Dilemmas of Attachment

Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia (S.E.P.S.M.E.A.)

(FOUNDING EDITOR: C. A. O. VAN NIEUWENHUIJZE)

VOLUME 112

The titles published in this series are listed at *brill.com/seps*

Dilemmas of Attachment

Identity and Belonging among Palestinian Christians

By

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ISSN 1385-3376
ISBN 978-90-04-27146-3 (paperback)
ISBN 978-90-04-27639-0 (e-book)

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

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Acknowledgements

In 2006, I received funding from the Norwegian Research Council to pursue a research project focusing on emigration among Palestinian Christians on the West Bank. My Project was part of 'Global Moments in the Levant' – a multi-disciplinary research project that included anthropologists, archeologists and historians from Norway, the US and from Palestine. Leif Manger at the University of Bergen led the project and provided critical guidance and advice at every stage of my research. Nefissa Naguib at the University of Bergen served as a vital source of critical feedback and moral support during my research, and while further developing this script. For this I am forever grateful.

Janne Bøe, Lars Lundblad, Kjersti Berg, Are Knudsen, Randi Håland, Nils Arnfinset, Anders Bjørkelo, Kamal Abdulfattah, Bert Devries, Øistein Labianca and the rest of my colleagues at Global Moments in the Levant offered constructive comments and served to make my research period far more enjoyable than it could have been. Berit Angelskår worked as an Ecumenical Accompanier in Bethlehem while I conducted my fieldwork and, later, as a PhD student at my Department in Bergen. Our numerous discussions over several years have sharpened my own reflections in the sometimes chaotic realities of Bethlehem and the West Bank. Between 2008 and 2010, I attended a series of workshops that resulted in an anthology of Religious Minorities in the Middle East. I would like to thank the editors Anh Nga Longva and Anne Sofie Roald as well as fellow contributors Annika Rabo, Elisabeth Picard and Eliz Sanasarian for inspiration and help in developing arguments that have since become central to this book.

Seteney Shami at the Social Science Research Council and Paul Silverstein at Reed College provided critical comments on an earlier version of this manuscript that served as a basis for important revisions.

Loren Lybarger at Ohio University, along with two anonymous reviewers, offered thorough and constructive comments that enabled me to vastly improve my manuscript.

While working through these comments, my current employer, The Department of Culture Studies and Oriental Languages at the University of Oslo, has provided me with the time and space I needed to complete this book. While hugely indebted to all my colleagues, the flaws and shortcomings of this book are entirely my own.

I need to express my profound gratitude to all my friends in Beit Sahour, Bethlehem and Beit Jala for their warm hospitality and friendships during my stays in Palestine. In particular I want to thank the Ghareebs, who served as my

host family during several fieldwork periods, and who made Beit Sahour feel like a second home to me.

I want to thank Adnan Musallam, Hanna Musleh and Romell Soudah at Bethlehem University, as well as numerous church representatives and civil society activists, for sharing their time with me and indulging me with my questions on Bethlehem history, emigration, economy, family relations, and the nuances of local politics. Your patience and openness has been of great help in my efforts to learn about the experiences of your communities, how they have been shaped by historical developments, and the different ways in which you experience your own situation today, and the challenges that lie ahead.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife Ida for her patience and support, and my daughter Embla for lighting up my days and for sleeping well at night, allowing me to finalize this script in the late hours of the day. It is my hope that, in a few years, when my darkest fears for the area have been put to shame, I will be able to introduce my daughter to the Bethlehem that I know.

Preface

When I die, my family name will no longer exist in Bethlehem

George, who works as a teacher at a Christian school in Beit Jala, pauses for a while. His story is not unique. He is one of the last remaining members of a family with deep roots in Bethlehem. His three brothers and his two sons have all settled in the US. The rest of his wider family is based primarily in Chile, and none of them are coming back. George knows that his family is not the first to disappear from Bethlehem. He also knows that it will not be the last.

Palestinian Christians include some of the oldest Christian communities in the world, and their presence in Palestine dates back to early Christianity.[1] In modern times, they have been instrumental in shaping a Palestinian national identity, and they have enjoyed a political and cultural influence in Palestinian society that far exceeds their numbers. However, due to more than a hundred years of large-scale emigration, their presence in Palestine has diminished, and they now make up less than two percent of the population in the West Bank and Gaza. Almost half of these live in the District of Bethlehem: a traditional stronghold of Palestinian Christianity.

This book is based on 11 months of fieldwork among the Christian communities of the Bethlehem District, in the towns of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala, over a period of two and a half years. Often referred to as 'the Christian Triangle', these towns have been shaped by the presence of a significant Christian minority, and a history of extensive contact with the Western world. My own decision to conduct a study of the Christians communities of Bethlehem grew out of a long-lasting involvement with Palestine. For my Master's degree, I studied Palestinian return migration from the US to rural communities in the area around Ramallah and Al-Bireh. As a part of this study, I conducted fieldwork in Ramallah and in two small towns near Ramallah between January and August 2000. During this period, which was characterized by disillusion with the peace talks among the Palestinians and the gradual build-up to the Second Intifada, a few general observations stayed with me. One was the extent to which Palestinian lives were constrained by the structural, bureaucratic aspects of the Israeli occupation rather than by the military measures that created headlines back in Norway. Living on the West Bank, I saw Palestinians facing various forms of domination that were never

1 Here, I refer to the areas covered by the British Mandate of Palestine, roughly comprising today's Israel, Gaza and the West Bank.

captured in dramatic TV images, and that were difficult to communicate to friends and family at home.

Another observation was that of an indigenous Christian community with a long and rich history in Palestine. Living in Ramallah, I got to know quite a few local Christians, some of them from families that claimed a 700-year presence in Ramallah, and some whose families had arrived as refugees in 1948. Whatever their family background, they stood out as highly resourceful, well-educated and politically-engaged individuals. I soon learned that local Christians had a strong voice in Palestinian society and public discourse, but also that they were few in number, and becoming fewer by the year.

These observations left me with a great curiosity about the Palestinian Christians, and about their history in the area and their relationships with other groups within the Palestinian community. In particular I was curious about how local Christians were affected by, and had adjusted to, socio-political developments in Palestine that included a weakening of secular ideologies and a strengthening of Islam as a source of social identity and political mobilization. A few years later, my involvement with Palestine, and my interest with its Christian communities evolved into a research project. After reading the literature on the subject, I decided to focus my study on the Bethlehem area, due to its position as a Christian stronghold in the Palestinian Territories. In the following section, I will briefly introduce the District of Bethlehem as a site of fieldwork, identify some of the social divisions that characterize this area, and touch upon some of the central challenges that will be addressed in greater detail throughout the book.

Doing Fieldwork in Bethlehem

I went to Bethlehem in May 2006 for my first three months of fieldwork in the area. Before that, I had visited Bethlehem only once during the summer of 2000. Prior to my arrival I had arranged for accommodation with a family in Beit Sahour through a local NGO. I had read books and articles about the area, and had heard how Bethlehem had been changed through internal migration, and the gradual growth of Islamist movements, into a much more socially conservative community in the course of only a few decades. Having seen with my own eyes how the far more liberal and cosmopolitan city of Ramallah had changed even since 2000, I had prepared myself for a community characterized by conservative norms and dress-codes, much like the rural communities around Ramallah that had been the focus of my earlier studies. I arrived in Bethlehem on a Saturday evening and was welcomed by my local host family,

and by a young American who also rented a flat from them. He had some local friends, and on my first night in Bethlehem, they invited us along for drinks at a café in Bethlehem. After a few drinks at a café called Bonjour, they invited us to Cosmos, a night-club in Beit Jala, near Bethlehem.

Nothing I had heard or read about Bethlehem had prepared me for this visit. Cosmos seemed like a scene taken out the eighties' TV-series *Miami Vice*: there was a large dance-floor lit up by the lights from a rotating disco-ball, a DJ playing everything from last summer's international hits to seventies' disco-classics and the latest Arabic pop music. In the neon-lit bar, the bartenders were selling imported beers, liquors and a wide selection of cocktails, and there was a seating area encircling the dance floor with tables and couches that could seat up to 300 guests. There was an even mix of young boys and girls at the night club, largely due to a policy of accepting young men only in the company of women, in order to avoid a large surplus of single men at the bar. The men were mostly dressed in jeans and dark long-sleeved shirts, unbuttoned in the front to reveal a shiny necklace. Some of the girls wore jeans topped by brief blouses, and some wore short dresses or skirts to just below their knees. The girls were all smartly made up, and spent the evening dancing with each other and with their male friends, with the confidence of Arab pop divas.

For a newcomer to the area, the conservative norms of the community and traditional ideals of female modesty appeared to be suspended all together. To some extent, Cosmos acts as a free zone, where guests are banned from taking photos, and where people of a conservative orientation are less likely to show up. At the same time, there is a code to the kind of conduct regarded as appropriate inside the club. People may not take pictures, but they do gossip. Local girls from Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala know where to draw the line to protect their own reputation. They may dance closely with their male friends but refrain from touching each other while on the dance floor. International visitors, however, may not recognize the nuances of what is regarded as acceptable behavior. As we were finding a table at the night club, a foreign couple on the dance floor was approached by the DJ, who firmly told them to 'cool things down'. On that first night, we enjoyed ourselves with our local friends until the club closed at 4.30 in the morning.

The next day I spent most of my time with my landlord, Jiries, and his family, who showed me around their hometown.[2] Beit Sahour lies about two kilometers downhill from the Old City of Bethlehem. The old city of Beit Sahour,

2 The families and individuals throughout this book have all been given fictional names, to protect their anonymity. In some cases, relevant, but non-essential facts have been left out, or generalized for the same purpose.

which is still a central district of the town, is made up of small limestone houses built close together, usually forming a circle or a crescent around a semi-enclosed courtyard. Traditionally, the houses built around a courtyard would belong to members of the same family. Nowadays, most of these houses have been abandoned by their original owners who have settled elsewhere within the town, and have sold or rented these houses to other families. The everyday pace of this small town contrasted sharply with my images of Cosmos the night before. Outside local shops and small coffee-shops small groups of young men would be hanging around and chatting, while older men played backgammon. In contrast, there were few women in the streets. Those who were out would be buying food for their families, or on the way to visit family and friends, but they would not loiter outside their houses or in the streets without a purpose, and they would take care to wear 'appropriate' clothes that were not too revealing. Younger people would confirm to me later that Cosmos is a place where they can 'let off steam' and find some temporary relief from the restrictions of their local community. Some local girls would emphasize that this was particularly urgent among young Christians. As one girl from Bethlehem explained it:

> This is the kind of double life that you have to live here as a Christian Arab; dressing like this (pointing to her clothes) in your everyday life, and being a totally different person when you go out.

In the evening, during my first dinner with my host family, I told them that I wanted to do a study of emigration among Palestinian Christians, and that I wanted to focus on the Bethlehem area. The family was very supportive. To Jiries, the issue of emigration was one that had shaped his family history and still defined the everyday realities of his family. In the course of the past 20 years, Jiries has seen too many of his friends and family leave the country to settle down elsewhere, and he was worried about what the future had in store for his four daughters; whether they would be able to build good lives for themselves on the West Bank or would end up in other parts of the world. Through Jiries, I got in touch with other members of his extended family. Once a sizeable family in Beit Sahour, they had declined in numbers after a century of emigration. In 2006, the family had around 120 members in Beit Sahour, and at least twice that number living in Santiago de Chile, where the first emigrants had settled down at the end of the Ottoman period. Later emigrants from his family traveled to other destinations and today, members of the family live all over North and South America, and in Germany, France and Sweden.

Jiries also taught me a lot about the family structure of Beit Sahour, the dominant family clans, the main churches of the village, and about Christian – Muslim relations in Beit Sahour. Through him, I also got a glimpse of the role of the family in resolving local conflicts and dealing with communal problems within the village. Other members of his family would turn to Jiries for counseling on family problems or conflicts with members of other families. His recollection of some of these cases gave me an idea of the role of the family and the extent of family intervention in the lives of its individual members.

The Different Worlds of Bethlehem

For the first two months of my fieldwork, I followed a program organized by the local NGO that had organized my accommodation. I attended a course in spoken Arabic at a Lutheran College in Bethlehem, and volunteered as an English tutor for a student organization that gathered students from Bethlehem University and Al-Quds Open University, which had a branch in Beit Sahour. The Bethlehem area consists of different communities that make up separate social universes, with only a limited degree of interaction among them. Living with a Christian family in Beit Sahour, I soon found myself circulating within a world of mainly well-educated, middle-class Palestinians. Working as an English tutor at the Student Forum gave me some insights into another part of the Bethlehem community, consisting mainly of Muslim students from Bethlehem itself, and from the refugee camps and villages around Bethlehem.

At the Student Forum I met resourceful students who had finished as many as four years of business studies but were still unable to put together a complete sentence in English, an increasingly important skill in the Palestinian labor market. This drew my attention to the importance of the church-run private schools that provide quality education to most Christian children in the Bethlehem area; an education that provided local students with a solid mastery of English and other European languages. Due to high tuition fees, most Muslim families cannot afford to send their children to these private schools. Instead, they have to settle for the over-crowded, understaffed and underfunded public schools run by the Palestinian Authority. Since 2000, many Christian families have been unable to pay for their children's education at the private schools but, thanks to personal connections with the churches and with school staff, they find ways of keeping their children in school. Greater access to Christian private schools is one aspect of the socio-economic divide between Christians and Muslims of the Bethlehem area.

Listening to these students from the nearby camps and villages, I was introduced to a world very different from that of middle-class Christians in Beit Sahour and Beit Jala.

Many of these students had grown up in families with 6–10 children, families that in some periods had relied on a single breadwinner. Whether they came from the villages, from families that still depended on agriculture or from the refugee camps, their parents usually had little formal education. In these communities, most girls would get married at the age of 17 to 21 and, thereafter, stay at home, taking care of their children rather than finding employment outside their homes. Most of these students seemed content to follow similar trajectories for themselves. Many female students hoped to get married shortly after completing their studies, and only a few of them expressed any hope of pursuing a professional career. The young men who had studied business and administration or engineering hoped to get jobs with local companies. If this proved too difficult, some of them wished to seek work in Jordan, Dubai or Saudi Arabia, where they had close family members. Many of these students expressed a strong desire to emigrate, with the above-mentioned countries as their preferred destination. These students would explain their preference for these countries because of their cultural and geographic proximity to Palestine, but also because, in their experience, these countries appeared to be more reachable destinations than the US or any country in Europe.

These students expressed many of the same frustrations and concerns as their Christian peers in the area. Nonetheless, their personal freedoms seemed more restricted by family authorities, their economic hardships more severe and their personal aspirations more constrained by structural limitations than was the case among young Christians in Beit Sahour and Beit Jala. These differences were particularly pronounced with regard to the issue of emigration. Young people in Beit Sahour, like their Muslim peers in the nearby camps and villages, had a bleak vision of their future in Bethlehem, in an area ridden with high unemployment, a stalled economy, and little in the way of economic opportunities. However, their personal aspirations were shaped by the prospects of emigration as a possible option. Young Sahouris usually have close relatives who have left Palestine and settled in North America or in Europe. They have heard about their achievements in the diaspora, and they know that they have family networks in a number of countries that can help them out if they wish to join them. This makes emigration to wealthier Western countries a real possibility for these young people.

Throughout the summer and autumn of 2006, I built up my network of contacts in the Bethlehem area. I met and interviewed individuals and families in Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala, families that had interesting stories to

tell about emigration, and I also interviewed priests at the main churches in the three towns, representatives of local NGOs, headmasters and teachers at some of the church-run private schools of the area, and people working within local media centers. By collecting family histories of emigration, I hoped to be able to identify some patterns in the dynamics of emigration, such as where people traveled to, how they got there, and the role played by family members in facilitating emigration. By talking to people of various backgrounds who were active within different sectors of the community, I wished to explore the extent to which people's discourses vary with locality and social status. The local communities of Beit Sahour, Bethlehem and Beit Jala all have their own histories of emigration, distinct demographic profiles and their own social structures that define relationships between different family clans and social classes and across sectarian divides. In addition, individual opportunities, both on the West Bank and abroad, are shaped by one's socio-economic standing. Locality and socio-economic standing play a major role in shaping people's outlook on emigration as an economic strategy, as well as their opportunities at hand on the West Bank. I aimed to capture this diversity by interviewing and gathering stories from people of different backgrounds.

My limited command of the Arabic language allowed me to exchange everyday pleasantries, engage in simple conversations and usually pick up the main thread of conversations that were held in my presence. However, I was not capable of conducting open-ended interviews in Arabic. Fortunately, Bethlehem Christians usually display a solid command of the English language and, in particular, those below the age of 40 spoke English with great fluency. This allowed me to conduct most of my interviews in English. However, I also conducted a few interviews with individuals who spoke only Arabic, using a local friend as an interpreter. Still, my language limitations gave me an access-bias, affecting whom I could talk to, and how I could talk to them. When talking to older people, and people who had attended public school rather than one of the Christian schools in the Bethlehem-region, I would often need an intermediary for our conversation to move beyond everyday small-talk. I made an effort to counteract these limitations by getting to know a wide range of people who were not conveniently bi-lingual, to record their stories, and to learn about their everyday concerns and thoughts about their own future in the region. Even when my informants spoke flawless English, this no doubt added a layer of 'impression management' in relation to an inquisitive foreigner, at least during the early stages of my fieldwork. With time, however, as I got to know a few people on a more personal level, they would let their guard down and speak candidly about issues that I would not have got to hear about when I first came to know them. Throughout this book, I present a few excerpts from

interviews and quotations from locals in Bethlehem. Unless otherwise stated, these were expressed in English.

As a part of this study, I spent eleven months undertaking fieldwork in Bethlehem, over a period of almost three years. My first and longest fieldwork period lasted from June until December 2006, interrupted only by a short trip out of the Palestinian Territories to renew my visitors permit. After six months at home, I spent another three months in Bethlehem between May and August 2007, one month in October–November 2008 and finally, two weeks in October 2009. Spreading my fieldwork over a period of three years gave me a chance to observe any changes taking place, and to experience people entering new phases in their lives.

While doing fieldwork, I consulted with local academics at Bethlehem University and other institutions who have worked on the issue of emigration, both as academics and as concerned members of the Bethlehem community. I also attended a number of conferences organized by various organizations, concerning the social, political and economic realities of the area, including such issues as migration and Christian-Muslim relations. At these conferences, presentations and discussions would take place within the framework of a secular nationalist discourse, reflecting opinions and perspectives that local participants feel strongly about, and that they were keen to communicate to both their local community and their international audiences.

The Palestinian conflict is a conflict over narratives as well as land. Palestinians and Israelis have developed conflicting national narratives that highlight their own people's historical and cultural ties to the land of Palestine and their unity as people. The notion of unity is an important part of both peoples' claim to nationhood, and of their self-ascriptions as groups. For any group to be recognized by other groups as constituting a national group in itself, it must be seen as being tied together by some sense of solidarity, based on social and cultural commonalities. In this context, promoting an image of close and trustful relations between Christians and Muslims, in a Palestinian society that is tolerant and pluralistic, is regarded as an integral part of the struggle for national liberation, and for international recognition as a national community. In relation to an international audience, any mention of internal conflicts, especially along religious lines, is thus seen as potentially harmful to Palestinian national aspirations. Palestinians with a strong public profile are cautious when talking about issues of internal tensions, be they along sectarian, regional or political lines.

Most people, however, are not concerned with engaging in a discourse of identity politics that involves a balancing of sectarian and national loyalties. On a day-to-day basis, people are concerned about the well-being of their

immediate family, with making ends meet, and with the social relations and affiliations that define their everyday lives. As social actors, they are concerned with protecting their own standing within their local communities, with maintaining and in some cases challenging the social structures, the norms and the values that make up these communities.

Throughout this book, I aim to explore what kind of narratives people invoke to make sense of their own situation and their own place in Palestinian society, as well as what kind of social strategies they apply, and what kind of choices they make in their everyday lives.

Introduction

Palestinian Christians in the West Bank

In June 2006, Congressmen Michael McCaul and Joseph Crowley circulated a proposed resolution for the US. House of Representatives entitled 'Condemning the Persecution of Palestinian Christians by the Palestinian Authority' (McCaul and Crowley 2006). Addressing the situation of the indigenous Christians in the Palestinian Territories, the resolution painted a grim picture claiming that Palestinian Christians were 'forced to follow Islamic law in public or face arrest by Palestinian Authority police'; that Christians were denied access to government jobs and forced to pay extra taxes; and that 'Muslim extremist and criminals would vandalize Christian holy sites and cemeteries and rape and sexually harass Christian women with impunity' (McCaul and Crowley 2006:1).

Based on these and other allegations, the resolution argued that Palestinian Christians were the victims of systematic discrimination and prosecution by the Palestinian Authority and by Muslim extremists, making their social situation intolerable and forcing them to leave the Palestinian territories in large numbers.

The contents of this resolution were met with shock and disbelief within the Christian community of Bethlehem. It turned out that neither community leaders nor church representatives had been consulted on the situation of Christians in Palestine. As a response, Palestinian churches, Christian NGOs and the Municipality of Bethlehem issued their own statements, declaring that this resolution was marred by false accusations and that it created a distorted image of a Christian minority disconnected from their own national community. They pointed out that contrary to the McCaul and Crowley resolution, Palestinian Christians have good relations with their Muslim neighbors and that the real aggressor against local Christians is the State of Israel.

In particular, the statements stressed that emigration among Palestinian Christians was fueled not by internal persecution, but by ongoing Israeli policies of collective punishments, the continued growth of settlements, the Separation Wall constructed on Palestinian land, and a policy of closures that has devastated the Bethlehem economy and ruined livelihoods. The following statement from a Bethlehem NGO reflected a widely held concern triggered by the resolution:

> By perpetuating the misconception that it is their Muslim neighbors and the Palestinian Authority who are creating this crisis, rather than policies imposed by the Israeli government, congressman McCaul is

 | DOI 10.1163/9789004276390_002

> further entrenching the problems facing the Christian community rather than helping to address them.
>
> SANSOUR 2006:1

The McCaul and Crowley resolution certainly gave a one-sided portrayal of the situation of Palestinian Christians, focusing only on the threats posed by their Muslim neighbors, and neglecting the impact of Israel's occupation.[1] At the same time, local responses to the resolution were also informed by political considerations in their emphasis on national unity and sectarian harmony among Palestinians. These statements represent two typical views of the situation of Palestinian Christians. However, both views underplay the complexity of their situation. It is this complexity that is the starting point for this book, in which I explore the situation of Palestinian Christians as shaped by internal factors within the Palestinian community, by the effects of an ongoing Israeli occupation, by a history of co-residence and neighborliness with Muslim Palestinians, and by their strong connections with the Western world.

In Post-Mubarak Egypt, violent attacks against Coptic communities and places of worship have served as a tragic reminder that sectarian harmony can be precarious in times of political upheaval (Tadros 2011). What is at stake in Egypt, and what was at stake in Palestine, is not only a factual representation of the situation at hand, but also how the relationship between Christians and Muslims is framed in various settings.

In a region dominated by the Arab-Israeli conflict, and marred by conflicts and warfare along religious and cultural lines, the loyalties and attachments of Palestinian Christians have been a complex and sensitive issue. The McCaul and Crowley draft demonstrated how their circumstances can be simplified and distorted to serve political agendas that conflict with their own lives and interests in the Palestinian Territories. Their cultural norms, ideologies and histories are entangled with those of their Muslim neighbors. They have deep attachments to their land, and they have a proud history of commitment to Palestinian self-determination. While they have long-standing cultural ties with Europe and the Americas, many local Christians also have an ambiguous relationship with Western Christianity. The situation of Christians in the Palestinian Territories involves efforts to maintain local communities, family structures and cultural traditions while adapting to a changing reality. It involves sectarian tensions and mistrust that is related to internal lawlessness and the rise of Palestinian Islamism. It involves suffering and resilience in the

1 In response to strong opposition from Palestinian Christians, but also from various Christian groups in the USA, the draft was never put to a vote in the US House of Representatives.

face of an oppressive Israeli occupation, and it involves a gradual weakening of their home communities through emigration.

Ethnicity and ethnic relations has been a topic of enduring interest among anthropologists. The theoretical innovations following Barths 'Ethnic Groups and Boundaries (Barth 1969) opened up for ethnographic studies on inter-group relations and identity construction more broadly, including issues of sectarian conflict and religious minorities in different part of the world. In the Middle East however, there has been relatively little ethnographic work on sectarian relationships and on religious minorities in particular. In recent years, anthropologists have explored the impact of historical narratives in shaping inter-ethnic and inter-sectarian relations (Longva 2011, Naguib 2008, 2009) the norms of everyday interaction across sectarian boundaries in pluralistic societies (Rabo 2011), the language of minority – majority relations in Middle Eastern societies (Shami 2009), and the role of diaspora networks in exacerbating sectarian tensions in the Middle East (Delhaye 2011, Mahmood 2012).

In Palestine, ethnographic research on the Christian minority has been sparse, and with a few exceptions (Bowman 2003, 2012) has centered on subtopics such as migration (González 1992) and political identities (Lybarger 2007a). I aim to contribute to this literature by providing an ethnographic account of the various forms of difference, boundary processes and power relations that characterize the situation of Palestinian Christians in the Bethlehem area. This book focuses on internal dynamics among Palestinian Christians, as well as their positioning within a Palestinian national community and state-building project. Through ethnographic descriptions, I explore how local Christians maintain or challenge traditional norms associated with an Arab cultural heritage, engage with the struggle for Palestinian liberation from Israel, and at the same time demarcate boundaries vis-à-vis Muslim Palestinians and nurture cultural ties with Western Christianity. My objective has been to capture these complexities, and to show how local Christians experience and engage with the world. As such, this study is a contribution to the study of Christians in the Middle East, and more generally to the study of minorities and cultural differences in the region.

'Living Stones' – The Christians of Palestine

The Christians of the West Bank are one of the oldest Christian communities in the world, and their presence in Palestine dates back to early Christianity (Sabella 1999:223). Bethlehem Christians in particular take great pride in their biblical heritage, and they claim a continuous history in the area that spans

2000 years. In reflection of this, local Christians refer to themselves as the 'living stones' – the community of people that keep alive a Christian cultural heritage connected with the ancient stones: the historical churches and holy sites of the area.

For centuries, Christians in Palestine have struggled to find their place within local and national realities. In various contexts, as Arabs, as Palestinians, as Christians, or as members of local communities, they have defined themselves in relation to multiple 'others'. Throughout history, their communities in Palestine have been suppressed and discriminated against, but also allowed to flourish under different political regimes.

