimed responsibility for the kidnapping and execution of two Israeli soldiers. The high media profile that Israel had granted the movement in presenting it as a rival to the United Leadership of the Uprising, along with the immunity to prosecution its activists had enjoyed prior to its banning, meant that the Israelis had no trouble

pinpointing its leadership when the arrests began; in the last two weeks of May 1988 more than 250 Hamas organizers were jailed.

[18] There appears to be a close correlation between properties maintained for the delectation of pilgrims and lack of interest in the local peoples. The Greek Catholic and Anglican churches have few holy land monuments to maintain for foreign visitors and have strongly supported their Palestinian congregations under the Bishoprics of Lutfi Lahan (Lebanese) and Samir Kafity (Syrian). The Lutheran Church, which divides its powers in the holy land between three delegations (German, American and Palestinian), supports Christian Palestinians unless such support interferes with the privileges of its foreign members. In 1985 the Lutherans shut down the 'Austro-Hungarian Hospice', which had served since 1948 as the only hospital in Jerusalem's old city, in order to refit it as a hotel for well-off Lutheran pilgrims.

[19] It is important to stress here that, as a foreign anthropologist engaged in research during conditions of what is in effect a national liberation struggle, I created a particular context for the persons I interviewed. People were keen to present an impression of unity to someone who, they rightly assumed, would be presenting Beit Sahur to the world outside. I suspect that an extended stay in the town, such as that upon which I am about to embark, would reveal moments of disharmony and conflict which might show that the nationalist project in Beit Sahur is precisely a project and not a fully realized and sutured new identity.

[20] Yehoshua Porath, who wrote a meticulous study of Palestinian mobilization leading up to the 1936 Revolt (Porath 1977), was quoted in the *Jerusalem Post* of 12 March 1988 as saying of the intifada that 'this is the first time that there has been a popular action, covering all social strata and groups'.

[21] The closest thing I saw to this at Mar Elyas occurred on 24 August 1984 when Israeli police began to break up the market in children's toys which had formed along the edge of the road, claiming that the dealers were not properly licensed. Only at this moment did persons in the crowd speak of themselves as Palestinians and of their traditional practices, then threatened by the incursion of representatives of the Israeli state, as manifestations of a Palestinian national identity. When the police withdrew, the formulation of identity in 'Palestinian' terms ceased.

[22] Among the Christian exceptions were some Armenians – both Orthodox and Uniate – who saw themselves as Armenian nationals rather than as Armenian Palestinians, and Protestants of fundamentalist and millenarian groups which defined the future in chiliastic rather than nationalist terms. Fundamentalist Muslims were also, as Lustick asserts, unlikely to wish to pollute their God-given identities at a time when all hope was resting on divine intervention (Lustick 1992: 431). Furthermore, various people who were still substantially patronized by the religious institutions were not likely to see their interests served by violating the terms of that support.

[23] The Holy Fire ceremony is a Greek Orthodox ritual which has been recorded as occurring as early as 870 AD (Peters 1985: 261-7). It takes place in the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem at approximately 1 p.m. on Holy Saturday and is alleged to signal the passage of Christ from hell to heaven. It stands, for Christians, as a sign that Christ's resurrection is promised on the following day. Interviews with attending Muslims revealed that it was also interpreted, by them and by participating Christian Palestinian youths, as an opportunity for Jerusalem Palestinians to welcome their foreign guests to their city. Massive crowds of local Christians and foreign pilgrims collect for the ceremony with occasionally disastrous consequences as Arthur Stanley recorded for 1834 (Stanley 1889: 464-9; see also Williams 1849: 533-5; Canetti 1973: 185-93) .

[24] Icons, which present well-established representations of religious phenomena in traditionally fixed forms and styles, are signs of Orthodox forms of devotion. Paintings tend to be freer and more realist in their desire to inspire a mental 're-enactment' of the scene portrayed, and are most often Latin and, in this area, Franciscan devotional artefacts (Bowman 1991).

[25] I would argue that the threat of disintegration to Israeli unity which Paine saliently points out in his study of Jewish identity in a national state (Paine 1989) is held at bay by a general consensus among Israeli Jews that an enemy (the Palestinian entity) exists 'outside' the fissile national community which is far more threatening than any other community within the nation.

[26] Rema Hammami writes that Hamas 'endowed the *hijab* with new meanings of piety and political affiliation. Women affiliated with the movement started to wear long, plain, tailored overcoats, known as *shari'a* [Islamic law] dress, which have no real precedents in indigenous Palestinian dress. Supposed to represent a return to a more authentic Islamic tradition, it is in fact an 'invented tradition' in both form and meaning. Here the *hijab* is fundamentally an instrument

of oppression, a direct disciplining of women's bodies for political ends' (Hammami 1990: 25). She notes the failure of a belated attempt by the United National Leadership of the Uprising to halt attacks on women for not wearing *hijab* and comments that 'since February 1990 the "*hijab* campaign" has been renewed with even greater force than before. Now that the imposition of the headscarf has been accomplished, a new goal seems to have been set: the imposition of the *jilbaab* (full length dress or coat)' (Hammami 1990: 28).

[27] Porath points out that the British were able to sow discord between the various Palestinian groups (rural and urban, Christian, Druze and Muslim, radicals and moderates, Husseini and Nashashibi) fighting against them in the Arab Revolt by emphasizing the antagonism of other factions to the particular interests of each (Porath 1977: 249; see also Johnson 1982).

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Nationaliser le sacre : lieux de pèlerinage et identités changeantes dans les territoires occupés par Israël

Résumé

Cet article se propose d'examiner la façon dont les identités sociales subissent des transformations au cours des conflits nationalistes. Basé sur l'étude de deux lieux de pèlerinage situés dans les territoires occupés de la Rive Gauche, l'article passe en revue les interprétations offertes par les palestiniens musulmans et chrétiens, ainsi que leurs pratiques rituelles. Le premier site sacré, étudié au début des années quatre-vingt, reflète par sa multi-vocalité sémantique la diversité d'intérêts des différentes communautés qui viennent y prier. La signification du second site, étudié lors du soulèvement palestinien, semble beaucoup plus fixe. On analyse cette univalence de surface comme l'expression d'une nouvelle forme d'identité sociale, forgée dans la lutte contre l'occupant israélite. On oppose la nouvelle identité séculaire et rationaliste aux formes alternatives de communauté fondées sur des affiliations sectaires. On démontre ainsi que dans les situations de conflits sociaux intenses opposant une communauté multi-sectaire à un ennemi 'étranger', la perception de l'antagonisme de l'Autre peut engendrer des formes nouvelles de communauté imaginaire qui englobent les différences collectives sans pour autant les effacer. L'émergence d'une 'identité nationale' entraîne la double transformation des traditions locales chrétiennes et musulmanes avec, d'une part, le développement d'affiliations sectaires, et, d'autre part, la formation d'une unité nationale totalisatrice.

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