In the late Ottoman period, Palestinian Christians were a resourceful minority within a largely Muslim society, and throughout the twentieth century they played an instrumental role in shaping a Palestinian culture and national identity (Sabella 1999). Along with Christian Arabs in Lebanon and Syria Palestinian Christians took a leading part in Al-Nahda, the Arab Cultural Rebirth that swept the Levant from the late 1800s until the mid-1900s (Aburish 1993, O'Mahony 1999). However, they also have a long history of emigration that has weakened their local presence in Palestine (González 1992, Soudah 2006). Since the late 1800s, the greater part of many Christian families, in some cases entire families, have left the country and are now spread throughout South, Central and North America, Europe, Australia and other parts of the Middle East (González 1992, Sabella 2006). This migration accelerated greatly with the emergence of the Arab-Israeli conflict, and with Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

Emigration – both forced and voluntary – is a Palestinian phenomenon not limited to the Christian population. Since the late Ottoman period, thousands of Muslim Palestinians have also emigrated, establishing large Palestinian communities throughout the Middle East and in other parts of the World. However, the rate of emigration has been higher among Christians, having a far more visible effect on their presence in the Palestinian territories (Sabella 1998, 2005). Due to a combination of low birth-rates and high rates of emigration, the Christian presence in what today constitutes the Occupied Palestinian Territories has fallen from 12% in 1914 to less than 1.2% today,[2] numbering

2 Before the establishment of an Israeli state, the relative decline of Christians was strongly facilitated by British policies during the Mandate period. Throughout much of this period, British Authorities welcomed the arrival of Jewish immigrants from other parts of the world, while at the same time obstructing the return of Palestinians who had spent some years out of Palestine. This enabled a six-fold increase of the Jewish population in Palestine, while the Christian and Muslim population merely doubled during the same Mandate Period (Musallam 1992, 2012).

between 49 000 (Sabella 2006:49) and 51 700 people (Raheb, Kassis, and Collings 2012:11) in the Palestinian Territories, East Jerusalem included.[3] This is a source of great concern among Palestinian Christians, many of whom fear the disappearance of their communities. Statements like 'In fifteen years there'll be none of us left!' are quite common, and reflect a widely shared sense of urgency within the Christian communities.

The area defined as Palestine during the British Mandate (1921–1947) covers present-day Israel, as well as the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank (Appendix 1). The Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) cover 22% of Mandate Palestine and hold a population of approximately. 4.4 million Palestinians, of whom 1.7 million live in Gaza, while 2.7 million live in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (PCBS 2013:9). Since 2000, Gaza has been increasingly cut off from the West Bank, economically, socially and politically.

Christian Communities in Israel and Palestine

This book will focus on the Christian communities of the West Bank and, in particular, their main strongholds in the district of Bethlehem. However, these communities form part of a wider Christian presence in Israel and in Gaza. As such, the Christian communities in these areas deserve some mention as well.

Indigenous Christians in Israel are part of the Palestinian population that is concentrated in the Northern part of Israel, in Galilee, particularly around Nazareth, and in the coastal city of Haifa (Rabinowitz 2001). Palestinian Christians number 120 000 people, or approximately 8% of Israel's Arab population (Raheb, Kassis, and Collings 2012:13). Israeli Authorities have made an effort to distinguish between its Palestinian citizens on the basis of religious belonging, privileging Christians and Druze in relation to Muslim Palestinians.

This has fueled internal tensions, and in communities with a significant Christian presence, such as Nazareth, Haifa and Acre, Christian-Muslim relations have been fraught with tension. In general, Palestinians in Israel are poorer than Jewish Israelis. But Arab Christians, concentrated in urban areas

3 The number of Christians remaining in the Palestinian Territories is a matter of dispute, and estimated are made on the bases of a number of sources, such as public census-records and church records, none of which are complete, up to date and on other ways sufficiently reliable on their own. In addition, the gradual, unpredictable and sometimes secretive ways in which individuals emigrate to other countries can make it difficult to establish whether someone is temporarily abroad or have permanently settled in another country.

are often wealthier and more educated than Muslims in Israel, partly due to the presence of Church-based educational institutions (Sa'ar 1998). Nazareth is a largely Arab city, home to a Muslim majority population, and a sizeable Christian minority whose local identity is strongly tied to their town's biblical history. Here, Christian-Muslim relations have been tense following a long-running conflict over Islamic demands for the building of a Mosque next to the Church of the Annunciation, a site of high importance to Christians in Nazareth and beyond (Israeli 2002).

In Haifa, Christians constitute a majority and an elite within the city's Palestinian population. Due to the relative wealth and social prominence of its Christian community, Haifa, along with Nazareth has been regarded as a stronghold of Arab Christianity in Israel. Historically, there have been extensive social ties between Christians in the West Bank and in Israel, especially within the Christian communities of Haifa and Nazareth. In recent decades however, Israeli border policies have resulted in a weakening of such ties, and intermarriages between Christians in Israel and in the West Bank are increasingly rare.

The Gaza Strip

Gaza is a part of the Occupied Palestinian Territories that is physically cut off from Jerusalem and the West Bank, bordering Israel, Egypt and the Mediterranean Sea. With a population of 1.7 million, and an area 365 squarekilometers, Gaza is one of the poorest and most densely populated areas in the world. A longtime stronghold of political Islam, Gaza was separated from the West Bank in July 2007 after a brief Palestinian civil war that left Gaza in the hands of a Hamas government, while the West Bank was controlled by the Fatah-dominated Palestinian Authority. Since then, Gaza has been ruled by Hamas. Gaza city is also home to a small community of indigenous Christians. Though their numbers are disputed, the Christians of Gaza are commonly reported as counting approximately 3000 people (Raheb, Kassis, and Collings 2012:11). However, these estimates are based on figures dating back to 2007.

Since then, the population of Gaza has faced two wars with Israel, devastating poverty due to an Israeli blockade of the area, and growing pressure to conform to Islamic norms, both from Hamas authorities and from emboldened Salafi-militants. Under these circumstances, Gaza's Christian minority is facing far greater hardships, economically, culturally and socially, than Palestinian Christians in the West Bank. As such, there are good reasons to assume that the Christian population of Gaza has declined dramatically from the 3000 commonly reported.

East Jerusalem

East Jerusalem was conquered and annexed by Israel during the war of 1967. Though geographically a part of the West Bank, Jerusalem is increasingly isolated from its Palestinian hinterlands through the building of Israeli settlements surrounding the city. Declared by Israel as its capital, while regarded as occupied under international law, Jerusalem has been subject to the most aggressive policies of Judaization (Yiftachel 2006:66), with a series of measures aimed at increasing the city's Jewish population, and minimizing Jerusalem's Arab presence. These measures include a revoking of residency rights and social benefits for Palestinians who stay abroad for seven years or more, or who fail to prove that Jerusalem constitutes their 'center of life,' systematic neglect of Palestinian neighborhoods in municipal planning, denial of building permits and demolition of homes built without permission (Zink 2009). East Jerusalem is home to more than 200,000 Palestinians. Of these, appr. 8000 are Christians belonging to more than eight different denominations (Raheb, Kassis, and Collings 2012:10).

The West Bank

The West Bank can be divided into northern, southern and central regions. The northern West Bank is dominated by the cities of Nablus and Jenin. These are areas characterized by social conservatism and an economy based on commerce and agriculture. In this region there are approximately 3500 Christians of which around 2500 live in the village of Zababdeh near Jenin (Raheb, Kassis, and Collings 2012:11). In spite of its modest number, the Latin Church, the Greek Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Anglican Church and one evangelical church are all represented in the village.[4] Surrounded by close to 60 Muslim villages, the Christians of Zababdeh feel the pressure of conforming to the norms of a conservative Muslim society around them.

Nablus, an industrial city of 130,000 inhabitants, is also home to a Christian population of approximately 700 people belonging to four different churches. In addition there are a few Christian families left in the Nablus suburb of Rafidia (Sabella 2006:45). The Christian presence in the northern West Bank,

4 The names of churches in the Middle East can be a source of confusion. In Palestine, the local branch of the Roman Catholic Church is referred to as the Latin Church. The Greek Catholic Church is referred to as the Catholic Church, and the Greek Orthodox Church is referred to as the Rom-Orthodox church. Throughout this book, I will use the terms Latin and Catholic interchangeably in referring to churches and institutions that belong to the Roman Catholic Church. When referring to churches belonging to the Greek Catholic Church, I will use the full term Greek Catholic, while Greek Orthodox churches and institutions will be referred to as the Greek Orthodox, or simply as Orthodox.

with its strongest concentrations in Zababdeh and Nablus has been decimated through emigration, and it is feared that within a few decades, these communities, and especially the Christian community of Nablus may have disappeared.

The southern region is centered on the City of Hebron, and is known for its strong social conservatism and its domination by sizable family clans. The city of Hebron has an economy based on a large trade sector, as well as agriculture and industrial production (ARIJ 2009). This region is not home to any indigenous Christian communities.

Finally, the central part of the West Bank includes the triangle of East-Jerusalem, Ramallah and Bethlehem. With East Jerusalem increasingly cut off from the West Bank, Ramallah has become the political and commercial center on the West Bank. These towns have distinct profiles, with economies based on trade and tourism, exposure to Western influence through Christian schools and churches, and with sizeable Christian communities. Jerusalem, Bethlehem and in particular Ramallah, thus feature an openness and liberal atmosphere that is not found in other parts of the West Bank (Taraki 2006). Historically, both Ramallah and Bethlehem have been strongly linked with East Jerusalem. Since 2000, however, these ties have been effectively severed, as West Bank Palestinians have been barred from entering the city. While Ramallah has a population of some 6500 Christians, this region is also home to Christian communities in the town of Jericho, the mixed villages of Aboud, Birzeit, Jifna and Ein Arik, in addition to Taybeh, widely known as the only fully Christian town in the West Bank, and as the home to Palestine's only microbrewery. These villages have all seen their Christian presence weakening through emigration, and they all have diaspora communities whose numbers exceed those of their home communities. Today, the total number of Christians in these villages is less than 6000 (Raheb, Kassis, and Collings 2012, Sabella 2006:43).

Bethlehem, along with the neighboring towns of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, is a stronghold of Palestinian Christianity in the Occupied Territories. Historically, these are towns that have had solid Christian majorities. Due to Christian emigration, and a steady influx of internal migrants to the area, this balance has shifted, and local Christians are now in a minority in the Bethlehem area.

Contested Belonging

Since the late Ottoman period, Palestinian Christians have also played a central part in the emergence of a secularly oriented Palestinian nationalism. With the emergence of political Islam and the growing confluence of religious

and national identities throughout the Middle East, their national loyalties and identification with the Arab World has sometimes been questioned within their own community.[5] International dynamics of polarization between the Muslim world and the Western world have further fueled such tendencies. In this context, Palestinian Christians have different ideas regarding how they should position themselves within a Palestinian national discourse. While some remain committed to a Palestinian national project, others feel that they are part of a religious minority that finds itself increasingly disconnected from the society it occupies. While some imagine that local Christians will play key roles in the building of a Palestinian nation, others fear their imminent disappearance from the community. Different views are also held on the issue of migration; some see it as a vital route of escape from warfare and political oppression, while others regard it as a phenomenon that threatens their own presence in Palestine.

Palestinian Christians are divided not only on how they see their place within a Palestinian community, but also how to present it to the outside world. While some wish to bring international attention to internal tensions involving Christian and Muslim Palestinians, most prefer to downplay any internal tensions. This reflects a post-colonial dilemma that haunts minority communities in countries throughout the Middle East (Delhaye 2011, Longva 2011, Mahmood 2012, Picard 2011, Rabo 2012): By speaking up about whatever hardships they may experience as a minority, they may mobilize international support for their cause, while at the same time furthering their own alienation from the majority population within their home community.

In the Palestinian Territories, local Christians live under an Israeli occupation that fuels economic depression and political uncertainty; a national community marred with internal conflicts and a cultural conservatism from which those of a more liberal persuasion wish to escape. Under these circumstances, Palestinian Christians are struggling with the choice of defining a social space

5 As a term, political Islam is often used interchangeably with terms like Islamism, radical Islam, and Islamic fundamentalism. There is a growing body of literature devoted to exploring the emergence of Islamic movements throughout the Middle East, the sources of their popular appeal, the differences between different forms of Islamism, the social and political role of Islamic movements, and their potential capability for participation in democratic systems (Burgat 2003, Kepel 2006, Roy 1996, Utvik 2003). Middle East scholars have offered different explanation to the regional growth of political Islam. The 'essientialist approach', represented by scholars like Bernhard Lewis, argue that Islam is a 'political religion' and refer back to the origins of Islam to demonstrate that Islam does not allow for a separation between a religious and a wordly sphere in society (Lewis 2003). This approach does not account for the importance of socio-political changes in the Muslim World.

for themselves in a community facing stark changes, or seeking new lives in other parts of the world.

In this study I show how these choices and challenges are dealt with by individuals and families. We will learn how family networks create opportunities as well as constraints in the lives of individual family members, and we will learn about the choices people make, as members of families and local communities, and as members of a national community. The individual parts of this book revolve around people's efforts to grapple with changes and

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Another approach views the growth of political Islam as a conservative reaction to modernity, and its social influence on the Muslim societies in the form of an emphasis on individual freedom at the expense of family and communal loyalties, scientific enquiry and critical though at the expense of religous doctrine and traditional authorities, etc (Rosen 1989). A third approach seeks to explain Islamism as a response to a widespread crisis of development, unfulfilled expectations and the failure of Middle Eastern states to meet popular needs (Ayubi 2004). Advocates of this approach emphasize self-empowerment through the establishment of welfare-networks, health and educational services as central to modern Islamist movements such as The Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas and Hezbollah.

A fourth approach explains the emergence of political Islam as part of a post-colonial struggle for cultural liberation from a Western hegemony, and a search for an indigenous identity. As the Middle East has gone through processes of social and political modernization on the bases of concepts and ideas imported from the West, people of the region are seeking to liberate themselves, by replacing these concepts with the symbols, ideas and cultural concepts of Islam (Burgat and Dowell 1993).

A fifth approach is represented by Bjorn Olav Utvik, who draws a parallel between Islamism and religious piety in certain Protestant traditions. He sees Islamism as a modern expression of individualization, that combines a lifestyle of modesty and strong work-ethics, with a zeal for religious reform. As he sees it, today's islamist movements applies an idealized image of the past in their efforts to pursue the realization of an alternative social order, based on Islam. Utvik views Islamism as a modernising force that promotes individualization, that mobilizes new groups of people in political deliberations, and that seeks to enable Islam to meet the challenges of modern statehood (Utvik 2003).

These approaches are not mutually exclusive. On a personal note, I believe in a combination of several approaches, that allows us to see Islamism(s) both as responses to crisis of development and political mal-governance in the Muslim world, and as part of a struggle for cultural liberation from Western hegemony, one that may involve rejections of modernity, and a search for an alternative, Islamic modernity. For the purpose of this book, I lean on a wider definition of Islamism as proposed by Bjørn Olav Utvik: "An ideology which stresses that Islam is not only a matter of personal faith, but contains God-given guidelines for how Muslim societies should be organized, socially, culturally, legally and politically. For most Islamists, this includes a conviction that the legal system should have the sharia, the Islamic law based on the Quran, and the Prophets Sunna as its primary foundations." (Utvik 2011:25, my translation)

constraints – within their family structures and everyday norms of social conduct, within the legal arrangements that shape their formal rights and duties, within the economic realities that shape their individual opportunities, and within the political realities that shape their social boundaries and sense of belonging.

Though writing about Palestinian Christians, I have not focused on issues of faith, and on the spiritual and ritual aspects that make up a central part of people's religious experiences. My focus has been on religion not as faith but as a mark of social identity, a criterion of demarcation, and as an important factor informing people's political orientations and social loyalties within a multi-sectarian community. This is also reflected in those sections that address the role of the church. When writing about local churches, I have focused on the importance of church-associated schools and other non-clerical institutions serving local communities. I have also looked at the sometimes uneasy relationship between local churches and a Palestinian nationalist movement to which many local Christians have been committed. However, I have not written about the role of local churches in providing spiritual guidance, and in performing liturgical services during important religious celebrations. Most importantly, I have not written about the role of the churches in shaping the social and ethical dispositions of local Christians, in relation to their families and the wider community in which they live.[6] As such, this book does not do justice to the multi-faceted role of local churches and their centrality to the lives of many Palestinian Christians.

Main Themes

This book is structured around four major thematic sections; change and continuity in local community and family structures; identity, belonging and Christian-Muslim relations within a national community; the impact of Israel's occupation on Christians in the Palestinian Territories and finally, migration and homeland-diaspora relationships.

6 Through ceremonial leadership, local churches shape the habitus of Palestinian Christians in very specific ways. Religious rituals and ceremonies led by the churches are practices that inculcate social and ideological dispositions among their lay members. Integration into churches as members of local congregations has an important impact on Palestinian Christian subjectivities. These processes are important and deserve further scholarly attention. In this book, however, my primary focus has been on the political role of the churches.

Patriarchy and Social Change

Looking at family dynamics and relations of authority among Bethlehem Christians, I focus on tensions between traditional social norms centered on patriarchal authority, and a more recent emphasis on personal freedom and individual self-assertion. These communities have been structured around patriarchal family groups whose social standing depends on the conduct of their individual members. Traditionally, individuals have been disciplined to behave in accordance with traditional gender roles within hierarchic family systems, thus securing the reproduction of a patriarchal order. With exposure to outside cultural influence, this order is being challenged by new ideals of individual freedom and self-assertion.

In the field of marriage arrangement, a traditional family veto on marriage decisions sometimes conflicts with individual demands for greater personal autonomy. Within the Bethlehem community, such conflicts can result in various forms of rebellion against family authority. I show how a balance between family authority and individual autonomy is negotiated in conflict situations, and how patriarchy shapes the actions of male and senior members as well as young and female members. Young people who feel the constraints of family authority try to stretch their own freedoms and take control of their own destiny while at the same time maintaining good relationships with their own families. Senior family members will try to protect the standing of their own family within the wider family group and the local community while staying on good terms with their children. When individual desires conflict with the dictates of family authority, people try to balance these concerns. Through individual stories, I show how the willingness of both younger and older individuals to challenge traditional norms and structures of patriarchal power reflect an acknowledgement of a society in motion, where social norms and rules of conduct are constantly challenged. I also argue that in a situation where livelihoods and socio-cultural practices are under threat, it becomes more urgent to enforce moral codes, and hold on to traditional structures within local communities.

Clan-based Rule vs. State Building

Second, I look at the formation of social boundaries and sectarian relations in the context of wider social and structural processes within the Palestinian community, focusing on how issues of the rule of law, land ownership and security are dealt with, and how these issues affect the dynamics of Christian-Muslim relations within the Palestinian community. In the Bethlehem area, the Christian communities have experienced an economic and demographic weakening relative to other social groups. Land previously owned by Christian

families has been sold to internal migrants from other parts of the West Bank. Some Christian families have also lost their family land through theft and land-document forgery. Among local Christians the issue of land disputes is widely read in sectarian terms, as expressions of Muslim hostility to Christians, and as part of a Muslim campaign to marginalize and weaken their presence in Bethlehem.

In exploring these problems, I discuss the issue of land disputes within the context of a weak and dysfunctional system of law enforcement, a chaotic system of land ownership, and the position of family clans whose powers and regional impunity are strengthened in the absence of law enforcement. In this context, strong families stand out as the primary source of social order and protection. I argue that under these circumstances, the Christians of Bethlehem – whose family presence has been weakened, and whose local communities have been fragmented through emigration – stand out as structurally vulnerable and unprotected against violations such as land theft, extortion, violent abuse and other transgressions.

How these problems are framed and interpreted by local Christians relates to another important theme: the interplay between sectarian and national identities. The Palestinian community has faced sweeping social and political changes in the course of only a few decades. With a focus on framing, I look at how these changes have affected Palestinian Christians in terms of political orientations, sectarian relations, and Christian perceptions of their own future within a Palestinian society.

Palestinian Nationalism

These processes are followed by an account of socio-political developments in Palestine. Here, I focus on how secular nationalist movements in which Palestinian Christians were heavily involved, have lost ground to social and political movements with an Islamic agenda, and how these developments have fueled a gradual estrangement between Palestinian Christians and parts of the Muslim community. Individual stories will serve to illustrate the diversity in how these processes have been perceived by different people.

Although Palestinian Christians are under pressure due to internal tensions, the absence of a rule of law, and the growth of political movements with an Islamic agenda, they do have a choice in how to handle these problems. In the first place, they have a choice on how to frame these issues within their own communities. They can refer to such problems as land theft and lawlessness in sectarian terms, as the result of corruption or institutional weakness in the Palestinian Authority, or as problems caused by the Israeli occupation. They also have a choice regarding how to present these problems to the

international community. Internally they tend to avoid a sectarian framing of conflicts in order to avoid alienation within a Palestinian national community. With regard to the international community, prominent Christians tend to downplay internal tensions and to project an image of Palestinian unity across sectarian lines. They wish to avoid being portrayed as a persecuted minority within their own community as such portrayals could undermine Palestinian national aspirations. While such choices reflect strategic considerations, they also reflect a continued commitment to a secular national project among Palestinian Christians. These processes of group formation along regional, sectarian and national lines are dealt with in Chapter 2 and 3.

An Israeli Military Order

A third theme is the impact of Israel's occupation in shaping the socio-economic realities within the West Bank. Palestinian lives are dominated by Israeli measures aimed at regulating and obstructing all mobility and economic activity within the West Bank, and by Israeli border policies that regulate all transfers of people, goods or financial assets in and out of the Palestinian territories.

One focus here is on the structural and bureaucratic measures by which Israel seeks to control Palestinian movements and activities within the West Bank. Measures such as legal infringements on Palestinian rights of residency, the building of settlements and the Separation Wall, and the use of checkpoints and roadblocks throughout the West Bank, restrict Palestinian mobility and sever ties between different parts of the West Bank, paralyzing Palestinian economic activities, and furthering an enclavization of the Palestinian territories into several distinct socio-economic regions.

These measures have been complemented by changes in Israels border policies in relation to the West Bank. I discuss how changes in Israeli border policies have resulted in a severing of social and economic ties between Israel and the West Bank, and a hardening of economic realities for Palestinians. These policies have included the expulsion of Palestinian labor from Israel, strangulation of Bethlehem tourism, and confinement of Palestinian economic activity within the West Bank. I will show how Israeli efforts to obstruct economic development and to encourage Palestinian dependence on the Israel economy prior to the Oslo Accords, have allowed these measures to have a devastating effect on the Palestinian economy. Using Agamben's approach to biopolitics, and Hanafi's notion of spaciocide, I will argue that these measures constitute a 'politics of paralysis' that serve to obstruct the economic viability and social unity of the Palestinian community. Individual histories illustrate how these measures are undermining the social and economic sustainability of a

Palestinian polity and dramatically limiting the opportunities available to individual actors. Individuals living under difficult conditions on the West Bank face the choice of accepting the constraints of an ongoing occupation, finding ways of resisting and circumventing them, or escaping them altogether by way of emigration. As such, the politics of paralysis serve not only to obstruct social and economic developments, but also to deprive the Palestinian community of some of its most resourceful and ambitious individuals.

A History of Migration

My fourth and final theme is emigration and homeland-diaspora relations, which have a central place in the Christian communities of Bethlehem. Looking first at how specific historical and structural circumstances have encouraged large-scale emigration, I explore how political shifts and economic changes have affected the dynamics of emigration since the late Ottoman Period until present times. I will argue that, due to their socio-economic characteristics as an entrepreneurial middle-class minority with access to Western schools and cultural ties to Europe, Palestinian Christians were socially disposed towards emigration, and that this can explain their role in pioneering Palestinian emigration to the Americas. A historical account of Christian emigration from Bethlehem explores the choices individuals and families have faced within their home communities and in the diaspora. During different historical periods, people have chosen to emigrate to escape warfare, political oppression and economic poverty in their home community. Those who remained in Palestine have endured poverty and the lack of economic opportunities, faced forcible enrolment in the Ottoman Army, warfare and unrest under the British mandate, and military oppression under Israeli rule.

On the other hand, emigration has involved separation from family and friends, and the challenges of adjusting to new cultural environments, as well as access to economic opportunities and freedoms that have not been available at home. With time, the emergence of migrant family networks has minimized the social risks and sacrifices associated with migration. Applying a transnational perspective, I explore the role of migrant family networks in facilitating migration, in providing a social infrastructure in host countries, and a support system for new migrants in pursuit of economic advancement in their host countries.

Homeland – Diaspora Relations

When we look at more recent dynamics of emigration, relations between the home community and the diaspora will require some special attention. Studies of diaspora communities often focus on images of the home community as

central to the production of collective identities abroad. I argue that among Christians in Bethlehem, the projection of certain qualities to the Bethlehem diaspora, such as industriousness and entrepreneurial creativity, justifies the attribution of similar 'inherent' qualities to the home community.

Images of Bethlehem emigrants as industrious and highly accomplished leave steadfast Palestinians with a sense of relative deprivation, and with high expectations of their emigrant relatives. These expectations are strengthened by the cultivation of emigrant success-stories, as well as the economic achievements of some short-term emigrants, particularly in the US. The stories of less fortunate emigrants illustrate the gap between popular expectations of emigrant success and the limitations that emigrants may well face in their pursuit of economic advancement. Here I argue that Palestinian Christian migration and migrant networks have taken on transnational traits that allow some emigrants to maintain a social presence both in the diaspora and in the home community. At the same time, certain forms of transnational migration and possibilities associated with transnational family networks are accessible only to the most privileged and resourceful emigrants. This means that the choice of emigrating or of staying in Palestine means different things to different people. The risks and opportunities that follow with emigration and the opportunities available in Palestine depend on one's family background, networks and connections at home and abroad, as well as one's personal resources. Christians in Bethlehem face these choices and respond to new challenges within their home communities in different ways. These are the main themes that I explore throughout this book. Before presenting some central theoretical perspectives, I will provide a brief overview of academic and popular literature that has addressed the issues of Palestine, Christians in Palestine, and the community of Bethlehem in particular.

Palestine and Bethlehem as seen through the Literature

Palestine has been the subject of extensive scholarly attention, mostly due to its historical and religious prominence in Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and its post-Ottoman history, which has been dominated by the Arab-Israeli struggle. Historians have engaged with the emergence and decline of empires in the region, with the origins of modern national identities, and with the origins of the ongoing conflict between Israel and its neighbors. Political scientists have engaged with the role of foreign powers in shaping and sustaining the conflicts of the region, and with modern processes of state and nation-building within the area.

A good starting point for understanding the rise of Arab and Palestinian nationalism is *The Arab Awakening* written by George Antonius, a Lebanese Christian who spent much of his adult life in Palestine. In the book, Antonius describes the emergence of Arab nationalism in response to Ottoman and Western imperialism, and the responses of Arab leaders to British and French mandate rule, and in particular the intricate processes that eventually led to the creation of Israel and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Written in 1938, the book concludes with a moral condemnation and an eloquent warning about the fate to be bestowed on Arab Palestinians in the game of international politics:

> The treatment meted out to Jews in Germany and other European countries is a disgrace to its authors and to modern civilisation; but posterity will not exonerate any country that fails to bear its proper share of the sacrifices needed to alleviate Jewish suffering and distress. To place the brunt of the burden upon Arab Palestine is a miserable evasion of the duty that lies upon the whole of the civilised world. It is also morally outrageous. No code of morals can justify the persecution of one people in an attempt to relieve the persecution of another. The cure for the eviction of Jews from Germany is not to be sought in the eviction of the Arabs from their homeland… No room can be made in Palestine for a second nation except by dislodging or exterminating the nation in possession.
>
> ANTONIUS 1965:411–412

With the Arab defeats of 1948 and 1967, Antonius' fears would be validated. Rashid Khalidi's *Palestinian Identity* (1997) provides the seminal account of how a modern Palestinian national identity has been affected by these events. At the same time, he traces the historical roots of Palestinian nationalism to the late Ottoman period.[7] (Khalidi 1997)

During the past 20 years, much scholarly attention has centered on the emergence of political Islam and the rise of social and political movements with an Islamic orientation and political agenda. The historical origins and more recent developments within Hamas, the main Islamic resistance movement in Palestine, have been the subject of numerous studies (Hroub 2007, Milton-Edwards 1999, Tamimi 2007) In much of this literature, the emergence of Islamic movements and Islamic political identities is partly explained as a

7 Khalidi's tracing of a Palestinian nationalism to the late Ottoman period, represents a challenge to claims by Israeli academics and political pundits that a Palestinian national identity is merely a modern construct, invented in opposition to Israel.

response to the failures of Arab and Palestinian secular nationalism throughout the twentieth century (Hroub 2007).

Among anthropologists, a great deal of research has focused on Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon and the West Bank, and on rural communities throughout the West Bank (Rothenberg 2004, Rubenberg 2001). On Palestinian refugees, researchers such as Julie Peteet and Rosemary Sayigh have addressed issues such as the formation of refugee identities, the place of refugees within a Palestinian national order, Al-Nakbah narratives, and political activism among camp-based refugees in Lebanon and the West Bank (Peteet 2005, Rubenberg 2001, Sayigh 1994). Refugee studies have paid much attention to refugee efforts to connect current realities with a pre-Nakbah past, through the reproduction of village settlement patterns, social relations and collective identities centered on their places of origin (Davis 2010, Peteet 2005, Sayigh 1994).

Rural communities have also received much attention from anthropologists. From 1929 to 1933 the Finnish anthropologist Hilma Granqvist carried out research for her extensive and elaborate studies of family live and social costumes in Artas, a Muslim Palestinian village near Bethlehem on the West Bank (Granqvist 1975). Her studies, characterized by highly detailed accounts of people's everyday routines and social rituals, and by her insightful reflections on village relations and codes of conduct, set a high standard for ethnographic studies in rural Palestine. Later researchers followed up Granqvist's insights about social organization, gender relations and family structures in Palestinian village communities. Palestinian family structures, and in particular the organization of Palestinian families into patronymic family clans known as *hamulas*, have been popular research topics (Lang 2013, Rothenberg 1998).

A number of studies have focused on the Palestinian communities in Israel, with an emphasis on Israeli state policies designed to contain or marginalize their presence (Reiter 2009, Yiftachel 2006), or their own efforts to find a place for themselves in the shadow of a national project from which they are excluded. Worth mentioning here is Dan Rabinowitz extensive work on the Palestinian population of Nazareth, in which he explores Israeli policies and popular attitudes towards Palestinians, and Palestinian strategies of accommodation and resistance (Rabinowitz 1997, 2001). Rabinowitz describes Palestinians in Israel as a 'trapped minority', marginalized and excluded from the national project of the country in which they live, while at the same time cut off and isolated from the national group with which they identify culturally (2001).

Jerusalem has been a natural focus of scholarly interest, with a number of studies exploring the impact on the city's Palestinian population of Israeli

policies of discrimination and marginalization (Weingrod 1993, Yiftachel 2006). In a seminal work on Jerusalem, Romann and Weingrod explores the depth of ethnic segregation in a city where Jews and Arabs live parallel lives but with minimal interaction between the communities (Romann and Weingrod 1991).

Loren Lybarger has done a great deal of research on the evolution of diverging political identities within the Palestinian territories. On the basis of extensive fieldwork in towns and refugee camps in the West Bank and in Gaza, he describes the development of new political identities shaped by the formative experiences of each new generation, in a national context that has been dominated by the emergence of Islam at the expense of secular ideologies (Lybarger 2007b). In an article on Palestinian Christians in the post-Oslo period, Lybarger argues that Christians of the generation that grew up during the Intifada have moved in three different directions: some embrace a traditional PLO secular nationalism; some advocate a religio-communal revival that parallels the Islamist one, and some seek refuge in an otherworldly religious piety (Lybarger 2007a:780).

The Palestinian communities of the West Bank are characterized by a high level of cultural diversity between different regions of the West Bank, tremendous differences between city, village and camp life in the West Bank, between people of different social classes and occupational status, between uneducated village farmers and well-educated professionals. Another aspect of this social diversity is that of religion.

On Palestinian Christians

In recent years, the small community of Palestinian Christians has been the object of some international interest, and a number of books have addressed the history of Palestinian Christians and their social position within a Palestinian national community.

Within a regional context, the situation of Christians in Palestine is often compared with that of Christians in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and other countries of the Middle East. Despite the particularities of each national context, similarities in socio-economic profile, patterns of large-scale emigration and the challenges posed by the growth of political Islam are frequently emphasized (Pacini 1998a, Sennott 2001). In a Palestinian context, some research has focused on ecclesiastical hierarchies and the politics of the churches in relation to different political regimes. Michael Dumper has written about the position of the churches in Jerusalem in relation to the Israeli and Palestinian

authorities. He has described the gradual nationalization of the Palestinian churches that in the course of time has resulted in a more active engagement with the Palestinian national struggle (Dumper 2002).

In a recent study, Noah Haiduc-Dale explores the relationship between Christians and Muslims in Palestine during the British Mandate, with a particular focus on the position of Christians within the Palestinian nationalist movements (2013). Haiduc-Dale explores how local Christians drifted between an embrace of Arab nationalism, and an emphasis on communal belonging in response to various outside pressures. In a context of Palestinian in-fighting, a rising religious conflict between Muslims and Jews, and an increase in Islamic identification among some Palestinians, Haiduc-Dale emphasizes the multitude of Christian responses in a formative period for Palestinian nationalism (Haiduc-Dale 2013).

A few studies have focused on the Christian communities of the Bethlehem area in particular. Glenn Robinson has written about internal power struggles in Beit Sahour as part of a wider struggle between old notables and new political elites during the First Intifada, but without focusing on sectarian relations (Robinson 1997). Glenn Bowman has written extensively on national identity, sectarian relations and the role of religious shrines among Christians and Muslims in the Bethlehem area (Bowman 1993, 2001, 2003, 2012). He has written about the emergence of strong leftist nationalist sentiments and intersectarian unity in Beit Sahour before and during the First Intifada, and about social fragmentation and sectarian distrust following the political disillusion of the post-Oslo years (Bowman 2001). He has since also described how a deterioration of sectarian relations has been reflected in changing ritual practices and institutional efforts to 'fix' the meaning attached to formerly-shared religious shrines in the Bethlehem area (Bowman 2012).

Nancie Gonzáles has written about Palestinian Christian emigration from the Bethlehem area to Honduras since the late 1800s. Based on fieldwork in Honduras and on the West Bank, she provides a detailed account of the history and trajectories of Palestinian Christian emigration from Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala to Honduras, and on the continued relations between the home community and the Bethlehem diaspora in Honduras (González 1992).

Bernard Sabella, a Palestinian sociologist, has gathered statistical material on the Palestinian Christian population of the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem, and written several articles on socio-economic, political and demographic issues concerning the Palestinian Christian population (Sabella 1998, 1999, 2005). In 2006, on behalf of Sabeel, the Center for Ecumenical Liberation Theology in Jerusalem, a team of researchers at Bethlehem University carried out an extensive survey of Christian communities in Israel and the Palestinian

Territories (Sabella 2006, Soudah 2006). The survey covered the demographic presence of Palestinian Christians, recent dynamics and reasons for emigration, their socioeconomic and educational profile, political outlook, Christian – Muslim relations and a number of other topics.

More recently, a book covering many of the same broader issues, but with a strong focus on emigration has been written by Rania Al Qass Collins, Rifat Odeh Kassis and Mitri Raheb for the Diyar Consortium in Bethlehem (Raheb, Kassis, and Collings 2012). This book also contains statistical material on the Christian population in Israel and on the West Bank and Gaza from 2007/2008.

Aside from these academic studies, the situation of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank and in the Bethlehem area has been addressed in books written by journalists who have worked in the region. Said Aburish, a Palestinian journalist based in the US, gives a bleak but empathetic description of the Palestinian Christian communities in the occupied Palestinian territories (1993). He generously describes the historical role of local Christians as agents of economic development and progressive change, and as intellectuals who have been instrumental in the development of a Palestinian national identity (Aburish 1993). In addressing more recent realities, he describes a Christian community trapped between different forces that seem to threaten their very existence as a community: on the one hand, an Israeli state that occupies and expropriates Palestinian land by means of brutal military force, and that controls and takes over tourism and other primary sources of income among the Christians; on the other, the emerging force of 'Islamic fundamentalism' that threatens their very place within a national Palestinian community, and that tends to view local Christians as 'agents of the West.' Aburish also accuses Western churches of undermining the local Christian presence through a combination of willful neglect and one-sided support for the Israeli authorities. He gives a damning assessment of the local churches, arguing that church representatives tend to be more concerned with the interests of their mother churches than the needs of local Christians (Aburish 1993).

In a wide-ranging and ambitious book that addresses the situation of Christian Arabs in Palestine, Israel, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt, Boston Globe correspondent Charles Sennott (2008) pays a good deal of attention to Bethlehem, and to Beit Sahour in particular. He portrays a community of local Christians who have played an active part in the struggle for Palestinian self-determination, especially during the First Intifada. In Sennott's account, they have since grown disillusioned with the failure of the peace process and with the Israeli authorities, are resentful and distrustful of their Muslim neighbors, and alienated by a Second Intifada that they feel has been high-jacked by Islamic militants. According to Sennott, these sentiments are partly a response

to the growing support for political Islam, but also to what they experience as a growing frequency of informal discrimination and acts of hostility based on anti-Christian sentiments among their Muslim neighbors (Sennott 2008).

In recent years, prominent Christians Palestinians have written several books and articles as part of an effort to narrate their own story within a national context. Religious leaders such as Mitri Raheb (1995, 2004) and Naim Ateek (2008), as well as political figures such as Hanan Ashrawi (1996) have given voice to the Palestinian Christian experience through books and articles. From their various points of departure, they have tried to communicate the experience of local Christians as part of a Palestinian community, and their response to dispossession, warfare and political oppression under various regimes. They have used their own personal stories to articulate a shared experience, and to communicate their visions for a future Palestinian society in which they can feel some ownership. As part of their individual visions, they all emphasize a tradition of peaceful relationships between Christian and Muslim Palestinians, and call for the realization of a tolerant, pluralistic, and politically-secular society, in which they as Palestinians can govern themselves within their own sovereign state, or enjoy equal rights with their Israeli neighbors within a bi-national state.

When they write about their own position, they all emphasize the prominent role of local Christians in Palestinian business, culture and politics, and in the emergence and articulation of a modern Palestinian national identity. They insist that Christians and Muslims are bound together by a shared history of injustices and dispossession, an ongoing struggle against a common enemy, and a national unity that transcends sectarian divides. Their accounts reflect an enduring commitment to a secular nationalist vision for Palestine: a vision that Palestinian Christians feel they have taken part in shaping, and of which many still feel a strong sense of ownership. Confronted with conflicting views, such as the Islamist visions presented by Hamas and other movements, and social tendencies and conflicts that cause worry among local Christians, they strike a balance between confronting and criticizing such issues, and upholding an image of unity within the Palestinian community. This navigation between different concerns is an important part of the Palestinian Christian experience, and one of the central themes of this book.

A Theoretical Framework

The dilemmas faced by many Christians in Palestine, and the choices they make can be viewed through the lens of Albert Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and*

Loyalty (Hirschman 1970). He argues that when confronted with an unsatisfactory situation, as members of an organization, or as citizens of a nation, people have two main ways of responding: 'exit' and 'voice'. Exit can mean leaving an organization or, in the case of nations, migrate to another country. Voice can involve complaining or protesting in an effort to change the behavior of an organization, or the government of one's home country. Hirschman introduces 'loyalty' as a third factor that influences whether actors choose exit or voice. Loyalty – a person's sense of belonging or emotional attachment to an organization or a country – can create greater resistance to choose exit, strengthen one's will to use voice in an effort to improve a bad situation, or to accept it without turning to either voice or exit.

When they face the social constraints of a patriarchal society, lack adequate protection under a formal legal system, or feel alarmed by emerging political currents within their home community, people may either voice their concerns through various channels, or try to escape the source of their concerns through some form of exit. In these and other contexts, Hirschman's model is useful as a way of thinking about what kinds of choices people face. However, we need other tools to help us explore the relationship between the choices people make, in various fields, and the structures that inform their actions.

The case of Palestinian Christians illustrates the complex ways in which socio-economic structures, cultural orders, and political regimes shape individual perceptions and actions. Individuals make choices within these constraints and in doing so partly determine the directions in which groups develop in response to broader structures and events. Palestinians as a whole, and minority Palestinian Christians, especially, confront enormous social and political pressures that powerfully constrain their lives, individually and collectively; however, even under these immense pressures, individual Palestinians can and do respond creatively to these circumstances, challenging, adapting, or escaping them in various ways. These responses occur at multiple social levels: within patriarchally controlled families challenged by social processes that have created a greater scope for individuality; within local communities defined by patterns of inter-sectarian competition and cooperation; within a national community split along secularist and Islamist lines and subject to Israeli occupation and colonization; and finally within transnational networks of migration and diaspora. To make sense of what happens at each of these levels, I draw on a series of interrelated theoretical perspectives that help illuminate the interaction between institutional structures and individual responses.

Because of the immediate role it plays in shaping Palestinian Christian subjectivities, I begin with the question of patriarchy and how it enables and

constrains certain kinds of consciousness and action. As a starting point, I turn to Bourdieu's contention that individuals within a given society are imbued with a set of dispositions to think and behave in certain ways that serve to reproduce the social structures in which they are socialized. These embodied dispositions also allow structures of power and dominance to be hidden or taken for granted, as part of a 'natural' social order. (Bourdieu 1977, 1990).[8]

Following Bourdieu's model, patriarchal family structures are forcefully reproduced through the actions of individuals imbued with dispositions to think, feel and behave in accordance with patriarchal norms. Bourdieu offers a convincing explanation for the persistence of social structures, but at the same time he sets a high bar for the possibility of social change. Building on his focus on embodied dispositions, Judith Butler argues that social structures, discourses and normative systems depend on the continued and repetitive performance of certain acts, and that these structures can be altered through alternative performative acts, that do not correspond with the dominant rules of behavior within a particular social order (Butler 1988). According to Butler, this means that even the most entrenched institutionalized norms can be subverted and transformed through transgressive performances.[9]

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8 With his theory of practice, Bourdieu explains the relationship between structure and agency through the concept of habitus. In his theory, individuals are imbued with a set of dispositions to think and behave in certain ways, and thus to act in ways that serve to reproduce the social structures in which they are socialized. A shared habitus is produced through socialization, and'doxa'a set of shared unspoken'truths' allows structures of dominance to be hidden or taken for granted as part of a 'natural' social order. Bourdieu views actors primarily as acting on the basis of largely unconsciously embodied dispositions. As such, his theory has been widely viewed as deterministic, by placing great emphasis on the reproduction of social structures, while giving little room for social change. In his theory, changes can be facilitated by objective crises that expose the habitus and that make people talk about doxic assumptions, problematize everyday experiences, and make room for new insights. For Bourdieu, the way to change goes through the verbalization and analysis of the unspoken, and the repressed rules that govern our behavior. In Bourdieu's model, the patriarchal family structures mentioned above would be reproduced through the actions of individuals imbued with dispositions to think, feel and behave in accordance with their ascribed roles within the family system. Any change in this system would depend on the capacity of a large number of actors to deconstruct and rebel against the emotional, normative and cognitive dispositions that they have embodied, and that orient them towards acting in accordance with the norms and relations of authority that characterize a patriarchal family system (Bourdieu 1977, 1990).

9 Building on Austin's speech-act theory as well as Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Judith Butler explores how linguistic constructions create our reality in general through the speech acts in which we engage on an everyday basis. By endlessly citing the conventions and ideologies of the social world around us, we 'incorporate' that reality by enacting it with our bodies.

Applied to a Palestinian setting, this allows for a shake-up of norms associated with a patriarchal social order. Traditional gender roles and structures of authority are continually reinforced as long as individual actors perform the social act that correspond with these norms: as long as young women adhere to the commands of male and senior family members, and communicate social virtues such as modesty and chastity through their verbal and bodily acts. However, if young girls start to veer from the script of expected behavior, and act in ways that violate the gendered norms of the community, this constitutes a challenge to those norms, and the patriarchal system of which they are a part.

In Palestine, as in other parts of the Arab world, most individuals refrain from transgressing the norms of a patriarchal order that limits their personal freedoms. Suad Joseph seeks to explain this with her concept of 'patriarchal connectivity.' She argues that, within Arab families, individuals are entangled in connective relationships where the boundaries between individual selves are fluid, and that within the family, individual actors feel themselves a part of significant others (Joseph 1993:452). These connective relations make family members sensitive to each other's needs, and to their own position within the family system. Within patriarchal families, connectivity involves the crafting of males and seniors prepared to exert authority over female and junior family members, and female and juniors prepared to respond to such authority (Joseph 1993:453), but it also involves great sensitivity and concern for each other's well-being. Through these connective relations, patriarchy is reinforced, both emotionally and ideologically. These are powerful mechanisms that serve to protect a patriarchal order from dramatic altercations.

The patriarchal family system among Palestinians, however, has increasingly confronted challenges to its legitimacy and capacity to perpetuate itself in the face of urbanization, mass political turbulence, generational shifts, and the increasing integration of Palestinians into the global economic system. The expansion of global communication, social media in particular, that has accompanied these processes has been especially challenging for patriarchal control in the Palestinian case.

Focusing in particular on gender, Butler argues that as performatives, gender realities depend on the continued performance of certain acts, and that these realities can be changed through alternative performative acts that do not correspond with the dominant rules of gendered behaviour (Butler 1988). The central elements of Butler's theory also apply to other social identities beside gender. According to Butler, social norms and institutions depend for their reproduction on their iteration and re-iteration in performance, and this 'logic of iterability' makes even the most entrenched institutionalized norms vulnerable to subversion and transformation through transgressive performances (Butler 1993, 1997).

With large-scale emigration and increasing exposure to Western culture, young Palestinians have been introduced to conceptions of individual freedom, self-realization and romantic love that may conflict with an ethos of patriarchal authority and family honor. A shift away from agriculture and family-run businesses, to construction, industrial labor and international labor migration has weakened individual dependence on family for financial support.

This creates a field of family relations where individuals will aim to balance conflicting concerns, where junior family members will strive for personal freedom while taking care to protect their own social standing, and where male family heads will uphold their authority in relation to junior family members, seek respectable marriage unions for their children, and protect their family's standing within the framework of a patriarchal order.

In this context, new forms of communication and social media have provided young Palestinians with new ways of operating beyond the realms of family surveillance. With time, following Bourdieu and Butler, these are changes that opens up for a questioning of the 'shared truths' that allow patriarchal relations of power and domination to be taken for granted, and for individuals to engage in transgressive acts that do not correspond to the norms of a patriarchal order. In the next chapter, we will see how, within the field of marriage arrangements, a failure to iterate and reiterate acts that reflect subordination to family authority, can be seen as a serious challenge to a patriarchal order and its norms of gendered behavior.

Within the framework of patriarchal family structures, a dialectic tension between actors' pursuit of individual concerns and their engagement in connective relations with close family members can make room for both continuity and change. In a community torn between conflicting normative orientations, connective relations can enable families to reconcile conflicting social drives, allowing actors who rebel against patriarchal authority to be kept within the family fold.

Social Boundaries, Framing and Forms of Belonging

In a wider context, patriarchy is central to the establishment of law and order, and political power within the Palestinian community. The absence of a sovereign state apparatus and a functioning legal system has allowed for the rule of powerful family clans. As a result, in certain periods, smaller family clans have been unable to protect their members against land theft, vandalism, extortion and other forms of power abuse at the hands of bigger and more powerful families. Due to their modest numbers and small families, the rule of family clans is a source of vulnerability among Palestinian Christians. In

some cases, this also represents a failure on the part of smaller family clans to provide their members with social protection and safety. However, when faced with various forms of power-abuse, such incidents are often read in sectarian terms, fuelling distrust between local Christians and their Muslim neighbors.

Focusing on social boundaries and group-making, Brubaker looks at how inter-group relationships are constituted through 'framing', through the interpretations of encounters and social events that serve to reinforce or undermine social boundaries and group identities (Brubaker 2002, 2004). Focusing on ethnic relations he argues that social conflicts become 'ethnic' conflicts through the process of framing:

> The ethnic quality of "ethnic violence" for example is not intrinsic to violent conduct itself; it is attributed to instances of violent behavior by perpetrators, victims, politicians, officials, journalists, researchers, relief workers or others. Such acts of framing and narrative encoding do not simply interpret the violence; they constitute it as ethnic.
>
> BRUBAKER 2002:173

Applying Brubaker's point more generally, framing is a key mechanism through which a sense of 'groupness' and social boundaries are constructed, and a successful framing may allow us to 'see' conflicts and violence in ethnic, regional, national or sectarian terms. To impose a certain interpretative frame on a conflict is not merely a matter of external interpretation, it is 'a constitutive act of social definition' (Brubaker 2002:174). This is evident when looking at land theft, vandalism and other crimes within the Bethlehem community. Whether such problems are read in sectarian terms, as expressions of Muslim hostility towards Christians, in regional terms, as conflicts between recent immigrants to the region and 'old Bethlehem families' or as examples of the predatory behavior of powerful family clans, this has a real impact on boundary dynamics, on relations of trust within the Bethlehem community and on the production of internal 'others.' In Palestine, certain socio-political changes can be placed in the conjuncture between a traditional order and a state-centered legal order, and between secular nationalism and political Islam. In this context, people's framing dispositions adjust to new realities, as part of the conceptual schemes through which people make sense of the world. However, social groups and group identities are not based on discourse alone. They also take shape through people's everyday practices.

Writing about the Republic of Yemen, Lisa Wedeen analyzes the making of national attachments in a country where state institutions are weak and

incapable of controlling a demarcated territory, and where people hold multiple loyalties to tribe, region and religious groupings (Wedeen 2009:2).

Following Butler, Wedeen outlines a performative perspective on political life, where identity formation takes place through people's everyday practices, and outside the realm of formal institutions and electoral politics. In her perspective, national attachments emerge through people's pursuit of their daily activities, and national subjects are produced through the iterative performance of particular national acts.[10] In Palestine, national attachments have emerged in the absence of autonomous 'state' institutions, and in opposition to Israel and its military aggressions (Bowman 2003, Khalidi 1997). In this context, practices and gestures that signal resilience in the face of an Israeli occupation, and solidarity with victims of Israeli violence are seen as expressions of national belonging. The concept of '*sumud*' has been central to a nationalist discourse in Palestine. With time, however, the meaning of *sumud* and its manifestation through the performance of particular acts has been contested. As many Palestinians disengage from the iteration and reiteration of particular acts, new conceptions of national solidarity, manifested through other acts and practices open up.

In the wake of dramatic events, national solidarities can be invoked temporarily in the form of popular demonstrations against the Israeli authorities, or protests against the policies and performance of a Palestinian Authority whose capacities fall dismally short of nationalist aspirations. These practices converge with democratic acts in the shape of discussions of political issues in informal settings such as shops, coffee-houses, village clubs, and through national media channels that give room for deliberative practices and exchanges of conflicting opinions within a shared framework of references.

In Yemen, national attachments coalesce with Muslim pious identifications (Wedeen 2009:21) while in Palestine – long dominated by secular

10 Wedeen's emphasis on practices as performative relates to her understanding of identity. Inspired by Hanna Arendt, she sees identities as something that result from public speech and actions; that through public words and deeds, actors 'make their appearance in the world.' In Arendt's perspective, identity is not something actors control themselves. Since our actions take place in interaction with others, who we become through actions is not up to us. Rather it is 'the outcome of many intersecting and unpredictable sequences of response, so that 'nobody is the author or producer of his own lifestory.' (Arendt in: Wedeen 2009:16) This connects with the duality of practices, they are both what the outside observer can be see, and what the actors understand themselves as doing. How different practices are ascribed with meaning, and associated with different identities, is not only up to the actor, but determined through his interaction with other in his social environment (Wedeen 2009:16–19).

nationalism-religious piety was toned down relative to national attachments. However, along with the regional resurgence of Islam as a source of mobilization, among certain segments of Muslim Palestinians, new forms of belonging and identification have emerged through every-day practices and enactments of religious piety. Certain acts and practices, related to the observation of religious rituals, dress codes, and modes of social conduct have led to the production of pious Muslim selves, and the creation of boundaries between those who share such pious identifications, and those who do not. With the emergence of Islamic political movements, pious practices and forms of belonging have been related to national attachments in Palestine as well, producing an alternative Islamic nationalist project with which secular Muslims and Palestinian Christians cannot identify. While some segments of the Christian community embrace their own forms of religious piety, I focus here on every-day expressions of religious piety within certain segments of Muslim Palestinians, and the impact of these expressions in informing Christian perceptions of Muslim Palestinians. While a strengthening of religious identification has sown internal divisions, Palestinians, both Christians and Muslims are eager to project national unity across sectarian lines, within a national context, and especially to the outside world. Between projecting a positive image to the world outside, and addressing minority fears and vulnerabilities in an honest and meaningful way, local Christians find that there are clear constraints to what kinds of concerns and what kinds of sentiments they can articulate in public. As such, when talking about sectarian relations in public contexts, statements about national unity and religious harmony are repeated, and the prominence and influence of Christians in Palestine is frequently emphasized. With each public reiteration of such statements, the limits of a public discourse on sectarian relations are reinforced, and individual actors are disciplined to operate within a 'script' of national unity. At the same time, Christians enjoy great access to international media and have a strong voice within a Palestinian public realm. When able to express their concerns in a non-sectarian manner, they find that they are very capable of confronting their community concerns within a wider, Palestinian setting.

A Politics of Paralysis

While internal tensions within the Palestinian Territories can be dramatic enough, they are eclipsed by the destructive impact and dominant presence of an Israeli political-military order. Since 1967, the Palestinian communities of the West Bank and Gaza have been subject to an Israeli military occupation that has dominated Palestinian lives, and that has set the terms for any form of economic activity or mobility among Palestinians.

Following Agamben, this occupation has been partly justified through the notion of an enduring 'state of exception' (2005), that compels Israel to suspend ordinary rules and constraints on the use of military powers in relation to a Palestinian population that it defines as a lethal threat to an Israeli national body. Building on Foucault's work on biopolitics as the management of life, Agamben distinguishes between zoe, which refers to 'bare life', the state of merely being alive, and bios, the qualified life, which is accessed through the inclusion within a political community (Agamben 1998). The governance and management of life among those included within the polis necessarily imply the exclusion of those deemed unwanted, or who are seen as a threat to a community.

Within a 'mainstream' Israeli discourse, the very survival of an Israeli polis is seen as depending on its effective exclusion of Palestinians, and their confinement in areas cut off from Israel.[11] In this context, the exclusion and containment of Palestinians – away from all areas that are reserved for Israel – becomes an integral part of the Israeli biopolitics. This is largely achieved through a politics of paralysis, a set of techniques of governance that serve to paralyze and obstruct people's social lives, mobility and economic activities, and their efforts to build a functioning, coherent Palestinian polity. Among Palestinians faced with these policies, some are left with a complete sense of powerlessness, while others retain some personal agency and a capacity to make meaningful choices for themselves. They may adjust to, or try to circumvent constraints imposed by Israel, or they may choose to escape them by way of emigration. To some extent, however, Palestinians who remain on the West Bank embody the movement restrictions imposed by Israeli authorities. Through roadblocks, checkpoints and other measures, they shape Palestinians' sense of distance and mobility, and where they can feel safe. In time, they can shape Palestinian expectations about what kind of freedoms, what kind of opportunities, and what kind of constraints their everyday lives on the West Bank can offer.

11 There is a variety of contending discourses in Israel concerning the nature of the state and the place of non-Jews, primarily Muslim and Palestinian Christians, within it, ranging from the hyper-Zionist stance of Avignor Lieberman, who has called for a forcible transfer of Israels Arab citizens to the West Bank, to the Anti-zionism of Ilan Pappe, who has called for the establishment of one bi-national state in which Israelis and Palestinians share equal rights (Pappe 2008). However, the notion that a spacial exclusion and containment of Palestinian is vital to Israel's security is a central premise within Israeli public debates on national security, peace-negotiations, and Israels relationship with her Arab neighbors.

Emigration and Diaspora-relations

An Israeli military political order has created a socioeconomic reality that Palestinians find hard to reconcile with their own dreams and aspirations, and that has encouraged large-scale emigration among Palestinians. However, emigration as a response to local hardships builds on a historical tradition that goes back more than 150 years. Since its inception in the late Ottoman period, family networks have played a vital role in shaping and facilitating further emigration, and in establishing sizeable migrant communities throughout the world. As such, the dynamics of Bethlehem emigration must be explored with a focus on transnational networks and processes. Focusing on these processes enables us to see individuals as members of households and social networks that set the terms for their choices, and that are affected by their actions in return. A young man growing up in Bethlehem may well have parents and a younger sister still living in Bethlehem, while his older siblings live in Jordan, Germany, Chile and in the US. The future prospects of his parents in Bethlehem, as well as his own chances of leaving Palestine, will depend greatly on his brothers and sisters abroad: their status of residence, their financial situation, and their readiness to assist younger siblings to follow in their tracks. Family networks may determine the options available and the choices made by prospective migrants by equipping them with vital social and economic assets, and by influencing the decisions they make by communicating family hopes and expectations. Though individuals may be separated from their families through emigration, the lives they make for themselves, and the choices they make with regards to work, marriage and continued residence in their host countries are still informed by the expectations and wishes of their families at home.

While advances in communication and transportation have made the world smaller, transnationalism is not a recent phenomenon. Accounts of Bethlehem migrants and families will serve to illustrate how in this as in other settings, transnational networks have evolved and existed through periods that span generations. Through migration and the emergence of transnational networks, Bethlehem has become a point of reference for sizable diaspora communities. Though the term has been stretched in different directions (Anthias 1998, Brubaker 2005), 'diaspora' usually refers to groups of people who have been dispersed from a place of origin to at least two other locations, who retain an orientation to, and a sense of longing for, a real or imagined 'homeland,' and who maintain cultural boundaries in relation to their host communities (Safran 1991). Brubaker suggests that we should think of diaspora not as a bounded entity, but as a stance or a claim (Brubaker 2005:13).

A diasporic claim can involve a self-asserted right to represent one's home community in a host country, or to represent a diaspora network in relation to one's home community. In the case of Palestine, there are many examples of expatriate Palestinians who make an effort to communicate Palestinian frustrations and national aspirations in their host communities. There also exist diaspora organizations and individuals who demand a say in Palestinian politics, and in the decisions being made by the Palestinian Authority in relation to Israel. However, such claims can go both ways. I propose that a reversal of Brubaker's notion of diaspora claims in the form of 'homeland claims' towards the diaspora offers a starting point for exploring the role of a Bethlehem diaspora within a local discourse of migration and the relationship between the diaspora and its home community.

Diaspora studies often identify essentialist projections of 'the homeland' as a central source of identity construction in diaspora communities (Anthias 1998, Cohen 2008). In the case of Palestine – as well as other communities where large-scale dispersion is part of a national narrative – essentialist projections go in both directions. Within the Bethlehem community, people have engaged in an essentialist construction of a Bethlehem diaspora highlighting stories of the economic success and professional accomplishments of Bethlehem migrants. By projecting qualities such as creativity and industriousness onto their diaspora, steadfast Palestinians ascribed similar qualities to themselves, as 'inherent' qualities whose manifestations are aborted within the context of occupation. In this way the story of migrant success becomes the story of local deprivation. Notions of migrant success and accomplishment also give grounds for hopes of financial help and assistance to those who have stayed behind. At community level, such expectation can take the form of normative demands from the home community towards the diaspora. When they remain unrealized, such demands can be a source of disappointment and tensions between the Bethlehem community and its diaspora networks. Nonetheless, the tales of emigrant success, and the vastness of a Bethlehem diaspora, especially in Chile, are retold with such regularity that they take on a performative quality; with each repeated statement about the size of their diaspora, and the success of their emigrants, the position of the home community is further decentralized within a 'global Bethlehem community', the sense of deprivation within the home community is further entrenched, and emigration is elevated as the preferred and normal life choice among Bethlehem Christians.

Navigating Multiple Fields

These are some of the processes and settings in which Bethlehem Christians must maneuver; within patriarchal family clans challenged by individualist

tendencies; in a society torn between the rule of family clans and a 'state-based' legal order; a national community split between conflicting ideologies, under the yoke of an Israeli military order designed to paralyze and suspend people's lives; and as member of a minority community decimated by migration and spread abroad through transnational migrants networks. These are the fields in which they must navigate and make their choices – as individual actors and as families – in pursuit of different goals. At the same time, the circumstances in which they make their choices, and the ways in which they ascribe meaning to their actions are shaped through several long-term processes of structural change.

The Special Case of Christians in Palestine

The situation of Christians in Palestine differ dramatically from that of Arab Christians elsewhere because of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Palestinian Christians are part of a community whose nationalist aspirations have been negated with the realization and continued expansion of another national project; that of the Israeli State. With collective narratives of loss and dispossession, and the continued occupation of their land, Palestinians self-conceptions and everyday realities are structured by an unresolved conflict in which they, as a national community, are the losing party.

The hardships, humiliations and injustices of living under occupation dominate the everyday lives of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank. These are experiences they share with their Muslim neighbors, and that overshadow any fears or discomforts that stems from their experiences as members of a religious minority in Palestine.

At the same time, the situation of Christians in Palestine has many similarities to that of Arab Christians in other parts of the Middle East. Countries like Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan are all home to Christian communities that predated the advent of Islam. Today however, these communities constitute religious minorities in predominantly Muslim countries. Throughout the region, Arab Christians have held a central role in articulating modern national identities, in opposition both to Ottoman and European rule, while at the same time having their loyalties, and their position within Arab societies questioned. Their historical experiences have included discrimination and persecution at the hands of more powerful forces, combined with great achievements in the fields of culture, trade and education.

Among the Christians of Palestine, these contradictions have been especially dramatic. In Palestine, Christianity not only predates Islam. This is where

it started, and local Christians see themselves as descendants of the very first Christians. At the same time, due to a history of large-scale migration, their local presence today constitutes little more than one percent of the population in Palestine.

Since the early 1900s, Palestinian Christians have been at the forefront in fighting for Palestinian self-determination in opposition to Ottoman, British and Israeli rule, and in articulating a secular Palestinian nationalism. At the same time, their commitment to a Palestinian national cause has been questioned, and their position within a Palestinian nation has been challenged with the emergence of an Islamic national project as represented by Hamas. Living under Israeli occupation, they find themselves subject to stifling regulations that dramatically limit their movements and activities in the West Bank. By contrast, extensive migrant family networks in the diaspora represent windows of opportunity to move across borders and create new lives for themselves in other parts of the world.

The case of Christians in Palestine offers lessons of wider relevance about the inclusion of minorities in modern nation-building, the experience of religio-political mobilization as seen from the sidelines, and the impact of large-scale emigration on majority-minority relations and boundary processes at home. In addition, the story of Christians in Palestine teaches us about the impact of family relations in enabling emigration to other part of the world, and in structuring relations between the home-community and the diaspora.

Most of all, their story offers lessons in the assertion of personal agency in contexts of tremendous constraints and social pressures – within their families and local communities, within Palestinian national community, and under the yoke of foreign military rule. Throughout the following chapters, I will explore how Palestinian Christians, as individuals and as families, seek out pockets of agency within various social fields, and in doing do, shape and reshape the social realities in which they live.

CHAPTER 1

Bethlehem between Tradition and Modernity

This chapter explores family structures and gender relation in a changing Bethlehem community. For the most part, Bethlehem Christians take pride in their Arab cultural heritage and traditional way of life. This heritage includes, among other things a patriarchal family structure, conceptions of collective family honor, and a focus on hospitality and generosity as central virtues. In particular, the patriarchal family structure, in which family ties carry great weight, and where authority is centered in the hands of senior males enjoys widespread support within the community.

At the same time, many young people long for greater social freedom, and a greater level of personal autonomy, especially concerning marriage arrangements and choice of marriage partners. This chapter will explore the issue of marriage arrangements as a field of contention in a community torn between the weight of local traditions and powerful forces for change.

Marriage and Family Relations

Within the Christian communities of the Bethlehem area, individuals have challenged the social constraints embedded in patriarchal family structures, marriage practices and rules of everyday conduct. At the same time, these communities have faced external challenges that have been a source of vulnerability, insecurity and internal fragmentation. These challenges have included the infusion of people from other parts of Palestine as a result of warfare and internal migration, a stifling Israeli occupation, centuries of contact with the outside world and exposure to Western cultural influence through emigration and homeland-diaspora connections, and the emergence of political Islam as a challenge to secular ideologies. Confronting challenges that have profoundly changed people's lives, family and village networks become arenas in which Palestinian Christians try to maintain a sense of control of their own lives and their own community.

Since the late 1970s, anthropologists have rejected a naturalistic conception of traditions as referring to a body of unchanging traits and practices handed down from the past (Handler and Linnekin 1984), instead arguing for an understanding of traditions as symbolic processes through which the past is constructed, interpreted and attributed with meaning in the present. In line with

 | DOI 10.1163/9789004276390_003

this reasoning, anthropologists have written about 'traditions' as invented or constructed practices, emphasizing their role in reinforcing social ties and collective identities within groups of people, as a means of legitimizing institutions and social hierarchies, and boosting claims of cultural authenticity and continuity with the past (Hobsbawm 2012, Keesing and Tonkinson 1982). Among Bethlehem Christians, patriarchal family structures, and the social practices and authority relationships connected with these structures, are regarded as part of a traditional culture through which people characterize their own past, and claim a sense of connection with the past in a contemporary reality characterized with dramatic changes and social upheavals. In this context, patriarchal family structures and traditional norms can serve as vehicles through which social control and authority can be asserted within the Christian communities of Bethlehem. In addition, these structures can be a source of unity, moral strength, and social boundaries vis-à-vis other groups within the Palestinian community. As such, the defense of patriarchal family structures and traditional norms is central to processes of group formation among the Christians of Bethlehem. At the same time, the constraints and uncertainties that characterize Palestinian lives may encourage individuals to claim a sense of personal agency by liberating themselves from traditional norms.

Patriarchy

Studies from Palestine and other parts of the Middle East tend to emphasize the cultural primacy and persistence of patriarchy (Abu-Lughod 1989, Rubenberg 2001). In line with Suad Joseph, I understand patriarchy as 'the dominance of males over females and elders over juniors (males and females) and the mobilization of kinship structures, morality and idioms to institutionalize and legitimize these forms of power' (Joseph 1993:459). With reference to traditional notions of honor and shame, special emphasis is often put on the ways in which women in particular are socially monitored and disciplined in accordance with the prevailing norms of their communities (Abu-Lughod 1989, Rubenberg 2001). However, patriarchy is not reproduced only through means of social coercion and discipline. Suad Joseph emphasizes the importance of connectivity in the reproduction of patriarchal family structures (Joseph 1993, 1994). By connectivity she refers to 'relationships in which a person's boundaries are relatively fluid, so that persons feel a part of significant others' (Joseph 1993:452). This concept relies on culturally contextualized and relationally oriented constructs of the self, which contrast with

Western constructs of the self, where relationality has been treated as a dysfunctional trait.

Based on fieldwork among Arab families in Lebanon, she argues that connectivity is intertwined with patriarchy to produce 'patriarchal connectivity'. She defines patriarchal connectivity as 'the production of selves with fluid boundaries organized for gendered and aged domination in a culture valorising kin structures, morality and idioms' (Joseph 1999:12). Connectivity supports patriarchal power by crafting selves that respond and are socialized to initiate involvement with others in shaping the self, while patriarchy helps reproduce connectivity by 'crafting males and seniors prepared to direct the lives of females and juniors, and females and juniors prepared to respond to the direction of males and seniors' (Joseph 1999:13).

Patriarchy has operated effectively in part because both men and women have been socialized to view themselves relationally. Within this framework the connective patriarch may view his wife, sisters, junior siblings and children as extensions of himself. He may speak for them, make decisions for them, read and expect to be read by them (Joseph 1999:13). Joseph cautions that within these dynamics, individuals retain a distinctive initiative and agency. Though deeply embedded on connective relationships, individuals do have their own dreams, desires, and concerns that are separate from those held by close family members, and that in various ways inform their behavior. While patterns of connectivity play a central role in the reproduction of patriarchy, so do individual concerns with protecting one's social standing within the community, and the comfort and security of maintaining good family relationships. However, in some situations, individuals can maintain interests and desires that conflict sharply with those of close family members with whom they hold connective relationships. In such situations, the actions of individuals may be shaped in a dialectic tension between relational concerns and individual interests that make room for both continuity and change within patriarchal family structures.

When individual desires conflict with the wishes of family authorities, relational connectivity can help to moderate conflicts by sensitizing the parties involved to the concerns of close family members. In addition, people's actions in the field of marriage relations are also informed by the embodied dispositions to think, feel and behave in certain ways, in accordance with the norms of a patriarchal social order. Following Butler, this order is reproduced through the performance of certain acts and practices that confirm subordination to family authority. As such, the performance of alternative acts that deviate from the script of expected behavior, especially within the field of marriage arrangements can represent a challenge to patriarchal norms. Marriage is an

institution through which family reproduction and the continuation of family-lineages are secured, and within which social alliances and ties between different families are established. To a great extent, the social standing of a family relies on the marriage unions in which its members are embedded, and on the orderly arrangements of such marriages.

In this chapter, I explore how tensions between relational and individual concerns can inform the actions of individuals, and allow for a continuous renegotiation of social practices within the field of marriage arrangements. I draw on Joseph's relational approach and her notion of patriarchal connectivity to explore how patriarchal structures are reproduced in ways that make room for both continuity and change, and that allow for some forms of rebellion without threatening the patriarchal order itself. I also lean on Butler in exploring the impact of everyday acts and practices in reinforcing as well as shaking up the norms of gendered behavior in the context of marriage. Before this, I briefly discuss the family structures and history of Bethlehem Christians, as described by other researchers, and the role of family affiliations in structuring people's lives.

Family Structures in Palestine

The Christian communities of Bethlehem are traditional communities, and historically, social ties within these communities were partly structured around family clans referred to as '*hamula*' (*pl. hamayil*) or *'hara'* (*pl. haraat*) in more urbanized communities, as 'hara' refers to spatially demarcated town quarters. The *hamula* is a patronymic family clan, uniting a cluster of families based on assumptions of shared genealogical origins. *Hamula* identity is mainly based on patrilineal kinship (Rothenberg 1998). Traditionally, the *hamula* could be a basis for political mobilization and military defense (Robinson 2009), as well as settlement patterns, distribution of pasture or farming land or marriage alliances (Granqvist 1975). Research has revealed that the *hamula* is a dynamic structure, subject to manipulation and fission into smaller clans, and that its social functions and significance can adapt to changing social circumstances (Rothenberg 1998).

It is believed that Bethlehem has had a small but continuous Christian settlement for almost two thousand years. From the late sixteenth century onwards, Christians from other rural villages in the region started migrating to Bethlehem, making it a Christian stronghold in the area. In Bethlehem and Beit Jala, people settled in specific quarters or 'Haraat'. Each Hara was a cluster of houses built around a courtyard, which became a meeting point and

workplace for the families that lived there. In the seventeenth century, Bethlehem was consolidated as a small town, with six Christian quarters being built with the Church of the Nativity as a point of reference. These quarters were Farahiyyah, Najajrah, Anatrah, Qawawseh, Hraizat and Tarajmeh (Arab Educational Institute 1999). In the course of time, the families that lived within each quarter came to be perceived as belonging to the same family clan. A Muslim quarter was constructed at the end of the eighteenth century to provide housing for Fawaghreh, a Muslim family clan that had emigrated from a village near Hebron. In Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour people are still identified in accordance with their family affiliation.

Today, *hamula* ties have little operational relevance in these communities, but each *hamula* consists of several extended families or sub-clans, and such families, referred to as *'aeeilah'*, still constitute one's primary base of social support. In Beit Sahour in particular, individuals are strongly identified with their wider family groups, and individuals display pride in and elaborate knowledge of their own family origins. Beit Sahour is home to some 15 000 people, and it is located two kilometers east and downhill from the old city of Bethlehem, on the plains that mark the border with the Judean desert. In biblical times, the area had few or no permanent residents, but was mostly used as agricultural land or as pasture for the livestock held by local Bedouins. The Shepherds Field, the biblical scene where angels were said to have announced the birth of Jesus to a group of local sheperds, is assumed to be located in this town.

In the fourteenth century, the area was settled by a few families from Wadi Moussa in Jordan. They established the first known permanent settlements in what is today the town center of Beit Sahour. These were both Christian and Muslim families that worked as shepherds and farmers for Bethlehem families that owned the land of Beit Sahour at that time. The Christian family clan Jaraisa and the Muslim clans Shaybat and Jubran trace their origins back to these original residents of Beit Sahour.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, new groups of people came from Wadi Moussa. New immigrants from Egypt arrived around the same time and settled in Beit Sahour. These new immigrants from Jordan and Egypt were mostly Christians belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church. This influx of new immigrants gave Beit Sahour a clear profile as a predominantly Christian village, although with a sizeable Muslim community.[1] Today, the town of Beit Sahour is home to five family clans or *hamula*; three Christian and two Muslim.

1 Information on the early history of Beit Sahour and the families living there, is based on oral accounts from older Sahouris, and some from translations from a book entitled 'The families of Beit Sahour', by Musa Bannura, published in Arabic in 1976.

Of the Christian clans, the oldest and smallest one is the Jaraisa clan with an estimated 900 members divided among five smaller families. Originally, the Jaraisa clan belonged to the Orthodox Church, but in the late nineteenth Century the entire clan converted and has since belonged to the Latin Church of the village.

The biggest Christian clan is Al-Qassaha, which is assumed to have more than 3500 members still living in Beit Sahour, divided into twelve families. Members of the Qassaha-clan originated mainly from the latest wave of immigration from Wadi Moussa in Jordan (Robinson 1997:71–72). The Qassaha families all belong to the Greek Orthodox Church. However, a small cluster of Qassaha families have broken away and established a clan of their own, referred to as Ooda. These families belong mainly to the Greek Catholic Church, and are believed to have close to a thousand people in Beit Sahour.

The last Christian clan is Al-Marajda, which has more than 2500 members, divided into eleven families. The Al-Marajda families are said to originate from the families that came from the village of Rushda in Upper Egypt in the early eighteenth century (Robinson 1997:72). Under the Israeli occupation, and with the emergence of local movements of resistance to the occupation, popular neighborhood committees came to a certain extent to replace the family group as the organizing unit of the village and to undermine traditional authority figures who held prominent positions within the structures of the family clans. This tendency grew even stronger during the First Intifada, and with the launching of local resistance campaigns implemented through neighborhood committees (Bowman 2001:52).

Traditionally, until the mid-1900s, agriculture was an important source of livelihood, along with tourism-related enterprises such as olive-wood and mother-of-pearl carvings. Agriculture has since been replaced by employment in health clinics, private schools and other institutions run by the many churches of the Bethlehem area. After 1967, many Sahouris found work in Israel, mainly in construction and in the service sector. In Beit Sahour itself, a great number of retail workshops were established, providing the local population with work manufacturing garments for the Israeli clothing industry. The move away from agriculture served to weaken the importance of family membership, as people no longer depended on access to land through their families as a source of livelihood. However, in spite of all these changes, family clans and their authority structures are still a central part of the social order among Palestinian Christians in the Bethlehem area.

Like other Arab communities, the Christian communities of Bethlehem are structured around a patriarchal order. Within local communities, this order privileges seniority and patrilineal ties and grants extensive authority to the male heads of each family. Traditionally, each family group had a family

council, consisting of a group of men – often led by a Mukhtar, an appointed leader of the family, to which other members of the family would turn if they were in trouble, financial or otherwise, or if there were problems within the family. In the case of conflicts between members of two different families, male representatives of the families would meet and try to work out some agreement. A few generations ago, settlement patterns were entirely determined by family relationships, and all the members of a family group would live close to each other, within a small area. All this changed in the course of the twentieth century. Families in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour that left the country sold their land to other families, and with the drift away from agriculture, people would build new houses on land that used to be cultivated, thus the settled parts of the towns gradually expanded. Today, most families have houses in different parts of these towns, but they usually still live in clusters of three or more closely related nuclear families.

A few generations ago, young people would be expected to marry within their own *hamula*, and certainly within their own church community. Today, such demands are no longer common. Young people have greater freedom to choose their own partners, and the social divides along *hamula* and sectarian lines are less significant today. In addition, a better understanding of the potential medical consequences of marrying close relatives has changed people's attitudes to marriages within the families. Today, one of few remnants of a community ordered strictly along *hamula* lines is the seating arrangements in the Orthodox Church of Beit Sahour. During Mass, the left-hand side of the church is reserved for members of the Marajda families, while the right-hand side is reserved for the Qassaha families.

Marriage Arrangements in Palestine

In studies of Palestine, marriage is often described as arranged and facilitated by families, and formally requiring the consent of the parties involved. However, studies have also shown that marriage arrangements in Palestinian communities often include strong elements of coercion (Rubenberg 2001, Ruggi 1998). Among the Christians of Bethlehem – as elsewhere in Palestine – marriage is very much a family affair. When talking about marriage arrangements within the community, people stress that a marriage is a union between two families, and a strengthening of ties between extended family groups.[2]

2 The extended family groups referred to in this case constitute sub-sections of different *hamula* – usually defined as patrynomic family clans within the Palestinian community (Rothenberg 1998).

The wedding is considered the most important social event in people's lives, and traditional wedding celebrations in Beit Sahour include three or four parties held at a banquet hall (Appendix 4), of which the biggest are attended by between 500 and 800 guests. The work and expenses involved are significant, though some of these expenses are balanced out by monetary gifts given to the couple getting married. These celebrations depend on the mobilization and full support of both the family groups involved. This makes it all the more important, at social, financial and practical levels, that the marriage union should be blessed by both the families involved. The wedding celebrations are supposed to demonstrate the social standing of the families involved, as well as the full support of the wider family groups that they belong to.

As already mentioned, the Bethlehem community has a long history of emigration and exposure to outside influence, through European-run missionary schools, western tourism and migrant relatives who have returned from the diaspora. As such, this is a community that is very familiar with notions of individual freedom, self-assertion and romantic love. Local Christians emphasize their relative openness to such ideals as a mark of difference between themselves and their Muslim neighbors. With reference to family and gender relationships, they like to see themselves as modern, tolerant, and open to progressive changes.[3] At the same time, most members of this community take pride in their Arab heritage, and hold on to certain traits and cultural traditions that they wish to protect against 'Western' influence and what many see as a destructive, one-sided focus on individual freedom and pursuit of happiness. In particular, traditional honor codes that connect family honor with women's behavior still hold some traction within the community. To a great extent, a family's honor is determined by the respectability of its daughters, which can be irreparably damaged by the perceived misuse of their sexuality (Rubenberg 2001, Ruggi 1998). The family's honor depends on a woman's virginity, which must remain intact until she marries. At community level, such ideals create strong incitements for the restriction of social freedoms and the close monitoring of young men and women's public behavior, as well as a cultural preference for marriage at an early age, all of which are mechanisms assumed to minimize potential threats to a woman's respectability and thus to her family's honor.

3 Defining themselves internally in opposition to their Muslim neigbours, Palestinian Christians often apply dicotomies usually associated with Western orientalism, describing themselves as modern, enlightened and change-oriented in contrast to a conservative, intolerant, backwards-thinking Muslim majority.

Only a few generations ago, young women usually married between the ages of 15 and 18, while young men got married whenever they could provide the means to support a family, preferably in their early twenties. With regards to the issue of marriage, some things have changed in the course of the past two or three generations. Young Christian men are still expected to get married, preferably before they turn thirty, while girls are expected to get married in their early twenties, and at least before they turn 25. Passing these ages without getting married is a cause of great concern within their families, who often put great pressure on their unmarried sons and daughters.

Amer

Amer is 27, unmarried, and lives with his family in Beit Sahour. He has a steady job, belongs to a big family of good standing, and he enjoys a good reputation as a hard-working and respectable young man. He is a seasoned activist in one of the left-wing political factions, and he has a large circle of friends within the Bethlehem community. He is single and quite happy about it, and he has told his family that he has no desire to get married any time soon. Nonetheless, since turning 24 he has started to face growing pressure from members of his extended family. At weddings, relatives would pull him aside and introduce him to girls from outside the family that they considered to be good matches for him. At first, this only happened occasionally, and it would be done in a discreet manner, allowing him an easy exit from the encounter. In the past two years, however, these encounters have been more frequent, and his relatives have become increasingly aggressive in setting him up with 'suitable brides'. Some of his relatives have also grown increasingly blunt, often saying in clear terms that they are worried for him, and that it is about time for him to get married and start a family of his own. This has reached the point where Amer dreads the idea of attending family weddings. At 27 he still does not feel ready to settle down and get married, and he is not comfortable with the idea of letting his family find a bride for him. He also dreams about spending a few years studying or working in Europe before settling down for good in Beit Sahour, and he does not want to be tied down before he gets to do that.

Amer's position is a rather privileged one. He is regarded as an eligible bachelor and a charming young man and, according to his peers, he should not have any problem finding a local bride if he wants to. There are other young men who wish to get married but are unemployed, or for other reasons, lack the means and the financial prospects to be thought of as reliable family providers within the local community. Most local girls would be reluctant to marry a man without a reasonably steady job, who could not provide a house for the two of them, separate from the household of his parents. More importantly,

few families will allow their girls to marry men with poor financial prospects. Even with good financial prospects, other points of uncertainty such as the lack of a Palestinian ID may ruin your prospects for marriage.

Girls who stay single well into their twenties have problems of a different kind. Like their male peers, they may enjoy staying single for a few years, putting off the idea of getting married. However, if they do, they run the risk of being sidelined by girls in their late teens or early twenties who are eager to get married early, and who appear to be far more popular among men on the lookout for a wife.

Amali and Maryam are 26 and 29 years old but are both unmarried and live in their parents' houses in Bethlehem. They both work at a local radio station, a job they enjoy and one which puts them in touch with many people in the local community. They take care of their appearance, making sure that their hair and make-up is just the way they want it, and that their clothes are smart and appropriate for any occasion. They have both reached a point where they are more than ready to get married and start their own families, but as Amali sees it, their prospects are bleak:

> This is an Arab community. The men can wait until they are older before they get married, but we cannot. Most of the men here want young girls who can stay at home and take care of their children. Even if the men are 30 years or older, even if they are well educated and open-minded, they prefer to marry girls who are 20 years old. And in this society they can.

Amali and Maryam find the whole situation very frustrating, and they are both worried about their own prospects for finding a husband. According to Maryam, this problem is exacerbated by the fact that men can go abroad all by themselves and find non-Arab spouses, while these same freedoms are rarely permitted to women. While plenty of male emigrants return to Bethlehem with Western wives, it is much less common for Christian women in the Bethlehem area to be allowed to marry non-Arab men.

A Loosening of Marriage Restrictions

Though Bethlehem Christians are reluctant to see their women marrying outside their community, there is one area in which restrictions have loosened. The Christians of the West Bank are divided between eight different sectarian communities, of which the Greek Orthodox and the Roman Catholic are the largest (Sabella 1999). Until the 1960s, marriage across sectarian divides, such as between members of the Orthodox and the Catholic communities, was not socially accepted. According to older people within the community, this taboo

started to break down in the late 1950s when a few Orthodox-Catholic couples married in Beit Sahour, provoking strong reactions within the local community. At first, such unions would be grudgingly accepted by the family of the bride, as she, according to local traditions, would be the one who would leave her church, and join the church community of her husband. Within a few decades, such marriages grew more and more common and are, today, considered unproblematic by most families (Bowman 2001:58, 78).

Thus today, people can marry across sectarian boundaries, and brides are not obliged to abandon their family church completely, even if they change their formal affiliation. In many such cases, when the women have a strong attachment to their own church, some families attend both Catholic and Orthodox Church services, allowing their children to grow familiar with both communities and remaining on good terms with parish priests and congregations in both churches. Within a Christian community that has been seriously depleted through emigration, it can be argued that the acceptance of intersectarian marriages have become a necessary adjustment to demographic realities. Nonetheless, the acceptance of such marriages, and the ways in which this has come about, reflects a gradual process whereby social boundaries between members of different Christian denominations have lost their force, allowing for a sharper focus on a shared identity as Christians, including members of the different religious communities. There have been other changes as well. The social rules by which young people get to know each other and by which marriage unions are established, have evolved significantly, affecting the role and influence of family networks in controlling marriage decisions.

According to older members of the Christian communities in the Bethlehem area, interaction between young boys and girls was far more restricted in their days, with few arenas in which boys and girls could interact without being monitored by close members of their families, and risk being 'talked' about within the local community. Even today, 'village talk' is a powerful disciplining mechanism, and among the Christians of the Bethlehem area, rumors spread with great speed. In Beit Sahour, there is a joke that the reason that the angels came to Beit Sahour to announce the birth of Jesus to a group of shepherds was because they knew that Sahouris talk a lot, and that the news would travel fast!

In this context, young girls in particular are vulnerable to 'village gossip' and it is vital that they do not behave in ways that may give grounds for village talk and the emergence of rumours. Gossip and rumours about romantic relationships can have a devastating effect on a girl's reputation. If a girl's respectability can be questioned, this ruins her status on the 'marriage market' and, by extension, harm her family's reputation. These mechanisms deter young girls from behaving in ways that conflict with local norms of respectability. Within this

framework, young people have depended to a certain extent on their family networks to find suitable partners and facilitate their marriages. Traditionally, marriages have been arranged by the families of the young people involved, sometimes based on a young man's expressed interest in a girl, sometimes on the basis of notions among the family's women that the two could make a good match. In the last two generations, as the norms of interaction between young men and women have been relaxed, young people have met at cafés and in other public settings and marriage unions have increasingly been initiated by the couple themselves, weakening the control of the family. As young people have expressed a mutual interest and confronted their families with their own choices of partners, it has happened that their choices have not been approved by their own families. Traditionally, in cases when a young man's preferred bride was not approved of by his family, or if the suitor was not found suitable by the girl's family, that would be the end of the story. They would both accept the decision of their families, let go of each other, and wait until they met someone who would be approved of by their families.

Challenging Family Authority

Once in a while, there have been cases in which young people have refused to accept their family's decisions and have married by elopement. In most cases this is the only way a young couple can marry without the full blessing of their families. Whenever something like this occurred, the girl involved would usually be ostracized by her family, and her elopement would leave a dark stain on her family's reputation within the local community. For the man's family, such a rebellion against family authority would be seen as far less dramatic. In the past two decades, people say it has grown more common for young people to challenge the authority of their fathers and refuse to abide by their decisions and in some such cases, a family that is reluctant to accept its child's chosen partner may come around after a year or two, and the couple will be allowed to marry. In such cases, the persistence of the bride and groom in standing up to their families is seen as a token of genuine affection.

John and Luma

In 1999, John, a young man from Beit Sahour met and fell in love with Luma, a young woman from Bethlehem. Two years later, the two of them wanted to get married. John knew that he would find it difficult to win his family's acceptance for their marriage. The couple had a turbulent and unusual story, and the

woman had a story of her own that his family would find hard to accept. Sixteen years earlier, in 1985, when they were both 13, they attended the same school in Bethlehem. They fell in love and started meeting in secret. After nearly two years, their families found out about their relationship, and there was a big drama. Luma was transferred to another school, and the two of them fell out of touch. A few years later, in 1992 they met again, and started seeing each other. After a short period, they broke up after a big fight, and lost contact with each other.

In 1993 Luma went to Chile, where she had family and legal residency, and she married a man from Santiago. She became pregnant shortly after their wedding, but her marriage lasted only a few months. While pregnant, and on her own again, she returned to Palestine, where her daughter Dana was born in Bethlehem in 1995. In 2000, when John told his family that he wanted to marry Luma, she was a 28-year-old single mother with a 5-year-old daughter from an earlier marriage. On top of that, Luma and her daughter did not have a legal right to residence in Palestine. John's father was very clear in his rejection of Luma. In his eyes, she was not a proper woman, and certainly not a worthy wife for his oldest son. It would be a disgrace for the family if John married a divorcee who had a child from an earlier marriage, and his father was not willing to accept that. John was prepared for these reactions, but he was also determined to win his family's acceptance for his decision. Having fought with his family for a few months, John told his father that if the family did not accept his choice, he and Luma would go ahead and get married without the family's approval. Realizing that John was not willing to let go of Luma and that such a marriage would be a far greater disgrace for the family, his father eventually caved in and gave John and Luma his blessing. In early 2002 they were married with the support of his entire family, and Luma was soon accepted as a full member of the family.

John's story is a rare one, but it does illustrate the lengths to which young people can sometimes extend their own freedoms in ways that challenge local norms and cultural ideals. In a community in which divorce is regarded as almost unforgivable, and where a young man's bride is supposed to be a virgin without any prior history, Luma was seen as an unacceptable choice of partner. John's triumph in pushing through his own will also illustrates another important point: If the family disapproves of one's chosen partner, it is usually easier for a young man to impose his will than it is for a girl. John emphasized this himself, pointing out that he could hardly imagine any of his sisters getting away with the kind of rebellion that he himself had committed. Young men and women are all expected to honor and respect the authority of their parents. However, if a man challenges his father's authority, this can be seen as an

assertion of masculine autonomy that can be met with some understanding. If a girl tries the same, it is a far more serious offence.

Mary

Nonetheless, some girls do rebel against patriarchal authority, and against their family's veto on whom they can marry. Mary, a young girl from Bethlehem was 20 when she met Joseph, a young man from one of Bethlehem's neighboring towns. The two of them fell in love and, after a few months, Joseph approached her father to ask for her hand in marriage. Much to her despair, her father rejected his proposal, and told his daughter to refrain from having any more contact with Joseph.

According to local norms, Mary was expected to accept her father's decision on this matter. Instead, she openly defied his authority, and refused to accept his decision. As she saw it, her father had rejected Joseph because he belonged to a family of low social standing. While this mattered greatly to her family, Joseph was still the man she wanted to marry. She did not recognize her father's right to decide whom she should be allowed to marry, and she did not accept the grounds on which he had made his decision. This was her personal position, and one that she also articulated and advocated in more principled terms. As she saw it, she was an adult, and her father simply did not have the right to control her life in this way. When confronting her father and other members of the family, she would emphasize the fact that she held a steady job with a decent salary in Bethlehem. She made the case that she was economically self-sufficient, and that this should strengthen her claim to make her own decisions and live her life as she wanted to. To her family, her financial situation was of little relevance in this matter. She still lived at home, she was still her father's daughter and it was her duty to honor his authority. After a period of trying to convince her family to accept Joseph, the two of them eventually ran off and got married in haste, much to her family's despair.

Mary's story points to the impact of economic relations in relation to patriarchal authority. Traditionally, young Palestinians, and women in particular have depended on their families for their economic survival. Young men have accessed jobs and land rights through their own families, while women have taken care of their children, farmed family land, and taken part in running family businesses. For young women to gain financial independence though wage labor independent from their families is a relatively new phenomenon, one that may in time serve to undermine the firm grip of patriarchal authority on young people's lives.

After 2000 a number of young couples in the Bethlehem-area got married without the support of their own families. In most of these cases, the couples

eloped and married without their families knowledge. Some of these marriages were mixed marriages between Muslim men and Christian girls. In general, such marriages are not accepted within the area, and Christian girls who marry Muslim men are widely regarded as betraying their communal group. The families of the girls involved are stained with irreparable shame, as their daughters have violated a fundamental taboo of the community. Faced with the threat of mortal retribution, such couples often run away to settle in an area beyond the reach of the girl's family, or they may leave the country alltogether.

In other cases of elopement, the parties involved have both been Christians. Although such cases are a tremendous embarrassment to the families of the girls, they are much less serious than those cases in which the groom is Muslim. In the case of Christian couples running away together, the man has usually been dismissed by the girl's family because he is regarded as being too poor, uneducated or unreliable, or because he belongs to a family of poor standing. In such cases, the woman who elopes may be ostracized by her own family and face social condemnation within the local community. But such reactions tend to wear off, and after a few months or a year or two, depending on the circumstances of their elopement, the girl and her husband may be able to make peace with her family. A perceived increase in the number of elopements has caused of some alarm among the Christians of Bethlehem. Some people point to such cases as proof of a moral deterioration within the community, and a weakened respect for family and parental authority among the younger generation.

The Burden of Authority

Amid perceptions that a patriarchal family system is being challenged, young people, and especially young women may face great pressure to conform to traditional norms, and respect the commands of their parents. At the same time, great pressure is placed on male family heads to enforce their patriarchal authority in a forceful manner, and ensure that their children, and in particular their daughters behave in accordance with local norms. Failure to do so may lead to severe social sanctions, not only against a rebellious daughter but also against the male head of her family.

A dramatic example was seen in Beit Sahour in the late 1990s. A young Christian girl fell in love with a man from a Muslim family. He was a well-mannered man with steady job, who belonged to a family of good standing. The girl was determined to marry this man, and her father, an open-minded

man decided it was better to accept this union rather than face the public humiliation of an elopement as well. However, the girl belonged to a greater family, an *aeeilah* that included between 120 and 150 families, and the senior family heads of the greater family did not share her father's open-mindedness.

In their view, this marriage brought shame upon the entire family and, in allowing it to happen, her father had failed to uphold his responsibility as the head of the family. Shortly after the wedding had taken place, the most senior heads of the family convened for a family council. In an effort to set an example, and to contain the social damage caused by this marriage union, the family council made a decision to 'expel' the girls' father from the greater family group and, by extension, his nuclear family. Among other things, this meant that the family was excluded from attending family events such as weddings, funerals, and big anniversaries, and that no other members of the wider family would attend social gatherings organized by the father himself, such as the future weddings of his other children. Most importantly, being expelled from the greater family involves being deprived of the social protection and access to financial support that comes from being a part of a wider family clan.

Though rarely used, such sanctions send a strong message to male family heads about their responsibility to enforce their patriarchal authority, and to do so in accordance with local norms. In spite of this, some family heads enforce their authority in ways that challenge the community consensus in these matters.

Jilal is a family father who faced the nightmare of seeing his daughter rebel by marrying a man he did not approve of. Her elopement became a very public event, in which her whole extended family was mobilized to search for her. In the immediate shock of learning about her elopement, senior members of the greater family declared that she was 'dead' to them, and that no member of the family would have any contact with her. As mentioned earlier, in cases of elopement, the girl is usually ostracized from her own family, at least for a few years.

In this case, however, Jilal went through a process of retrospection in the weeks following his daughter's elopement. He felt that he could have handled the situation better, and realizing how committed his daughter was to be with this man, he felt that maybe he should have allowed her to marry him. A month after the elopement, and after a few attempts by friends from outside the family to mediate, Jilal was ready to reconcile with his daughter. Within his greater family, some of the other family heads were already unhappy about how he had handled the situation. They blamed him partly for failing to control his family, enabling his daughter to elope in the first place. To them, allowing Jilal's daughter to be reconciled with the family would send the wrong message: that

rebelling against the family barely has any cost. Jilal knew that his decision would be unpopular, and felt that he had to confront this situation head on. A few days after meeting with his daughter, he called for a meeting with the male heads of the extended family, where he made the case for his new position and talked them into accepting his decision – to forgive his daughter, and to welcome her back into the fold of the family. The rest of the family was stunned. With such a dramatic turnabout so soon after her daughter's elopement, he could have risked being disowned by his extended family, but after some discussion, they agreed to support his decision. A few weeks later, Jilal's daughter and her new husband were invited to the engagement party of a cousin on her father's side.

With a risky maneuvre, Jilal had stretched the boundaries for how much lenience you can show to your own children, and he had done so without losing his social standing within the community. Prior to his daughters elopement, Jilal had enjoyed great respect within the community, and held a natural position of informal authority within the family. This may have enabled him to publicly reconcile with his daughter and get away with it, in a way that would have been difficult for other senior members of his family.

The issue of marriage by elopement points to enduring tensions between tradition and change, between an ethos that highlights family authority and an emphasis on personal autonomy, self-assertion and individualized romantic love. Even within a strongly family-centered community, there will be incidents in which individuals oppose figures of authority within their families. Depending on how such conflicts evolve, and how they are interpreted and retold within the community, such incidents become a part of the repertoire of ways in which conflicts can be handled within the community. As such, they affect the ways in which tensions within the families are expected to be handled, and how a balance between family authority and individual concerns may be struck in the future.

There is an elaborate set of rules for and expectation of how people should conduct themselves in relation to close family members, especially in the field of marriage arrangements. The stories presented above are all examples where people deviate from these rules. In some cases, young people question the primacy of patriarchal authority concerning decisions about whom they can marry. In some cases, they act on personal emotions that they simply cannot bring themselves to set aside. However, not only younger people deviate from the script. Some of these stories involve family fathers who have failed to enforce their patriarchal authority in accordance with the norms of their community. In all of these cases, individuals have refrained from performing certain acts and practices in accordance with patriarchal norms. Rather than

staying in the background, and communicating subservience to their fathers command, they have openly defied their decisions regarding whom they can marry. By running away and getting married without their family's approval, they have also sidestepped a whole range of social rituals that are designed to celebrate and reaffirm the patriarchal family order that constitutes the social frame for traditional weddings. By engaging instead in transgressive acts and practices that involve open rebellion and elopements, they are challenging dominant gender norms and authority relations within their community.

Incidents where young couples have got married through elopement and the girls involved reach some kind of reconciliation with their families are seen by many as setting an unfortunate precedence for the future. In such cases, when family fathers choose not to disown their daughters, they fail to perform important acts associated with their position as heads of their families. Neighbors and relatives complain that such lenience with rebellious girls serves to extend the boundaries of accepted behavior and that, in the aftermath of such cases, young girls have used the threat of elopement when their families have not allowed them to marry whom they wanted. With comments such as "before we know it, our girls will be marrying Muslims as well," some people express their concern over what they see as a moral order under siege. In spite of such dramatic reactions, this can be seen as part of a continuous process of negotiation and boundary-pushing, the same process that, less than fourty years ago, allowed Catholic-Orthodox marriages to gain social acceptance.

Conclusion

In the Christian communities of Bethlehem, patriarchal values are deep-seated, and young people internalize a certain disposition to behave and feel in ways that serve to reinforce patriarchy. However, this social order relies on the everyday performance of certain act for its continued reproduction. If people fail to repeat acts and practices that confirm patriarchal gender norms and relations of authority, patriarchy in its current everyday manifestations is challenged. These communities face an ongoing struggle between holding on to traditional values and social structures and a drive for social change. A central field of tension is between the primacy of family authority and ideals of individual freedom and self-assertion, and a primary battlefield for these tensions is the area of marriage arrangements.

In recent years, there have been numerous cases in which young couples have rebelled against their own families and married against their will. This is

seen as a gross violation of patriarchal family authority and of local norms that place the interests of the family above individual concerns. At the same time, local discourses reveal changing attitudes to the regulatory powers of family authority, the importance of family background in the social assessment of individuals, and the legitimacy of opposing family authority under certain circumstance.

These are gradual processes, and changes in the realm of possible actions available to individual people can be generated through the actions of many individuals over a period of time. With her concept of patriarchal connectivity, Joseph constructs a notion of relational selves that helps us explain how patriarchal relationships and structures of authority can be reproduced in Arab societies. However, while patriarchal connectivity serves to harmonize the concerns of individuals with those of family authorities, there are situations in which individual desires clash with the wishes and expectations of not only their families but their local communities as well. In such cases, people seek to balance the pursuit of their individual desires with respect for and accommodation of the concerns of their families.

Following from this, I have argued that connective relationships within families can help shape people's actions and reactions in ways that leave room for both continuity and change within patriarchal family structures. In situations of conflicting interests within a family, individual desires may drive junior family members to rebel against their families, while connective relationships may compel them to moderate their rebellions, and to prevent their rebellions from triggering more dramatic social consequences. As such, the tension between individual interests and relational concerns may serve to accommodate processes of social change, through moderate rebellions that challenge the social constraints and authority relationships that are embedded in patriarchal family structures.

In a society facing economic and political instability and social upheaval, a general sense of powerlessness and uncertainty can serve to heighten tension between forces of conservation and forces of social change. For some, patriarchal family structures and traditional norms become vehicles through which a sense of social control and continuity with the past can be achieved. Others may feel a need to assert their personal autonomy in opposition to those very same structures. By making room for certain acts of rebellion within the confines of its authority relationships, traditional family structures can evolve and adapt to new realities while remaining the primary source of social cohesion and unity among the Christians of Bethlehem.

CHAPTER 2

Christian-Muslim Relations

Land, Law and Family Protection

In early May 2002, Israeli forces withdrew from Bethlehem, ending a brutal five-week military siege of the city. For the first time in more than a month, people could leave their houses, walk around, and stock up on food from the shops without fear of getting shot by Israeli soldiers. Amer, a Christian business man living in the city was relieved like everyone else. His relief would turn to shock as he learned that, without his knowledge, a man had made legal claims to a large piece of land that belonged to him, and that these claims had already been supported in court. Amer's land was now the property of another man.

Since its establishment in 1994, the Palestinian Authority has struggled to build a functioning judicial system and provide adequate legal protection for Palestinians under its rule. One of the problems emerging from this has been a notable increase in land disputes throughout the West Bank. Thefts of private property and manipulation of land documents have raised concerns throughout the West Bank. In the district of Bethlehem, Christian landowners have been disproportionately targeted by people who lay claim to their land on questionable grounds.[1] To make matters worse, the Palestinian Authority has been perceived as facilitating such land claims. With a history of dispossession and confiscation of land by Israeli Authorities, land possesses great symbolic weight among West Bank Palestinians. To many people, ownership of land is a testimony to family roots in an area, as well as financial security in an environment of great uncertainty. Among Bethlehem Christians, internal land disputes have nurtured perceptions of anti-Christian hostility among local Muslims, perceptions that have been further fueled by other violations of the properties and rights of local Christians. Furthermore, there is internal disagreement about how to interpret and respond to these events, reflecting different perspectives on their own position within the Palestinian national community.

1 Other parts of the West Bank, including Ramallah/Al-Bireh and Jenin have been marred by land disputes as well. However, in these and other places, most land disputes take place between Muslims who lay claim to the same pieces of land.

 | DOI 10.1163/9789004276390_004

In this chapter, I investigate how internal tensions and conflicts within the Bethlehem area have emerged from the conjuncture of a traditional clan-based social order, attempts to establish Palestinian administrative and legal institutions under the Palestinian Authority, and demographic changes that have weakened the Christian presence in the Bethlehem area. In these circumstances, the importance of strong family ties and the loss of family-based power and protection through emigration have grown more visible among local Christians. Social turbulence and internal divisions have also generated new perceptions of Christian-Muslim relations, as social tensions and conflicts that used to be described in regional, family or factional terms are increasingly framed in sectarian terms. In this context, the issue of land ownership serves as a lens for exploring Christian-Muslim relations and experiences of vulnerability among Bethlehem Christians.

Group-making and Framing

In his famous article from 1969, Barth described ethnic groups as being constituted through boundary processes, through an emphasis on cultural difference in relation to other groups (Barth 1969). Brubaker focuses further on ethnic relationships as a matter of perception, compelling us to look at ethnicity as a 'perspective on the world' rather than as a thing in itself (Brubaker 2002). In his view, ethnicity and nationhood exist only in and through our perceptions, interpretations, representations, categorizations and identifications. Central to his perspective is the concept of 'groupness', and his emphasis on 'framing' as a social act. Brubaker starts out with the basic distinction between categories – as aggregates of people who may share certain social characteristics – and groups, referring to aggregates of people who on the basis of shared characteristics also share a collective consciousness, a sense of solidarity, and a capacity for concerted action (Brubaker 2004:12) He goes on to distinguish between 'groups and groupness'. He refers to groupness as an event, as a phenomenon where a sense of group belonging and commonality occurs only occasionally, triggered by specific events or situations, between people who may not usually regard themselves as a group. The concept of 'groupness' thus allows us to perceive group solidarity and a sense of commonality as temporal and context dependent rather than stable and enduring aspects of social relations. Brubaker goes on to argue that by treating groupness as a variable, and distinguishing between groups and categories, we can 'attend to the dynamics of group-making as a social, cultural and political project, aimed at transforming categories into groups or increasing levels of groupness' (Brubaker 2002:171).

Brubaker argues that a critical view of the notion of ethnic groups raises an important question in relation to our understanding of conflicts:

> If the protagonists of ethnic conflicts cannot, in general, be considered ethnic groups, then what makes such conflicts count as ethnic conflicts? And what makes violence count as ethnic violence?… The answer cannot be found in the intrinsic properties of behavior. The ethnic quality of "ethnic violence" for example is not intrinsic to violent conduct itself; it is attributed to instances of violent behavior by perpetrators, victims, politicians officials, journalists, researchers, relief workers or others. Such acts of framing and narrative encoding do not simply interpret the violence; they constitute it as ethnic.
>
> BRUBAKER 2002:173

Following on from this, he argues that

> Framing may be the key mechanism through which groupness is "constructed", that successful ethnic framing allows us to "see" conflicts and violence not only in ethnic but in groupist terms, and that a compelling retrospective framing of events may serve to fuel feelings of groupness.
>
> BRUBAKER 2002:174

Interpretive framing is often contested, and conflicts, including violent events, are often mingled with struggles over how to interpret and define such conflicts. To impose a label or a certain interpretative frame on a conflict is not merely a matter of external interpretation, but 'a constitutive act of social definition' that may have important consequences, and may also have a formative effect on the dynamics of an ongoing conflict (Brubaker 2002:174).

In my view, Brubaker's approach, his concept of groupness, and his emphasis on framing as a constitutive of social boundaries and division can be applied not only to issues of ethnic identity but also to the issue of sectarian boundaries and inter-sectarian relations in a Palestinian context. The concept of groupness is instructive in that it points to how feelings of solidarity, of commonality among people who share certain characteristics may be mobilized and brought to new levels of intensity in particular situations, and that groupness can be invoked on the basis of different criteria, such as belonging to the same village, the same sectarian community, or the same national community. The levels at which a sense of groupness is invoked may depend on how a particular situation is framed; how social tensions and lines of conflicts are understood

and interpreted. In a Palestinian setting, conflicts may arise between people of different social backgrounds. However, whether this is seen as conflict between individuals who disagree about business arrangements, between members of different family clans or different village communities, between city-dwellers and camp-based refugees, between competing political factions, or primarily as a conflict between Christians and Muslims, will depend on how hostilities are being articulated, and how such a conflict is framed retrospectively. If a conflict is read in sectarian terms by those involved, as a confrontation between members of two opposing sectarian communities, it is treated as an example of sectarian tension, an example that may add to a repertoire of stories that serve to reinforce an image of hostility between groups.

However, intergroup relations do not take shape through processes of framing alone, but through social practices, and through interaction between members of different groups. This chapter will explore situations characterized by conflict and social tensions, situations that involve both Christian and Muslim Palestinians but that also actualize other lines of division along family-based, class-based, and regional lines. Before doing so, however, we must look at the history of the local Christian community in Bethlehem in order to understand its present situation within the Palestinian territories, and its relations with its Muslim neighbors.

Historical Contexts and Shifts in Christian-Muslim Relations

Throughout most of the Ottoman period (1517–1917), relations between Muslims, Christians and Jews were regulated by the 'millet-system', in which Christians and Jews were defined as 'people of the book', as protected non-Muslim minorities, who were granted religious autonomy, and a judicial status separating them from the Muslim population (Farsoun and Aruri 2006, González 1992). Though enjoying a certain level of autonomy in matters of family law and religious matters, they were relegated to the status of second class citizens, exempt from some of the rights of the Muslim majority. For example, they were not permitted to bear arms or serve in the Ottoman army, they had limited property rights, and had to pay high taxes for what properties they had (González 1992, Tsimhoni 1993).

In some aspects however, Christian Arabs managed to put their status as dhimmi, as indigenous non-Muslims, to their own advantage. Having limited property rights through most of the Ottoman period, they had to develop economic strategies in directions other than agriculture, and those strategies were mostly related to the Western world (González 1992:49). An important source

of income was the mass production of olive wood and mother-of-pearl carvings, which was boosted by a growing trade with Christian Europe, facilitated by the Fransciscan Order and other church-based institutions. Another important source of income from the early 1800s onwards was stone-masonry. The Christian communities of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour were known for their skilled stonemasons, and in the late 1800s, it is believed that some 30% of the men of Bethlehem were engaged in construction, mainly in Bethlehem and Jerusalem (González 1992:50). While the Muslim majority was banned from taking interest on loans, non-Muslims were not subject to such restrictions. This allowed Christians and Jews to dominate the banking business throughout the Ottoman Empire and to establish valuable business contacts between Jerusalem and other trading centers throughout Palestine and across the Jordan River to Syria and into Egypt. Christian entrepreneurs in Bethlehem and Jerusalem established trading routes via contacts in Beirut, Damascus, and other regional centers (Pacini 1998a, González 1992).

In addition, as custodians of biblical sites of pilgrimage, owners of shelters and guesthouses, etc, Christians came into contact with Western pilgrims, missionaries and travelers who were visiting the area. As such, they were in a good position to establish business contacts in Europe and, later on, America. These advantages were further institutionalized through the Capitulations, a system whereby European powers, as international trading partners and as protectors of different churches, were granted legal and commercial privileges within the Ottoman Empire. These powers often appointed local Christians as their representatives in the region, to whom the privileges of the Capitulations where extended. As representatives of European powers, certain Christians would benefit greatly from tax exemptions and other commercial privileges and, in some cases, impunity from Ottoman law (González 1992:49). Prominent Christian families in Bethlehem profited greatly from these arrangements (Arab Educational Institute 1999).

Foreign Educational Services

Christians in Bethlehem also had privileged access to Christian schools run by European Church Missions and local churches. The Franciscan Order, that arrived in the fourteenth century, established a school for handicrafts in Bethlehem in the fifteenth century, facilitating the emergence of a local tourist industry. In 1598, they also established the Terra Sancta Boys School (Tushiyeh 1999:74).

Later on, in the early nineteenth century, the Orthodox and the Latin Church established schools throughout Palestine, catering mainly to their own parishes. From the mid-nineteenth century on, Protestant missionaries from

Germany and the UK established missions in Palestine and, as part of their efforts to attract converts from the historical churches, they focused their efforts on building schools and providing educational services. These schools catered particularly to Palestinian Christians of all denominations and, in terms of academic standards, they were regarded as being far superior to the public schools run by the Ottoman authorities. The influx of Protestant schools attached to the Lutheran and the Anglican Church in particular, provoked an expansion and an improvement of the educational services offered by the Orthodox and Catholic schools. Though often aimed at raising the educational level of the local population in general, the church-run schools were concentrated in Christian-dominated areas, and most of the students came from Christian families. Through these schools, students attained a basic mastery of European languages such as English, French, Italian and German, and they were introduced to the culture and history of some of the main European powers. These skills would turn out to be useful in a community that was increasingly exposed to the outside world. Due to these and other factors, the Christian community in Bethlehem flourished, and prominent Christian families would come to dominate local commerce and tourism as well as cultural and educational institutions (González 1992). As successful entrepreneurs, leading Christian families in the Bethlehem-area were able to amass a certain amount of wealth, and after the Ottoman Land Reforms of 1858, that lifted restrictions on Christian landownership, they could purchase land in and around the city of Bethlehem (González 1992:49–50).

Demographic Shifts in Bethlehem

The prominence enjoyed by local Christians in the late nineteenth century would gradually diminish throughout the twentieth century as thousands of local Christians migrated to the Americas, often selling their land in the process (Pacini 1998b). A great deal of land was sold to Muslim families from other parts of the West Bank, such as the Hebron-area, and from the rural areas around Bethlehem. With the passage of time, thousands of Christians left Bethlehem and the neighboring town of Beit Jala (González 1992). British policies during the Mandate period would further fuel Christian emigration and serve to weaken the Christian presence in Palestine. On the one hand, Mandate authorities allowed for Jewish immigration on a grand-scale, and facilitated their take-over of land traditionally farmed by Palestinian peasants.

In the 1920s and 1930s, the British mandate also introduced legal obstacles barring Palestinian migrants from returning to Palestine after a few years in Latin America or elsewhere (Musallam 1992). Christian emigrants from the

Bethlehem area who had emigrated to Chile and Honduras in their thousands were particularly affected by this (González 1992, Musallam 2012).

After the war of 1948, the Bethlehem area also become home to 21,000 Palestinians who had been uprooted from their homes in what became Israel, and who were now settled in three refugee camps surrounding Bethlehem (Arab Educational Institute 1999:57). This involved a dramatic change in the social profile of the Bethlehem community, a change that was further intensified by the ongoing influx of internal migrants primarily from Hebron.

With time, these demographic shifts have been a cause of friction between more recent arrivals and the older families of Bethlehem. These frictions are heightened by a sense among the older families that their financial standing has deteriorated, allowing for the emergence of a new economic elite that is largely made up of families from the Hebron – area. Members of the older families of Bethlehem frequently complain that their town has been 'taken over' by outsiders, that Bethlehem is 'lost' and no longer 'their town'. The Hebron region in particular is seen as more culturally conservative than Bethlehem, and Hebronites are regarded as being more traditionally oriented in matters of family and gender norms. Historically, Bethlehem Muslims have seen themselves as being less traditional in their way of life – more intuned with the lifestyle of their Christian neighbors. As large family groups from Hebron and other parts of the West Bank make their presence felt, Muslims of Bethlehem origin sometimes complain that the Hebronites have redefined what it means to be 'good Muslims' in terms of dress codes, family structure and norms of everyday social conduct.[2] Such nuances are easily lost on local Christians. In addition to this, the growing strength of Islamic movements, and the decline of secular ideologies over the course of the past two decades have served to create an atmosphere in which tensions between old Bethlemites and newcomers from other parts of the West Bank are increasingly described in sectarian rather than regional terms.

Historically, other sources of identity and social boundaries have converged with and occasionally transcended those religious affiliations in the Bethlehem area. One source of affiliation that has held social importance throughout Palestine is the ancient division between people who originated from Southern Arab tribes, referred to as the Yamani, and the Northern Arab tribes, known as Qays. In the Bethlehem area, the Christian clans of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour were perceived to be of Yamani origins while the clans of Beit Jala were Qays

2 One Muslim family clan, the Fawaghreh came originally from a village near Hebron and settled in Bethlehem in the middle of the eighteenth century. Along with six Christian family clans, they are generally seen as one the original family clans of Bethlehem.

(Elali 1991, Musallam 1999). During the late Ottoman period, between the late seventeenth and the early nineteenth century, conflicts would erupt and alliances would be mobilized in accordance with these ancient tribal divides. On several occasions, the clans of Beit Jala aligned themselves with Qays clans from the Hebron area, when confronting the Christian Yamani tribes of Bethlehem and Beit Sahour, or when confronting Muslim Yamani tribes in Jerusalem (Musallam 1999:13). Historically then, other social divides have been more important than sectarian affiliation as sources of conflict and social demarcation in the Bethlehem area.

Insecurity and Sectarian Concerns

Local Christians take great pride in Bethlehem's biblical heritage, and they feel a strong sense of collective ownership and responsibility for the Christian holy sites of the Bethlehem area, in particular the Church of the Nativity (Raheb 1995, Sabella 2005). This, along with a history of Christian prominence in the area, adds to a heightened sense of urgency about maintaining a strong Christian presence in Bethlehem, in a town in which they are now outnumbered three to one by a growing Muslim population. In this context, many Christians see the purchase of Christian-owned land by Muslim families as part of a collective effort to marginalize an already-weak Christian presence. Allegedly funded with money from Saudi banks, families of Hebron origin have bought a substantial amount of land in Bethlehem and Beit Jala (Lybarger 2007a:790). Such transactions are increasingly seen as expressions of territorial aggression against Christian landownership. In Beit Jala, The Orthodox Club has taken steps to prevent such transactions by raising funds to make counter-offers and block the sale of Christian land to Muslim buyers. Further alarm has been caused by incidents of land theft through the fabrication of property documents, and manipulation of the Palestinian legal system.

Internal Land Disputes in the West Bank

Since the Palestinian Authority was established in 1994, property scams and land-document forgery have emerged as a serious problem in Bethlehem and in other parts of occupied Palestine.[3] After 40 years of Israeli occupation

3 According to local real estate lawyers, similar problems of land theft are found in other parts of the West Bank as well, such as in the cities of Jenin and Ramallah. In these cities however, most land disputes involve old landowners and new land claimants who are both Muslims, and where sectarian divisions is not a relevant factor.

and continued confiscations, land is an increasingly-scarce resource and, even within a context of economic depression, property prices are rising, making land theft a very lucrative enterprise.

In 1996, two years after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, the Palestinian Ministry of Justice established Land Registration Offices throughout the Palestinian Territories (Fischbach 1996). These offices were assigned the task of updating the registry of land ownership handed over from the Jordanian period, registering formerly undocumented land ownership and settling disputes over land in cases where sufficient documentation on land-ownership was lacking or outdated, or where different principles and claims of ownership might conflict with each other (Land Equity International 2007). This carried great symbolic weight: for the first time the Palestinians would take control of the administration of their own land (Fischbach 1996). But there were problems ahead. Building on a legacy of numerous land reforms and shifting legal regimes, land registration in Palestine would turn out to be a messy affair.

Land Ownership in a Historical Perspective

In 1858, as part of the Ottoman Tanzimat reforms, the Ottoman authorities issued a Land Reform, which among other things, instructed landowners to have their private properties inscribed in a public land register, known as the Tapu. Within the framework of this law, agricultural land was largely defined as Miri (Land of the Emirate), essentially belonging to the Ottoman Sultan, and populated land was mostly defined as private land, to be registered in the name of individual landowners (Falah 1983:26, Land Equity International 2007).

Ottoman attempts to register the use of agricultural land as well as individual ownership of private land were resisted for a number of reasons. Cultivated land was subject to taxation so that registered owners had to pay tax on it. Second, data from the register were used to draft soldiers for the Ottoman army. Finally, this focus on individual landownership conflicted with traditional notions of land as the collective property of family clans and village communities (Land Equity International 2007:26–27). As such, the authorities were unable to establish a full registry of land ownership in Palestine (Falah 1983). In the urban centers, individual landowners would see their interests best served in having their land registered. However, once it had been registered in the names of individuals, land would still be regarded locally as the collective property of the families they belonged to. Once the registered landowners passed away, their land would be divided between family members, often without an updating of ownership within the land registry.

The collective organization of land was especially strong in the villages, where land could be sold or re-distributed within the family without any formal registration of such agreements. To complicate matters further, some families systematically under-registered their land in order to avoid taxes imposed by the late Ottoman Authorities (Tamim 1995, Land Equity International 2007). A family owning some 200 dunums[4] might have been registered with only 40 dunums, although everyone in the local community would know what land belonged to which family.[5]

With the fall of the Ottoman Empire, parts of the Land Registration archives for the area were lost, and some ended up in Turkey. During the Mandate Period, the British authorities introduced the 'Land Settlement Ordinance' in 1928, in an effort to establish a complete land registry in which all land, including agricultural land, would be registered in the names of individuals (Tamim 1995). Once again, this was fiercely resisted by Palestinian villagers as a violation of their tradition of communal ownership (Falah 1983). In some cases, all land belonging to a village was formally registered in the name of the Mukhtar, the head of a village or family clan, only to be redistributed and treated as communal land within the village itself (Land Equity International 2007). In such ways, old and new concepts of landownership would be reconciled on a practical level and control of the land would be kept within the community (Falah 1983, Tamim 1995).

After the War of 1948, the West Bank came under Jordanian rule, and in 1952 the Jordanian authorities started to establish an updated registry of landownership in the urban centers of the West Bank (Fischbach 1996). In the following years they completed an updated registry of land ownership in Jenin, in Nablus and in Ramallah, dividing properties registered in the names of deceased family patriarchs among their descendants. A new land registry for Bethlehem was begun in 1967 but this work was aborted with the eruption of the Six-day War a few months later. When Israel took control of the West Bank, the Jordanians were expelled, and the new land registry for Bethlehem was never completed.

Since 1967, Bethlehem has seen a dramatic loss of land through Israeli confiscations for the building of settlements, military installations, bypass roads, and most recently, the Separation Wall. Within the community itself, Christian families continued to sell their land, and most of these families have left the

4 Dunum or dunam is a unit of land measurement that dates back to the Ottoman period. The dunum referred to different measures in various countries. In Palestine, one dunum was equal to 920 square meters. Since 1928, the metric dunum, which equals 1000 square meters or 0.1 Hectares has been in force.

5 These accounts of local practices are based on interviews with local real estate lawyers.

country in order to settle in other parts of the world. In 1994 the main cities of Palestine, including Bethlehem, were turned over to the Palestinian Authority, within the framework of the Oslo Agreement. The Palestinian Authority established its own legal system, which would include the Land Registration Offices, or Tapu Departments (Fischbach 1996). Within a short period of time, an incomplete and chaotic system of land registration led to an explosion of land disputes that ended up in the Civil Court system (Fischbach 1996). In 2002, the Land Registration Offices were placed under the Palestinian Land Authority, but internal land disputes have remained a major problem throughout the Palestinian territories. In 2007, a government report estimated that 'nearly 25 percent of the court disputes in the West Bank today are land related' (Land Equity International 2007:11). In the Bethlehem district, this situation has enabled certain individuals to claim other people's land through the fabrication of land documents, sometimes with the help of officials in the Land Registration offices and the Civil Courts.

The Case of a Bethlehem Land Scam

An example of one such land scam may illustrate the complexity and scale of the problem. In the early 1980s, Shafik, a Christian businessman from Bethlehem, bought a large piece of land covering eight dunums (0.8 Hectares) in a central part of Bethlehem. In the following years, and especially after the Oslo Agreement, the commercial value of this property would multiply. In 2001, a group of investors offered a generous sum of money for the property. Shafik declined to sell as he had his own plans for the land. However, in the spring of 2002, he faced a counter claim to the land from a man who claimed to have bought this piece of land from the previous owner at an earlier point in time.

This claim was brought before the Land Registration Office a few days before Israel's military siege of Bethlehem in March 2002, a siege that would paralyze the city for 37 days (Sennott 2008). By the time the siege was lifted and Shafik was informed that someone else had made a claim for his land, the claim had been accepted by the Office, the entire process had been finalized, and Shafik's land was now the property of another man. After contacting a lawyer, Shafik was eventually confronted with the sales documents of the claimant. According to his lawyer, these documents were poor fabrications, printed on a type of paper that was not in use at the time when these documents were supposedly dated. Shafik then appealed to the Civil Court System to have the case reopened, but his appeal was denied. However, the case did not end there. Being a resourceful and well connected man, Shafik was determined to reclaim his land. In his twenties and thirties, Shafik had studied and worked in the US and

obtained an American passport. This enabled him to use the American consulate to put pressure on the PA. He also had high-ranking connections within the PA who could speak on his behalf. As a result, the case was eventually reopened, and it was decided that the land documents involved would be thoroughly re-examined. According to his lawyer, however, the opposing claimant to his land, a man from a nearby refugee camp, also had valuable connections, allowing the case to be stalled for years. After six years, in spring of 2008, the case was finally settled and Shafik got his land back.[6]

This case is not unique. According to real-estate lawyers, public officials and community activists in Bethlehem, there have been numerous cases in which people have lost their land to illegitimate claimants. The case in Bethlehem illustrates the acquisition of land through simple fabrication of land-documents. Another common practice has been for two individuals to make conflicting claims to the same piece of land. Such cases have been examined by the Land Registration Office, and decisions have been made, granting ownership of land to one or other of the claimants. In many such cases, the land in question has not belonged to either of the claimants. The real owners have often been out of the country or, if present, they may not have been informed that someone else has claimed their land.[7]

There are also cases in which people have faced unwarranted claims to their land from members of their own extended families. Khader, a Christian landowner in Beit Jala experienced this when some distant members of his family clan laid claim to a large parcel of land to which he held legal title. When facing these relatives on his land, asserting his claim to the land, he was physically assaulted, and suffered minor head injuries caused by several blows to his head. To avoid further physical confrontations, outsiders were brought in to mediate between the parties. A meeting was arranged, in which Khader presented documents from the Tapu registry proving that he held title to the land in question. Nonetheless, the issue remained unsettled. Khader suspected that his relatives had made a deal to sell his land to a network of well-connected people, and that, if this was the case, their claim to the land would be supported by the Land Registration Office. His fears were confirmed. The office dismissed his documents of ownership, and the land in question was handed to his relatives who – only months later – proceeded to sell the land.

6 With Shafik's permission, the main elements of the case were presented to me by Shafik's lawyer in 2007, a year before the case was settled.

7 This information is based on interviews with local real estate lawyers and individual landowners who have lost their land through a variety of different means.

A variety of strategies have been used to acquire land by dubious means. However, most of these land scams have depended on the complicity of officials within various PA offices. According to local real-estate lawyers, the victims of such scams have often made futile efforts to reclaim their land before giving up, realizing that they have lost their land to people who are more powerful than themselves. Those who are behind these land scams are commonly referred to as 'the Land Mafia'. Their numbers are disputed, but they are widely assumed to be a group of well-connected individuals, some based in refugee-camps, some in the villages of Bedu next to Bethlehem, and some based in Bethlehem itself but belonging to families of Hebron origin. It is claimed that some of them work for the Palestinian Security Services, the Bethlehem Governorate and the Civil Court system in Bethlehem, and they are all said to be connected to Fatah, the ruling party in the PA.[8] Concerned individuals in Bethlehem know who the key players are, and they also know that they cannot be held accountable for their actions, either because of their connections within the PA or because of the strength of their families. Due to probable underreporting and the disputed nature of such cases, it is difficult to estimate how many families have lost their land to illegitimate claimants. Some claim that more than a hundred families may have lost land under questionable circumstances, but lawyers who work with such cases dismiss such estimates as highly exaggerated.

Adding to Christian fears of marginalization, it is widely believed that most of the land that has been acquired through such land scams has belonged to Christian families. The apparent targeting of Christians is partly a reflection of the fact that Christian families have been, and still are, major landowners in Bethlehem. Nonetheless, many Christians see this phenomenon in sectarian terms, explaining the theft of land as part of an effort to marginalize the Christian community. As one Bethlehem landowner put it, 'If they cannot buy our land, they just take it!' Such interpretations are easily turned to in a context of marked Christian-Muslim tensions, where local Christians are becoming increasingly alarmed with their own demographic vulnerability. However, these land disputes may be better understood as part of a wider picture with reference to the state of law enforcement under the Palestinian Authority, and the primacy of family and community relationships as a source of protection.

8 Palestinian resistance movement founded by Yassir Arafat in the late 1950. Fatah has been the dominating faction within the Palestinian Liberation Organization, and since 1994, within the Palestinian Authority. Starting out as a movement committed to the liberation of Palestine through armed struggle against Israel, Fatah has since become the main proponent of negotiations as a way of pursuing national sovereignty within a Palestinian state in th West Bank and Gaza.

Law and Order in the Palestinian Authority

Since the PA took control of parts of the occupied territories, the governing institutions of the PA have been ridden with corruption, incompetence and a systematic misuse of financial and human resources (Brynen 2000, Khan 2004). Due to a combination of internal and external factors, the Palestinian Authority has failed to establish a functioning legal system and a rule of law in the occupied territories. With all their shortcomings, the Palestinian Authority and its institutions of law enforcement in particular are regarded as untrustworthy and as having little legitimacy by local Palestinians. Some of these shortcomings are the result of structural limitations on the coercive powers of the Palestinian Authority as defined by the Oslo Accords (Kelly 2004). Within the parameters of the Oslo Accords, the West Bank was divided into three areas with different judicial status; in Area A, which included Palestinian urban centers, the PA would enjoy full civil and military jurisdiction; in Area B, which included the areas surrounding most Palestinian towns, the PA would enjoy civil but not military control; and Area C, the most rural areas, and areas surrounding Israeli settlements and military installations, would be under full Israeli jurisdiction. As such, the Palestinian police have a limited legal right to apply coercive power in their efforts to enforce the law. Even though Palestinian Civil Law applies in Area B, Palestinian police can only enforce the law within Area A. In Area B, any Palestinian police actions would require close coordination with the Israeli army. By 2001, this coordination had broken down, leaving large areas of the West Bank in a legal vacuum (Kelly 2004:8). In the Bethlehem area, this means that many of the areas outside of Bethlehem itself are beyond the reach of Palestinian law enforcement.

The Rule of Family Clans

However, the Palestinian legal system is also characterized by significant internal flaws. Palestinian police forces are underpaid, poorly trained, and largely recruited on the basis of clan membership. As mentioned above, Palestinian society is traditionally structured around patrilineal family clans or *hamula* that unite groups of families based on assumptions of shared origins, mainly along patrilineal lines (Rothenberg 1998). These clans serve several functions. First of all, they are a source of individual and family security. Outsiders think twice before attacking a member of a powerful clan, knowing that revenge will be taken.

The rule of family clans constitutes a traditional order that has co-existed with shifting political regimes in the region. When states are strong, and can

protect their citizens, clans weaken. However, when states are weak, clans take on a heightened importance. According to Robinson, this dynamic has allowed clans to flourish in the Palestinian territories and, when it suits them, to terrorize their neighboring communities, especially after the breakdown of the Palestinian Authority during the Second Intifada (Robinson 2009).

This is not a new phenomenon in the Bethlehem area. Lawlessness and insecurity are recurring topics in descriptions of the Palestinian central highlands. Ali Qleibo writes about the security situation in Jerusalem and its hinterlands in the late Ottoman period:

> Peasants in their villages were not safe, neither were city people outside the walls, for the marauding Bedouins, in the absence of a strong central government, raided and looted towns and villages and abducted women and children to be sold as slaves.
>
> QLEIBO 1992:145–146

In the later half of the ninteenth century, the Ottoman authorities were unable to maintain law and order. Beduins would frequently raid Bethlehem, and the terror they inflicted on Bethlehem and its nearby villages has a central place in local history and folklore from the late Ottoman period (González 1992:51, 88). In the Bethlehem area, people speak with bitterness about the vast areas of land stretching towards the Judean desert, land that is said to have belonged to Bethlehem and to have been taken by force by Bedouin tribes as they settled down and established their own villages around Bethlehem.

According to some sources, a certain level of security and rule of law was installed when the British Mandate took control of Palestine after World War I (González 1992, Qleibo 1992). This was also the situation after 1948, when the West Bank was subjected to the rule of a centralized but strong Jordanian state. In the Bethlehem area, the Jordanian period is viewed with some ambiguity. Under Jordanian rule, the West Bank suffered from developmental neglect, being treated as a peripheral region of the Kingdom of Jordan. Jordan was a police state, with a large police and security apparatus dedicated to combating and silencing any political dissent. However, this security apparatus also provided a rule of law and a certain level of protection for communities that were not backed by powerful family clans. Among the Christians of the West Bank, there was hope that the Palestinian Authority would be able to protect vulnerable communities within the West Bank. Instead, it is claimed that already powerful-family clans have grown more powerful since the establishment of the Palestinian Authority.

The Politics of Tribalization

This was largely a result of the politics of tribalization instituted by Yassir Arafat as President of the Palestinian Authority. In his efforts to bolster his own rule and stem the influence of the new generation of political leaders known as 'the Intifada elite', Arafat sought to undermine institutional politics, and strengthen the politics of personality, family and patronage. Through a number of key steps, Arafat secured his own powerbase and strengthened the influence of powerful family clans (Robinson 2009).

The first step was the adoption of an election law that divided the West Bank and Gaza into 16 electoral districts, where all parliamentary representatives had to be elected from their own districts. This allowed large family clans to determine who would be elected from each district, creating a parliament of clan leaders who were obedient to Arafat and his cabinet (Robinson 2009).

The second step was to establish a Department of Tribal Affairs, a department that encouraging the use of 'tribal law' and '*sulha*' – traditional means of conflict resolution – to resolve conflicts instead of turning to formal institutions of law enforcement (Institute of Law 2006:37–38, Robinson 2009). The Palestinian Authority has even made efforts to integrate traditional institutions of tribal law into its formal system of law enforcement (Bowman 2001, Institute of Law 2006:59). At the local level, the Authority has encouraged people to settle conflicts and handle minor offences through the use of tribal law and family council rather than involving the police.[9] Traditional means of conflict resolution are used to deal with a wide range of problems, ranging from petty theft to more serious cases, sometimes even homicide (Bowman 2001). This is not a new phenomenon. In coexistence with centralized systems of law enforcement, the institutions of tribal law and family councils have been utilized to handle internal disputes among Palestinians under Ottoman, British, Jordanian and Israeli rule (Institute of Law 2006:30–35). Under some circumstances, tribal law and other traditional means of conflict resolution may prove effective in containing or resolving social conflicts. However, these methods all seek reconciliation based on some form of consensus, and according to local skeptics as well as studies on informal justice in Palestine, they tend to do so to the benefit of more powerful clans and individuals, and at the cost of weaker clans and their individual members (Institute of Law 2006:108–110).

9 Bowman (2001) describes a case involving a murder in Beit Sahour, where the families involved are told by the Palestinian Authorities to settle the case by traditional means of conflict resolution. Failures to reach a settlement by tribal law leaves a lasting rift between the family clans involved.

A third step in Arafats empowernment of family clans was to allow for clan-based recruitment to his various security forces – 14 in total – which turned the security forces into vehicles of clan power and politics (Robinson 2009). Under these circumstances, certain family clans are so powerful that their members are beyond the reach of the law as enforced by the civilian police forces.

While ostensibly establishing a formal legal system under the PA, Arafat sought to incorporate the rule of family clans rather than replace it. As a result, the law is unevenly and arbitrarily enforced, and in some areas not enforced at all. The lack of a functioning rule of law, and the impunity enjoyed by certain groups have been highlighted by both researchers and international reporters. Frisch has emphasized the growing informal power of family clans of Hebron origin in Bethlehem and other parts of the West Bank (Frisch 1998). Others (e.g. Rees 2004) have described how certain groups of people, due to the size of their family clans or their status as resistance fighters, have gained impunity from the law and been allowed to operate as Mafia-like networks in the Bethlehem area. Whether or not an incident can be treated as a criminal incident is not decided by the police, but depends on the gravity of an incident and the identities of the people involved.

The Limits of Formal Law Enforcement

An incident that took place during the summer of 2007 illustrates this. In a Muslim village close to Bethlehem, a bitter dispute over the distribution of family land reached a violent conclusion. At close range, and in broad daylight, a man shot and killed his two nephews outside their family home. The killings had been witnessed by a number of people, some of whom reported the incident to the police. After obtaining detailed accounts of the event, police officers came to arrest the perpetrator, who was apprehended at his home and brought to a police van, where the police were confronted by a large number of men from the village. One of the village elders came forward and told the police officers that they would not be allowed to take the perpetrator. The village demanded that they let him go, and made it clear that this tragic incident would be dealt with by the village itself. The police had no choice but to let the man go, and they made no further attempts to arrest him.

This episode demonstrated some of the inadequacies of PA law enforcement.[10] In some cases, Palestinian police authorities lack the means, authority

10 This episode also illustrates some of the problems resulting from the transition to a new system of land registration. Within the local community, the attempt by the two young men to reclaim the land already sold by their father, was seen as a gross violation of local notions of honor and decency. For these young men, permanently based in Jordan, the

and will to enforce the law if this involves confronting certain community leaders and family clans. This means that both traditional means of conflict resolution and the absence of formal law enforcement favor those who are already in a position of power. Under these circumstances, people depend on their own families and local communities for protection, and people who belong to big family groups are in an advantageous position compared to those belonging to smaller family clans and less closely united communities.

During the Second Intifada, PA institutions of law and order collapsed rapidly, largely because they were the primary targets of Israeli military activities. During the first few years of the Intifada, the institutional framework of the Palestinian Authority was destroyed by Israel. This strengthened the importance of clans as a source of protection (Institute of Law 2006, Landinfo 2008). Robinson argues that the absence of any state authority, left Palestinian society in a state where

> Palestinians from weaker clans found themselves more vulnerable to crime, as their family name was no deterrent, and Palestinians from powerful clans could avoid being victims of crime simply because of their clan name.
>
> ROBINSON 2009

The Fear of Powerful Clans

A few years into the Intifada, the institutions of the PA, including its police forces, were gradually rebuilt. However, local power relationships based on clan and community affiliations are still reflected in all areas of law enforcement. In the Bethlehem area, the most feared clan is a clan of Bedouin origin that I will refer to as the Bedu, and they are settled in a stretch of villages close to Bethlehem, Within the Bethlehem region, the Bedu are notorious for being clannish, for sticking up for other members of their group, and for being fiercely resistant to interventions by any kind of external authority (Rees 2004). This reputation is based both on their Bedouin origins – a source of both romanticism and prejudice among Palestinians – and on a history of repeated conflicts with some of their neighboring communities. Within the Bethlehem

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transition to a new property system opened up opportunities for great economic gains at the expense of family honor and unity. The killing of these young men may have been seen as a rather dramatic reaction within their local village, but also as a timely warning to anyone else who might feel tempted to take advantage of the new system.

area, they are approached with fear and caution, and some people try to minimize their contact with them. As a man from Beit Sahour explained:

> It's not that we have anything against them, it's that there are so many of them.. if you get in trouble with one of them, you're in trouble with the whole community! So we try to deal with them as little as possible.

Thanks to their regional notoriety, well-known people from Bedu, and from other communities with a similar reputation, can do much as they please without being held accountable by the law. Local policemen can be very blunt about this, and they easily confirm that people from certain communities, and in particular the Bedu, are regarded as 'special cases', and that keeping out of their way makes their job as policemen much easier. Since the late 1990s, members of the Bedu clan have also come to dominate the Palestinian security forces in the Bethlehem District, further strengthening their status as 'untouchables' in the region. A dramatic example of this was seen some years ago, when a Christian man from Bethlehem accidentally bumped into a young women from Bedu while driving his car. The woman was not injured but the driver had her brought to a doctor, where she underwent a thorough examination before she was taken home to her own family. Fearing any acts of retribution from the woman's family, the driver agreed to pay them a sum of 300 Jordanian Dinars in compensation – the equivalent of a month's salary for most Palestinians.

Two years later, the brother of the unlucky driver had an encounter with the same family from Bedu. His daughter was hit by a car and killed instantly. The driver had been driving recklessly and was apprehended by the police at the scene. After being taken into custody, he spent the following night in jail. The next day, the local police contacted the girl's father and informed him that the driver was the son of a powerful man from Bedu. The police then argued that it had been a tragic accident and that the driver was not really to blame for it. The girl's father found himself under heavy pressure to drop the case, and the driver was freed. Among local Christians, some saw the contrast between the two episodes as an example of the impunity enjoyed by members of the Bedu clan as well as the relative powerlessness of local Christians. However, in this particular case, people would add that the outcome would have been the same if the girl had belonged to a Muslim family, as long as the driver belonged to the Bedu. Within the District of Bethlehem, both Muslims and Christians react to the Bedu clan with a mix of fear and contempt.

Areas inhabited by communities with a notorious reputation, such as the Bedu, are viewed as zones of insecurity and danger. Even areas in their close proximity can be regarded as unsafe territory. I had my first encounter with

these perceptions after attending a dinner party in Beit Jala. After the party, another family from Beit Jala offered to give me a lift to Beit Sahour where I lived at the time. They were shocked to see what kind of area I was living in. The area itself was nice, with many spacious and relatively new houses. However, being on the outskirts of Beit Sahour, overlooking the valley that separated Beit Sahour from Bedu, they considered the area to be fraught with danger and warned that, while living here, I could be robbed, kidnapped or even killed if I came across the 'wrong people'. They emphatically urged me to find a place to stay in a safer area, and to make sure that I locked the door before going to bed. The next day, I mentioned the episode to one of my neighbors. He laughed, and said that there have been break-ins in the area but that in general, this was a safe neighborhood. He pointed to another neighborhood, further down the valley and closer to Bedu, stating that this was an unsafe area. When asked if he could recall any particular incidents, of break-ins, theft or vandalism in that area, he could not but he stressed, as a general point, that the area was closer to Bedu. On another occasion, I was reprimanded when I told my host family that I had walked across the valley and into the Bedu area. I was told to be more careful, and that I could come across 'bad people' who did not like foreigners and who could harm me. Whenever such issues came up, it was made clear that certain areas within the Bethlehem region, when settled or dominated by certain communities, were regarded as unsafe or even dangerous to enter. Such perceptions are reinforced by the limited reach of the law.

Structural Vulnerabilities

These tendencies shed some new light on the issue of land disputes in the Bethlehem area. As mentioned earlier, most of the victims of these scams have been Christians who have owned land in Bethlehem and neighboring Beit Jala. However, Bethlehem's other neighboring town of Beit Sahour has a higher population of Christians who own large areas of undeveloped land, but they have not faced similar problems of land-theft.[11] According to real-estate lawyers based in Bethlehem, there have been internal family disputes over land, but there have not been any incidents in Beit Sahour, of people loosing land to the so-called 'land mafia' by way of document fabrication.

11 More dunums of land belong to Bethlehem and Beit Jala than to Beit Sahour, but a larger share of this land has been confiscated by Israel for the construction of settlements, Israeli-only bypass roads and the Separation wall.

The Special Case of Beit Sahour

Within the Bethlehem-region, certain social characteristics that may partly explain this difference have been attributed to Beit Sahour. Until recent years, the people of Beit Sahour have refused to sell land to outsiders, leaving them much less vulnerable to the kind of land claims that have taken place in Bethlehem. Since 1948, Bethlehem and Beit Jala have absorbed a large influx of Muslim migrants from other part of Palestine and many local Christians see these families as strangers, newcomers, and as recent intruders in a local community to which they do not belong. In Beit Sahour, in contrast, the number of recent arrivals is modest and the oldest families of Beit Sahour, both Christian and Muslims, have a shared history in the town that reaches back for more than seven centuries. When faced with external threats, this is a common bond that can mobilize solidarity between them.

Beit Sahour is recognized as a town with a strong sense of community and solidarity vis-à-vis outside forces (Bowman 2001). This common front can be triggered against harmless outsiders as well. Elias lives in Bethlehem with his wife and two children. He comes from a Syrian-Orthodox family that fled Syria during the Ottoman persecution of Armenians and Assyrians in 1915–16. In 2002, he rented a small house in the old city of Beit Sahour and opened his own corner shop. For years, people in Beit Sahour viewed him with skeptisism and reserve, and some asked him bluntly why he had opened a store in Beit Sahour and not in Bethlehem. In Elias's experience, being a 'non-Sahouri' running a store in Beit Sahour was enough to be seen as an aggressive intruder. Elias may have been regarded with particular suspicion because he lives in Bethlehem but does not belong to one of the 'old' families of Bethlehem. Having lived in the area for only three or four generations, he is still regarded as a 'ghareeb', a stranger within the Bethlehem community. After a few years, Elias decided to close down his store, and open a similar store in Bethlehem. A few Christian families from Bethlehem have also rented houses in Beit Sahour. After a few years of residence, they still have very little contact with their neighbors, who are all connected through kinship and generations of neighborhood ties. Although they are well known for their hospitality and generosity towards visitors, the Sahouri community has been fiercely protective of its territorial boundaries.

A common front against outsiders can be speedily activated in the case of violent confrontations. When conflicts have erupted between people from Beit Sahour, and people from other nearby communities, Christians and Muslims from Beit Sahour have united against the external 'others'. A well-known incident took place a few years ago, when a young man from a nearby village used his mobile phone to take pictures up the skirts of a Christian girl in a clothes

shop in Beit Sahour. The man was caught by the girl's fiancé, and an ugly fight broke out between the two men. After a while, the man from the nearby village was joined by friends and relatives from his own village. However, they were hugely outnumbered by a large group of Sahouris, both Christians and Muslims, who came to support the girl's fiancé. In the end, the men from the nearby village were sent running out of town. The man who started it all lost an eye in the fighting, and his car was physically carried beyond the town limits of Beit Sahour and set on fire. The Palestinian Authority – fearful of an inter-village fight that might escalate further – bought a new car for the original perpetrator, and the Presidential office appealed to the two communities to put an end to the dispute. This incident, along with a number of histories of confrontation between young men from Beit Sahour and from the Hebron area, is held up as illustrative of a kind of community solidarity that is attributed to Beit Sahour, and that may discourage any attempts to appropriate land belonging to the community.[12]

A Fragmented Community

This kind of solidarity is also attributed to the many villages surrounding Bethlehem, but less so to Bethlehem itself. In addition to large-scale emigration, the towns of Bethlehem and Beit Jala have seen the arrival of internal migrants from Hebron as well as the establishment of three refugee camps between Beit Jala and Bethlehem. As a result of these demographic shifts, these communities stand out as deeply fragmented and marked by tensions between the old families and newcomers to the area, between city dwellers, villagers and camp-based refugees, and between Christians and Muslims. This is where the land scams of the Bethlehem area have taken place, and those who lose their land are often families that have already left the country, or families that still live in the communities but whose local presence has been

12 While Beit Sahour enjoys a reputation for internal unity and solidarity, some locals argue that this spirit of unity is a thing of the past. Bowman traces the processes that followed the killing of Basem Rishmawi, a young resistance fighter in Beit Sahour, and its impact on the local community. Immediately assumed to be the act of Israelis, the young man is seen as a martyr, and becomes the center of a discourse of Sahouri unity in the face of an oppressive occupation, a discourse later fueled by an anti-tax campaign which earned Beit Sahour a widespread reputation as a place of resilience and internal solidarity against the occupation. After the establishment of the PA, revelations that Basem Rishmawi had been killed by fellow Sahouris contributed to an unravelling of the internal unity within the community, and created deep conflicts between large family clans that remain unresolved more than ten years later. (Bowman 2001).

heavily decimated through emigration.[13] These are families that find little protection in the form of big family clans, or within their local communities. They appear to be targeted based on their social vulnerability and when well-connected people try to take their land, they find themselves on their own.

While a history of large-scale emigration has left certain families easy targets for land theft, the same set of mechanisms has left the wider Christian community of the Bethlehem area vulnerable to extortion, vandalism and other violations of their rights and properties. In a society characterized by lawlessness, local Christians find themselves in a protection gap where the official system of law enforcement is too weak and unreliable, their own are families too small, and their communal networks too fragmented to offer adequate protection and security.

When the Palestinian Authority was established, people hoped that it would represent Palestinian interests, protect their rights, and establish an internal rule of law from which everyone would benefit. Fifteen years later, the Palestinian Authority and its system of law enforcement has failed to meet such expectations. Under these circumstances, local Christians are experiencing a growing sense of insecurity as their local strength and presence continue to decline. The absence of a functioning rule of law combined with their own demographic vulnerability fuels their anxieties about their own future in the area.

Working within the System

However, the Christians of the Bethlehem area are far from powerless. Some of them have tried to address problems such as land theft and the rule of law through internal political structures. On the issue of land theft, the Mayor of Bethlehem among others has called on the Palestinian President to intervene and initiate proper investigations. After several years, these efforts appear to have paid off.

In the spring of 2007, efforts were made by the Palestinian Authority to address the issue of land theft. A handful of people associated with land scams

13 To make matters worse, families with a long history of emigration are also especially vulnerable to land confiscations at the hands of Israeli authorities. Since 1967, the state of Israel has applied the Absentee Property Law of 1950 to justify the confiscation of Palestinian land that has not been used regularly and properties that have not been inhabited for longer periods of time. Families that have emigrated in large numbers have been hit particularly hard by Israeli land-confiscations for the building of settlements, by-pass roads and in recent years, the Separation Wall. Many of these families would have lost their land anyway, but their absence or limited presence in the area has provided Israeli authorities more easily with a 'legal' pretext for confiscations.

were arrested, and some properties were returned to their rightful owners. Skeptics then said that those who were arrested were peripheral to the network, that key players would go free and that a lot of land would remain in the wrong hands. Later, in November 2008, the Palestinian Land Authority launched a long-term investigation aimed at determining the rightful ownership of disputed land in the West Bank. This process, which involves a re-examination of questionable land claims over the previous 15 years, started in the Bethlehem Governorate, and the process in Bethlehem alone was expected to take several years. This investigation has been met with some local optimism and hopes that in time most of the disputed properties would be returned to their rightful owners.

The issue of land disputes in the Bethlehem area illustrates some of the flaws and shortcomings of law enforcement within the Palestinian Authority. With a legal system riddled with corruption and dictated by informal power-structures, family- and local-community networks become ever more important as sources of social security. Unless the general inadequacies of the legal system are addressed more forcefully, Palestinian Christians may be left with a continued protection gap, leaving them at risk of further violations against their rights and properties. In the meantime, it appears that their interests are best served – if not particularly effectively – by working within the formal institutions of the Palestinian Authority in efforts to protect their own interests.

Contested Framing

The disputes described in this chapter illustrate the importance of how social tensions and conflicts are framed. I was first introduced to the issue of land disputes when visiting a women's discussion group organized by an ecumenical organization based in Bethlehem. The main theme of the discussion was emigration, and they talked about the different reasons why so many Christians have chosen to leave the area. During the discussions, the lack of a rule of law was mentioned as a source of general insecurity in the region. In connection with this, one of the women attending the meeting pointed out that a major concern in the Bethlehem area is the theft of Christian land by the 'Muslim mafia'. Fuad, the man who chaired the discussion group quickly intervened to correct her:

> This is not a matter of Muslims stealing land from Christians. What you have is a state of lawlessness that some people can take advantage of, and steal land that belongs to others. And in some cases the land is stolen by people who happen to be Muslims, while those who have their land

> stolen happen to be Christians. But this is the result of a state of lawlessness and chaos that everyone suffers from.

Some of the women attending the meeting murmured in disagreement but chose not to argue with Fuad. While some of them clearly saw the land disputes as part of a conflict between Christians and Muslims, Fuad tried to avoid a sectarian understanding of the conflict by describing a situation in which everyone, regardless of sectarian background, feels powerless and insecure. He tried to avoid a sectarian framing of the issue, but judging from the reactions of the women in the discussion group, as well as of others who spoke about land theft, he is fighting an uphill battle. At the same time, the issue of land disputes as well as other conflicts associated with the lack of a rule of law, reveals that people's actions and their sense of protection and security is based on other sources of group identity and boundary formation than sectarian background. The regional notoriety of the Bedu is not based on their Muslim background, but on the strong sense of solidarity and unity attributed to their community: a form of groupness that would manifest itself in violent opposition to any outside antagonist. In the town of Beit Sahour, a sense of groupness that also transcended sectarian boundaries could be invoked in the face of outside opposition. This may serve to protect Beit Sahour Christians from land theft and other forms of abuse that have been more common in Bethlehem and Beit Jala.

These land thefts are perceived as a serious problem, regardless of what is their primary driving force. The theft of land in the Bethlehem area can be seen as crimes committed by corrupt public servants who are only interested in filling their own pockets, or as the crimes of powerful family clans from Hebron that wish to expand their territorial bases. Finally, it can be seen as the crimes of hostile Muslims intent on driving out local Christians, and assisted by the PA in so doing. A sectarian reading of this issue is especially dramatic, as it invokes a wider problem of Muslim hostility towards a tiny Christian minority rather than one of internal migration, clan-based rule or government corruption. Whichever way these problems are interpreted, they represent a source of grave insecurity and vulnerability among local Christians. They serve to fuel the perception that a series of social changes, including a weakening of family ties, and the dissolution of close-knit neighborhoods, has weakened Christian communities, made them less cohesive and less capable of responding to community-wide challenges, and that this poses an existential threat to their community as a whole.

As with the developments explored in the previous chapter, involving a reconfiguration of patriarchal authority and a loosening of marriage norms,

the developments addressed here are placed within a narrative of collective weakening through social change. In this narrative, negative social developments internal to the Christian community weaken its integrity and sustainability, and a present reality of fragmentation and weak social ties is juxtaposed with a golden past characterized with stronger family ties and greater community cohesion. With or without a sectarian framing, a narrative of vulnerability through social change is central to how local Christians experience their situation in the West Bank. A sectarian reading of this situation raises further questions regarding the future prospects of the Christian community in the area. Within a public discourse, however, these problems are discussed mainly in terms of corruption, lawlessness and internal migration. The next chapter will follow how a sectarian framing of local tensions has gained popular ground, while being eagerly dismissed by prominent members of the community.

Conclusion

In recent decades, internal land theft has been a source of great concern within the Bethlehem community. Along with other problems of lawlessness and insecurity, this problem has grown out of the interaction of social orders that are founded on different principles and core values. On the one hand, there is a traditional social order structured around family clans, where political power, legal protection and access to economic resources are secured on the basis of family membership. Within this order, power is centered in the hands of a few powerful families, where social protection is assured through membership of or alliances with strong family clans, and crime and conflicts have been dealt with through negotiations between the families involved. On the other hand, there is a legal order centered on the Palestinian Authority, which is expected to provide legal protection and effective law enforcement based on principles of due process and equality before the law.

With the weak and fragile state of the Palestinian Authority, a flawed and incomplete implementation of a formalized legal order has served to incorporate rather than neutralize clan-based power dynamics within a Palestinian state-building project, further strengthening powerful family clans at the expense of smaller and weaker families.

Combined with their numerical weakening through emigration and a fragmentation of their local communities through the influx of internal migrants, this has left local Christians particularly vulnerable to land grabs and other violations of their rights and properties. Bethlehem Christians also connect this vulnerability with a weakening of their own family- and community ties.

As such, social changes addressed in the previous chapter, changes that have brought greater autonomy for individuals and nuclear families at the cost of wider family ties, are partly blamed for the sense of weakness and insecurity felt among local Christians.

In a society in which social boundaries are strongly rooted in one's place of origin, Bethlehem Christians see the influx of migrants from other areas as an aggressive takeover of 'their' towns. These changes have been made all the more dramatic by the loss of their own financial standing vis-à-vis new arrivals. In this context, thefts of land and other violations are increasingly framed in sectarian terms within the Christian community. These framing tendencies tend to reinforce existing sectarian boundaries and to fuel Christian distrust and fear of suppression at the hands of Muslim Palestinians. In a wider perspective, such sentiments also raise questions and doubts among local Christians regarding their own future in Palestine.

In general, Palestinian Christians are divided on how to interpret and frame these problems of land theft and lawlessness, and on what constitutes the wisest response: whether to lie low and refrain from voicing their worries; to address their concerns through official channels within the Palestinian authority; or to invoke external interventions on their behalf. This will be explored further in the next chapter, which deals with the place of Palestinian Christians in a Palestinian national context, focusing on Christian-Muslim relationships, the rise of Islam as a mark of political identity, and the impact of international forces on the Israeli – Palestinian conflict.

CHAPTER 3

National Identity, Attachments and Solidarity

During the summer of 2006, Israeli forces conducted military operations throughout the West Bank, making mass arrests and killing a large number of Palestinian militants. The most violent attacks took place in Nablus and Jenin in the northern part of the West Bank, yet news about the death of Palestinian fighters affected the collective mood in Bethlehem as well. During this period, the Football World Championship was a welcome distraction. Palestinians throughout the West Bank followed the championship with passion and enthusiasm, rooting for a variety of teams. In Bethlehem, some of the matches were shown on wide screens in restaurants and social clubs, attracting huge crowds of locals who otherwise showed little interest in football.

One of these was Amali, a 25-year-old woman from Bethlehem. One night during the championship, she took a taxi to meet some friends in Beit Sahour and watch a football match in one of the restaurants in town. I shared the taxi with her, sitting next to the driver as she tried to engage him in a conversation, asking if he watched the championship, and if he had a favorite team:[1]

> Driver - *I don't watch any games*.
> Amali – *Why not, don't you like football?*
> Driver – *I love football, but who can watch football and enjoy it while our brothers are getting killed in Nablus? I can't smile, I can't enjoy anything. This time they are killing people in Nablus. Next time, they will be coming for us. I can't enjoy a football match and have fun while this is going on*.

The conversation ended abruptly, and was followed by a tense silence for the rest of the trip. When Amali got out of the taxi, she was upset and felt that the driver had accused her of being a bad Palestinian because she wanted to watch a football match. As a long-time political activist, she felt she should not have to prove her commitment to her people.[2] The Israeli attacks on Nablus enraged

1 I overheard the conversation, and though it took place in Arabic, I picked up its main contents. After leaving the taxi, I talked through the conversation with Amali.

2 The encounter between Amali and the taxi-driver was shaped by class and gender-related tensions as well. Amali, was a Christian, middle-class girl from Bethlehem who traveled accompagnied by a foreign man. For the driver, a middle-aged Muslim man from a nearby

 | DOI 10.1163/9789004276390_005

her, but she could not see how it would benefit the people of Nablus if she refrained from enjoying herself. As she saw it, so many atrocities were taking place at this point, that if they had to enter a state of collective mourning each time something bad happened, they would be paralyzed and this would only benefit the Israelis. Within the Palestinian community, national attachments and solidarities are produced through people's everyday practices and what kind of acts and forms of behavior reflect national commitments are a matter of contestation. In this context, the encounter between Amali and her taxi-driver reflected tensions between different expressions of national commitment, and conflicting norms of national behavior.

The Enforcement of National Solidarity

Within the Bethlehem area, the Christian communities are widely regarded as having a liberal lifestyle and distinct patterns of recreation that involve attendance at cultural events and socializing in public places such as cafes and restaurants. Because of these and other characteristics, local Christians sometimes feel that their national commitment is being questioned.

Calls for national solidarity with martyred Palestinians sometimes take the form of demands for silent reflection, and refrain from engaging in work or social gatherings in the public sphere. At times of unrest, and particularly when Palestinians have been killed by Israeli forces, one or two days of mourning are usually declared in a show of respect for those who have died. In times of mourning, shops are closed, the streets are empty and people are expected to refrain from celebrations and from participating in frivolous social activities such as parties, concerts and other social gatherings that might be regarded as violating a spirit of mourning. Sometimes, a day or a period of mourning may be declared by the authorities but, in most cases, mourning is declared by the local branch of one of the most influential political movements in a particular area, and enforced by groups of young men who walk around the central streets of a city, telling and sometimes forcing shop-keepers to close their shops for the day. In the evening, groups of young men patrol to make sure that restaurants and cafes are also closed.

In Bethlehem and elsewhere, the act of declaring a time of mourning and calling on businesses to close for the day also serves as a demonstration of the local power of the political factions that are enforcing it. This can take the

refugee-camp, she most likely represented both social privilege and a set of social mores quite different from his own. Such tensions well may have motivated his comments.

shape of a period of mourning being initially declared and enforced by members of Fatah, who close down all businesses in the city. Two days later, when the normal time of mourning has passed, members of Hamas may declare that the time of mourning is not yet over and spend a day closing down shops that have just been opened up. For Hamas, this can serve as a way of demonstrating their power in a city usually dominated by Fatah.[3]

During the summer of 2006, frequent reports of Palestinians being killed by Israeli forces were followed by local calls for a day of mourning and for a closure of businesses, or at least a scaling down of celebrations in public. In the same period, the Football World Championship was being followed with great interest among Palestinians in the West Bank. In the Bethlehem area you could see Brazilian, German, Italian and French flags hanging outside people's homes, indicating what teams they supported. Brazil and Germany enjoyed a great deal of local support, partly because both countries hosted a large community of immigrants from Bethlehem. France received a lot of support, mainly because Zidane, one of their key players, was of Arab descent. The championship mobilized much enthusiasm, and the evening screenings of matches in cafes and restaurants attracted huge crowds. It also happened that matches were publicly screened the day following the death of people killed in Israeli offensives in other parts of the West Bank. This did not go down well with everyone. On such evenings when matches were screened at the café run by the Orthodox Club in Beit Jala, and a number of restaurants in Bethlehem, masked men carrying machine guns and wooden bats would enter the premises, force the management to close the place, and tell the guests who were watching the game to be ashamed of themselves, and to go home in a show of respect for those who had lost their lives the previous day.

In Bethlehem, concerts, plays and dance performances organized at cultural centers were also interrupted and shut down by groups of masked men who denounced the centers and their audiences for taking part in celebrations following the death of Palestinian fighters. These incidents point to a tension between conflicting ideals and practices of national commitments.

New Conceptions of 'Sumud'

'*Sumud*' has been a central concept in Palestinian nationalist discourse. *Sumud*, (steadfastness) refers to an ideal of having the strength and resilience to remain

3 As rituals of collective mourning, and as arenas of competition between political factions, the closing of shops, restaurants dates back to the First Intifada. During the First Intifada, the collective suspension of everyday activities was enforced with even greater discipline.

on one's land in the face of great adversity. *Sumud* is about persevering and staying put despite the hardships and oppression of an Israeli occupation (Van Teeffelen 2009). Those who remain on their land, who exhibit *sumud*, are referred to as *'samidin'.* In times of hardship, *sumud* has also connoted solidarity with the suffering of fellow Palestinians, expressed through refraining from joyful activities (Taraki 2008:17).

Writing about the urban middle-class of Ramallah and Al-Bireh, Lisa Taraki argues that a new conception of resilience has emerged, one that renders 'the very pursuit of happiness a manifestation of resilience and resistance at the same time' (Taraki 2008:17). Though it may be more clearly expressed within the urban elites of Ramallah/Al-Bireh, a similar notion of *sumud* has also gained ground in Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala. Within this concept of resilience, the struggle to maintain a sense of normalcy, to create small spaces of sanity through cultural, artistic and recreational activities, to experience moments of joy in the company of good friends under trying circumstances, is seen as a part of one's everyday resistance. While some people are reluctant to drape their social activities in a narrative of resistance, they insist on their right to pursue a life of enjoyment.

When masked men invade restaurants or cultural centers in Bethlehem telling people to leave the premises, those who attend such gatherings often experienced such crackdowns as unfounded and unjustified infringements on their social freedoms, and as expressions of a joyless culture of resistance that they themselves firmly reject. Others see these incidents as expressions of Muslim hostility to a liberal lifestyle associated mostly with the local Christian community. The restaurants and the cultural centers that are shut down are mostly run by Christians but tend to attract a broader clientele of both Christians and Muslims. Often assuming that these crackdowns are conducted by Islamic activists, many local Christians see such episodes as intrusions into their social spheres and as attempts to discourage patterns of consumption and forms of socializing that are not condoned by conservative Muslims.

While such incidents are also read in sectarian terms, they do point to wider tension between conflicting notions and expressions of national commitment within the Palestinian community, tensions that exist beyond, and are independent of any sectarian divisions. For decades, Palestinian expressions of national solidarity have evolved and adjusted to new realities through people's actions and everyday practices. In recent years, traditional expressions of national solidarity have been challenged by new ways of thinking about everyday resistance and expressions of national commitment. However, in turbulent periods, marked by military sieges and armed confrontations with Israel, practices associated with national solidarity, such as closing stores, and

refraining from frivolous social gatherings, are publicly enforced by different political factions. In such periods, local Christians who enjoy socializing in public places and seeking out cultural experiences feel that their national commitment is being questioned, and that their social freedoms are unjustly constrained.

National Belonging in the Absence of a State

Writing about the United Republic of Yemen, Lisa Wedeen offers an approach to the study of national attachments and other forms of belonging that can also be useful in a Palestinian context. She describes the emergence of national solidarity in a country whose state institutions are incapable of controlling a demarcated territory, and where people hold multiple loyalties to tribe, region and religious groupings (Wedeen 2009:2).

In this context, she argues that national solidarity and belonging are generated not within the framework of state institutions, but through the ordinary activities undertaken by men and women in their daily lives. Emphasizing the performative dimensions of political life, she demonstrates that nationalism is actualized through the performance of nationalist practices, and that nationals themselves are formed by the speech and bodily acts associated with nationalism. Within this community, meaning is ascribed to practices that come to be understood as nationalist on the basis of shared references among the members of the community. In her approach to nationalism, Wedeen leans on Brubaker, who states that:

> Instead of focusing on nations as real groups, we should focus on nationhood and nationness, on nation as a practical category, institutionalized form and contingent event…we have to understand the practical uses of the category 'nation', the ways it can come to structure perception, to inform thought and experience, to organize discourse and political action.
>
> Brubaker in: WEDEEN 2009:4

In a Yemeni setting, national solidarity appears to converge with democratic identifications that are produced through deliberative practices during 'qat sessions', an important site of political argument, where conflicting views are exchanged within a framework of shared references. Through these and other practices, a sense of 'nationness' emerges among individuals who come to share the everyday experience of communicating with each other within the sovereign territorial space of the nation state (Wedeen 2009:20).

Wedeen also explores the emergence of pious forms of belonging through the performance of practices related to ideals of Islamic piety, and argues that

the emergence of pious forms of belonging is intertwined with the emergence and legitimization of national attachments in Yemen. On these grounds, she criticizes Benedict Anderson and other theorists of nationalism for assuming a necessary link between secularism and the emergence of national identities. As she sees it, this relies on an overgeneralization of a historical connection between secularism and nationalism in the West (Wedeen 2009:14).

In the Palestinian territories, national solidarity has emerged in the absence of autonomous state institutions, but also in opposition to Israel and its military aggressions (Bowman 2003, Khalidi 1997). Bowman goes a long way in arguing that a Palestinian national community emerged as a response to its negation by the state of Israel in the form of expulsions, occupations and the denial of Palestinian autonomy within a demarcated territory (Bowman 2003). In this context, practices and gestures that signal resilience in the face of an Israeli occupation, and solidarity with victims of Israeli violence are seen as expressions of national belonging. These practices converge with deliberative practices in the form of political arguments in stores, coffee-houses and village clubs, and through national media channels. In these informal settings, people express discontent with Israel's occupation and conflicting opinions about internal politics, but they do this on the basis of a shared set of experience-based references. As Wedeen points out:

> Even when discourses do not explicitly refer to nationalist ideas, people unknown to each other can come to share knowledge about events, actors, and places in ways that allow them to imagine themselves as members of discrete homogenous collectivities.
>
> WEDEEN 2009:10

Wedeen argues that, in the absence of a robust network of state institutions, traumatic political events can reveal collective vulnerabilities and invoke perceptions of nationness: a sense of belonging in which people become aware that their hardships and concerns are shared by thousands, sometimes millions of others (Wedeen 2009:132). In her view, a sense of nationness, like other forms of solidarity may develop gradually, but it can also just 'happen', 'suddenly crystallizing as a basis for collective and individual action within a "political field" conducive to such actions' (Wedeen 2009:93).

In line with Wedeen's approach, I argue that, within the Palestinian Territories, national attachments have been generated through people's everyday practices and activities in response to shared realities of dispossession and occupation. In the absence of autonomous state institutions, traumatic political events such as the al-Nakbah, the Six-Day War and the two Intifadas have

been central in generating a sense of national belonging among the Palestinian population. I also argue that, in response to these dramatic events, some segments of the Palestinian population that embrace an Islamic ideology have adopted new everyday practices, generating new forms of belonging and new notions of national belonging intertwined with ideals of Islamic piety. These new developments have led to fragmentation and division between those who embrace such pious practices and forms of belonging and those who do not.

In this chapter, I will give an account of how these processes have played out within the Palestinian community. I will explore how the emergence of national attachments and other forms of belonging through people's everyday practices have been experienced among Palestinian Christians, and how these experiences have informed their perceptions of current political realities, of Christian-Muslim relations, and of their own position within a Palestinian community.

Palestinian Nationalism: Turning Points

Historically, Palestinian Christians played a prominent role in the emergence of Arab and Palestinian nationalism from its very start in the mid-1800s. The presence of foreign educational institutions played a central part in this respect. European-run mission schools used Arabic as the primary language of teaching in contrast to the Ottoman public schools, where students were taught in Turkish (Ayyad 1999:20). Equipped with a superior mastery of the Arabic language, former students from Church-based schools in Palestine, as in Syria and Lebanon, (Salibi 1988:44–46) would take part in al-Nahda, the Arab cultural renaissance movement that swept the Levant between the late 1800s and the mid-1900s (Musallam 1999).

The revival of an Arab cultural identity also involved the emergence of Arab nationalist movements, largely in opposition to the Ottoman Empire (Ayyad 1999). With a strong presence among urban traders and middle-class professionals, Palestinian Christians were active in the early pan-Arab and Palestinian nationalist movements that emerged from the late 1800s on (Ayyad 1999, O'Mahony 1999, Sabella 2005). Leading figures in these movements had been inspired by European nationalist movements and the modern nation-states concept, and started calling for independence from the Ottoman Empire (Ayyad 1999, Sabella 1999, Hourani 2002).

In Arab nationalism, Christian in Palestine as in other parts of the region, saw a promise of equality and a way out of their status as 'dhimmi' under Ottoman rule (Salibi 1988:51). In Palestine, prominent Christians were among

the first to articulate their opposition to Jewish immigration and the purchase of Palestinian land by Zionist organizations in the late Ottoman period (González 1992, Aburish 1993). In the early years of the Mandate period, Palestinian nationalist aspirations were articulated through the network of Christian-Muslim Associations, established in urban centers throughout Palestine (Aburish 1993). This reflected the central position of Christian leaders within the early national movements, in spite of their moderate numbers – around 10% of the population of Palestine at the time (Sabella 2005). From the early Mandate period, Palestinian leaders saw it as an advantage to present a united Christian – Muslim front when dealing with the British Authorities (Haiduc-Dale 2013).

During the late Ottoman and Mandate periods, there were also strong voices calling for a restructuring of society on the basis of Islamic tenets. Islam served as a drive for popular resistance against British rule and zionist expansionism, and political movements that envisioned Palestine under Islamic rule gained popular ground throughout the Palestinian highlands. However, in the Bethlehem area, dominated by its Christian majority up until the 1950s, these early Islamist forces had a modest influence.

1948–1967 – A High Point of Secular Nationalism

After three decades of British rule, the State of Israel was established in 1948, following the drafting of a plan for the Partition of Palestine, backed by the United Nations. This happened against the will of the Arabs, who constituted more than two thirds of the population of Mandate Palestine, and who had no say in the drafting of the partition plan. For the Arabs, the imposition of a Jewish state in Palestine was yet another European colonial project that they could not accept. After a short and brutal war, the new state of Israel had expanded its territories, expelling more than 700,000 Palestinians who were never allowed to return to their homes (Farsoun and Aruri 2006, Kimmerling and Migdal 2003:214–217). The national trauma of 1848 known as al-Nakbah – 'the catastrophe' left Palestinians scattered all over the Middle East, traditional Palestinian elites were discredited or eradicated, and the Palestinians were left without leaders.[4] In the following decades, when Palestinians started organizing and re-articulating a shared identity, the historical lessons of their defeats had to be evaluated (Kimmerling and Migdal 2003:136–137).

A key motif of the Palestinian narrative of 1948 is that those who fled during the War with Israel made the mistaken assumption that they would be able to

4 The traditional leadership, the leaders of the notables, had already beeen severely weakened and discredited during the Arab Revolt (1936–1939) (Khalidi 2006:123–124, Swedenburg 2003).

return to their land once the battles were over. One of the lessons of their tragedy is that when faced with violence as part of an attempt to drive people of their land, these measures must be resisted or endured and that one must hold on to one's land, whatever the cost, or lose it forever. The tragedy of 1948 would later give retrospective validation to the emergence of *sumud* as a strategy of resistance.

In the 1950s, the first seeds of a Palestinian movement with national ambitions would emerge on university campuses in Cairo and Beirut (Khalidi 1997:180). From then on, Christian activists were at the core of the wider secular Palestinian national movement. The most militant wings of the national movement, the Popular and the Democratic Fronts for the Liberation of Palestine, were founded in the 1960s by George Habash and Nayif Hawatmeh, both Palestinian Christians (Aburish 1993). These were both left-wing organizations that promoted a fiercely secular form of Arab Nationalism, and sought to overthrow reactionary governments and install 'revolutionary' regimes throughout the Arab world as a first step towards defeating Israel (Farsoun and Aruri 2006, Kimmerling and Migdal 2003). By contrast, the Fatah movement, led by Yasser Arafat and established in the late 1950s, articulated a specific Palestinian nationalism, calling for Palestinians to pursue their national goals through armed struggle without relying on the Arab states (Lybarger 2007b).

1967 – Arab Defeat and Israeli Occupation

In June 1967 Israel started a new war against her neigboring countries that would shape the region for the following decades. After a period of military build-up in the Arab countries, Israel launched a pre-emptive attack against Egypt, Jordan and Syria, defeating the Arab forces on all fronts.[5] Within six days, Israel had taken the West Bank from Jordan, the Gaza strip from Egypt,

5 There is an unsettled dispute with regards to who was to blame for the start of the War. Israel claimed that they were forced to launch a pre-emptive attack in the face of a planned invasion from the neighboring Arab countries. Israeli historian and former Ambassador to the US Micheal Oren, argued in his book *Six Days of War* (Oren 2003), that Israel conducted a pre-emptive strike, and that the Arabs had planned the conquest of Israel and the expulsion of its Jewish inhabitants in 1967. By contrast, the Arabs viewed this as an unjustified attack on Arab countries that were not intent on starting a war. This view is supported by historians such as Ilan Pappé (Pappe 2006b) while a popular middle position is represented by Avi Shlaim, who argues that Israel and the Arab countries were caught in a 'crisis slide' unable to prevent a war that nobody really wanted (Shlaim 2001). Overall, the question of whether Israel chose to launch the Six-day war or was forces to, remains a central point of contention in Israeli and Palestinian national narratives.

and the Golan Heights from Syria. The Six-Day war of 1967 was a crushing defeat for the Arab states, and it dealt a fatal blow to the idea of pan-Arabism as a road to collective empowerment (Khalidi 1997, Lybarger 2007b:24). Most Palestinians responded by embracing Fatah's program of self-reliant armed struggle, which laid the ground for Fatah's rise to dominance within the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). Others interpreted Israel's victory as God's punishment on Palestinian Muslims for abandoning Islam and concluded that only a return to Islam would bring Muslims to victory against Israel (Lybarger 2005:144–146). As such, the Arab defeat of 1967 may have planted early seeds for a resurgence of Islam as a source of political mobilization, and the articulation of an Islamic agenda for the liberation and building of a Palestine community (Knudsen 2005:1374).

After Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the PLO established a policy of *sumud*, providing material and financial support for industries and services in the Occupied Palestinian Territories in order to sustain living conditions in the territories and encourage people to stay on their land in the face of an Israeli occupation. This was a response to the poor government services offered by Israel's military 'civil administration' which controlled government health and educational institutions within the Palestinian territories (Wick 2008). Among Palestinians within the Occupied Territories, *sumud* would acquire meaning as a moral virtue, as a strategy of everyday resistance and as a way of life built around the powerful idea that merely to exist, to survive, and to remain on one's land is an act of defiance against Israel's occupation (Binur 1990).

Although they were living under a suppressive military occupation, many Christians in Bethlehem describe their home community of the 1960s and 1970s as an area with a relatively liberal atmosphere in which Christian-Muslim relationships were good. In places like Bethlehem, East Jerusalem and Ramallah, men and women were free to interact in public spaces, and alcohol consumption was common among urban Muslims as well as among Christians. Young Palestinians followed Western clothing fashions, and even in Muslim village communities young women could be seen wearing short skirts and revealing dresses. In the Bethlehem community, left-wing political movements enjoyed strong popular support and in mixed communities such as those of Beit Sahour and Bethlehem, Christians and Muslims shared much common ground in terms of life-styles, codes of conduct, family structures and cultural values. Among liberal families in Bethlehem, Ramallah and Jerusalem, marriage between Christians and Muslims was sometimes accepted. This appeared to be the situation throughout the 1970s and into the early 1980s.

1979 – A Turning Point for Islamist Mobilization

In 1979, the pro-Western Shah of Iran was overthrown and an Islamic theocratic regime was installed in a popular revolt that would be known throughout the world as the Islamic Revolution. The revolution in Iran took place at a time when Islamist movements were starting to emerge throughout the region, and secular nationalism had lost its radical momentum. Only a year earlier, Anwar Sadat, Nasser's successor as President of Egypt had signed a peace accord with Israel. The Camp David accord was seen as a betrayal of the Arab and Muslim World, and an example of the moral and political bankruptcy of Arab nationalism as represented by the political establishment. As such, the Islamic revolution in Iran was a central part of an ideological shift that was under way in much of the region.

In its aftermath, an Islamic tide swept the entire Middle East and oppositional movements with an Islamic agenda would emerge in several countries throughout the region. In Palestine, secular movements would remain politically dominant for some time, but the signs of an ideological shift underway could be found in people's everyday practices. From the early 1980s, local Christians recall detecting a process of social Islamization among some Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza. In parts of the community, Palestinian Muslims began to adopt everyday acts and practices that reflected specific ideals of Muslim piety. Interaction between men and women became more restricted, and Muslim women would start dressing in accordance with strict interpretations of Islamic norms, wearing the hijab to cover their hair, or the jilbab, a dress that also covers a woman body without revealing her figure.

Until the early 1980s, the hijab was worn mainly by older women in rural communities. Twenty years later it was worn by a majority of Muslim women in Palestine (Boe 2005). As the most socially-visible expression of Muslim religious piety, the increasing veiling of Muslim women reflected a growing embrace of Islam as a mark of cultural identity. These processes led to an experience among many Christians of a growing cultural gap between themselves and certain segments of the Muslim population, and an impression that the differences between them, in terms of life style and social conduct grew more visible as the years went by. In the Bethlehem area, the divisive effects of these developments would be temporarily suspended for a few years, during the Palestinian uprising that came to be known as the First Intifada.

The First Intifada

The First Intifada broke out among Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza in December 1987. At the outset, this rebellion grew out of widespread anger and frustration with the Israeli occupation (Khalidi 1997, Robinson 1997). In line

with Wedeens framework, the uprising was an event in which a sense of nationness 'crystallized as a basis for collective and individual action' (Wedeen 2009:93), especially among young Palestinians born shortly before or after 1967, and who had lived their entire lives under Israeli occupation. The First Intifada mobilized wide grassroot support, as large sections of the population took part in demonstrations and other forms of largely non-violent resistance against the Israeli occupation.

Throughout the Intifada, the concept of *sumud* would be ascribed with new meaning in the face of new hardships and everyday challenges. At the same time, new strategies of resistance, and new practices and demands for national commitment would emerge within the Palestinian territories. Living under a constant state of emergency, the ability to endure long-term suspensions of normalcy became a test of one's personal strength and national commitment. Under these circumstances, a notion of national solidarity and resilience equated with social piety and an ascetic denial of frivolity and joy gained strength among Palestinians. In Gaza, during the most intensive phase of the Intifada, any recreational activity associated with the sea, such as swimming or strolling along the beach, was regarded as a violation of the spirit of resistance. In a typical directive issued by the United National Leadership of the Uprising, comprising all the nationalist PLO factions, it was declared that

> Those who frolic by the seashore as if we lived in a state of tranquillity and normality…Those are the people who are contemptuous of our values and traditions, and piss on the blood of the Martyrs.
>
> UNLU-directive quoted in: TAMĀRĪ 2008:24

Within the framework of an ascetic notion of national solidarity, the performance of everyday nationalist practices included the closing of stores and businesses for most of the day and an avoidance of festive social gatherings in times of mourning and throughout the more dramatic periods of the Intifada. In Bethlehem, as in other parts of the West Bank, left-wing secular organizations such as the PFLP[6] and DFLP[7] as well as Fatah enjoyed strong support within the Christian communities. In general, the Christians of the Bethlehem

6 PFLP is short for Popular Front For the Liberation of Palestine, a resistance movement established in 1967 by George Habash, and that combined pan-Arabism with Marxist ideology. In the 1970s it was the second largest movement within the PLO, and known for the execution of aircraft hi-jackings as a way of drawing attention to their cause.

7 DFLP Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, another left wing resistance movements, established by Naif Hawatmeh in 1969 as a breakaway organization from the PFLP.

area have been reluctant to engage in armed resistance. However, in 1989, the town of Beit Sahour was the scene of the biggest non-violent campaign of resistance during the First Intifada: the Beit Sahour Tax Revolt (Bowman 2001, Robinson 1997).

The Beit Sahour Tax Revolt

In the late 1980s, Beit Sahour was a rather affluent small town with a large number of small-scale businessmen and shop-owners. Among other things, local sewing factories selling retail to the Israeli clothing manufacturers had become an important source of income for the people of Beit Sahour. As such, the community had a lot to lose in terms of economic resources and, in general, people were reluctant to take part in any form of armed resistance. At the same time, there was a strong presence of left-wing activists, with the PFLP and the DFLP being the dominant movements along with Fatah. During the First Intifada, the entire community found itself engaged in non-violent forms of resistance. In 1989, community leaders in Beit Sahour organized a large-scale boycott of Israeli consumer products, replacing Israeli products with Jordanian or Palestinian products wherever possible. The idea was to achieve economic independence from the Israeli marked at local level. Later on, a group of small-scale business-men and shop-owners organized a campaign in which they threw away their identity cards issued by Israel, and refused to pay taxes to the Israeli authorities. Under the slogan 'No taxation without representation', they mobilized the entire town to join, refusing to pay any taxes to the Israeli authorities (Bowman 2001, Robinson 1997).

Israeli reactions were swift and brutal. The Israel military authorities responded by placing Beit Sahour under a strict curfews for 42 days, during which they blocked food shipments into the town, cut telephone lines, barred reporters and foreign citizens from entering the town, arrested more than forty community leaders, and confiscated millions of dollars in cash and property value during house-to-house raids. For the next few months, once the curfew had been lifted, Israeli authorities tried to break the anti-tax campaign by closing down schools, shops and medical clinics, and by keeping people from bringing medicines, food and fuel into the town. In response to these measures, the town community organized into neighborhood committees that coordinated the distribution of vital products such as medicine and certain food items and organized school classes in people's houses against Israeli orders (Robinson 1997, Sennott 2001). As the months went by, Beit Sahour was viewed with awe and admiration in other parts of the territories for its resilience. However, after nine months, the campaign came to an end, the tax-refusal campaign had not been adopted by any other part of the West Bank,

and the village received no support, financially or politically, from Arafat and the PLO leadership abroad (Robinson 1997). Beit Sahour took a heavy blow from the tax revolt, and paid a high price in economic and human costs. Even so, some twenty years later, the tax revolt is a source of collective pried within the Palestinian community, widely seen as an expression of a unity and collective *sumud* that the townsmen of Beit Sahour have ascribed to their own community.

The Rise of Hamas

While often remembered as a time of national unity, the Intifada was also a period that split Palestinian society into two camps – one secular nationalist and one Islamist (Lybarger 2005:143). The Islamic camp would be represented primarily by Hamas. Historically, Hamas originated from an Islamic welfare organization established in 1973 by a Gaza branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, before gradually expanding to the West Bank in the 1970s and 1980s. In 1988, in response to the first Palestinian Intifada, the Muslim Brotherhood established its own movement for political and militant resistance against the Israeli occupation, which would be known as the Islamic Resistance Movement of Hamas (Hroub 2007, Milton-Edwards 1999). Ideologically, Hamas combined Palestinian nationalism and political Islam by calling for an Islamic Palestinian state, defining historic Palestine as 'Waqf' or Islamic land. On these grounds, the struggle against Israel for the liberation of Palestine was defined as a Muslim duty (Hroub 2007). As such, Hamas could appeal both to nationalist aspirations for self-determination within an independent state and for an Islamic transformation of Palestinian society (Knudsen 2005). Within the political field, Hamas became the primary voice of an emerging popular culture of Islamic piety, and of pious forms of belonging. Advocating an Islamic brand of nationalism, Hamas would offer a considerable challenge to the secular nationalist movements in the following years (Lybarger 2005, 2007b).

The Oslo Years

The Intifada dissolved as a popular uprising during the early 1990s, and a new phase was initiated with the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993 and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994. With the Oslo-accords, the Palestinian Authority led by Yassir Arafat was given civil and police jurisdiction within the Palestinian urban centers of the West Bank and Gaza, while the greater part of the Palestinian Territories would remain under Israeli control (Robinson 1997). For the next few years, the PA was to be in charge of preventing Palestinian militant attacks against Israeli targets, while an agreement between Israel and the PLO, regarding border issues, the status of Jerusalem,

refugee rights and other issues would be negotiated by the two parties. The final goal of this process was the establishment of a Palestinian state next to Israel within five years (Robinson 1997).

Among Palestinian activists across the political spectrum, this was seen as a poor deal that failed to fulfill their national aspiration, a deal that some would oppose and others only grudgingly accept. In their efforts to maintain their security commitments to Israel and to establish internal control within the Palestinian Territories, the Palestinian Authority cracked down on political factions that opposed the Oslo accords and the peace process. Within the PA, central positions were filled with PLO cadres who had been a part of the PLO apparatus in Lebanon and Tunisia. In the process, a whole generation of political activists from the West Bank and Gaza, who had emerged as local leaders during the First Intifada, found themselves sidelined and marginalized by the 'PLO outsiders' (Lybarger 2007b, Robinson 1997).

Though brutal to anyone whom he perceived as a threat to his dominance, Arafat made efforts to include the Christian community in his nation-building project, and he emphasized the importance of nurturing good Christian-Muslim relations (Lende 2003, Sennott 2008). Between 1995 and 2000, Arafat attended the Christmas Mass in the Church of the Nativity every year. When Israeli authorities refused to allow him to attend the Mass at Christmas 2001, he protested vigorously, emphasized that it was his joy and duty to attend the Mass, and said that if necessary, he would walk to Bethlehem in order to be there for the Christmas Mass (Sennott 2008). Though this was recognized as a dramatic gesture, typical of Arafat's public persona, it was also greatly appreciated by Bethlehem Christians. As President of the Palestinian Authority, Arafat determined by Presidential Decree that six seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council would be reserved for Christians, as would the office of Mayor in ten traditionally-Christian towns, of which Bethlehem, Ramallah and Jericho are the most prominent. Through these arrangements, he assured that Palestinian Christians would enjoy solid representation in public offices (Lende 2003). In spite of this, the frustrations felt by other Palestinians vis-à-vis the policies of the PA and the lack of movement in the peace process was also shared by local Christians.

A Failed Peace Process

After 1994, the PA failed to achieve any diplomatic gains in relation to Israel, to establish a functioning rule of law, or to improve people's everyday lives within the West Bank and Gaza. As vocal critics of the Oslo accords and the PA, Hamas gained wider popular support throughout the 1990s as popular discontent with the peace process intensified. Throughout the Oslo years, Hamas also expanded

its apparatus of health and social services throughout the West Bank and Gaza, services that were warmly welcomed in areas where the Palestinian Authority had failed to respond to people's needs (Hroub 2007). As a movement, Hamas was characterized by its strong internal discipline, and was led by local leaders who retained modest lifestyles, who lived in villages and refugee camps, and who were seen as exemplifying the ideals of religious piety promoted by the movement. This contrasted starkly with the lavish lifestyles of prominent Fatah leaders, who dominated a Palestinian Authority that was increasingly associated with corruption, political patronage and other forms of power abuse (Amundsen and Ezbidi 2004, Hroub 2007).

Throughout the 1990s, the Israeli authorities continued to confiscate land in the West Bank, and to build Jewish settlements and roads connecting them with Israel. The Palestinian national leadership was unable to curb these settlement activities or to mobilize international reactions against them (Khalidi 2006:198–201). This left a damaging perception among Palestinians that the main job of the Palestinian Authority was to control the Palestinian population, giving Israel time and peace to steal Palestinian land while stalling further negotiations. After seven years of growing discontent among Palestinians, the peace process broke down and the Second Intifada set in (Khalidi 2006).

The Second Intifada

The Second Intifada broke out in autumn 2000 and, after a few months, it was apparent that this rebellion was going to be very different from the First Intifada. While the First Intifada had been seen as a grass-roots rebellion, the Second Intifada was dominated early on by groups of militants who soon started organizing suicide attacks and other militant attacks on Israeli soldiers in the West Bank and Gaza, and on civilians inside Israel itself. The Second Intifada also took on an Islamic expression with which many Christians found difficult to identify (Sennott 2008). Named the Al-Aqsa-Intifada, after the holiest Muslim site in Jerusalem, this rebellion soon came to be dominated by militants from Hamas, and from the newly-established Al-Aqsa Martyr brigades affiliated with Fatah.[8] Hamas assumed a leading role in the armed resistance, and were able to capitalize on popular discontent with the Palestinian Authority (Abu-Amr 2007, Knudsen 2005).

8 In the early years of the Second Intifada, the leftist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) also conducted several high profile attacks, both against Israeli military targets in the West Bank, and against civilians in Israel. Their most famous attack during the Second Intifada was the assassination in 2002 of Rehavam Zeevi, an Israeli right-wing politician and Minister of Tourism in Israel at the time of his assasination.

When Arafat died in 2004, he was replaced as leader of Fatah and the PA by Mahmoud Abbas, who sorely lacked Arafat's charisma and popular appeal. After continued failures at starting a new peace process, the Fatah movement steadily lost popular support, and in the January 2006 election, the Hamas movement won a majority of the seats in the Palestinian Parliament and established its own government. Before the elections, Hamas had run a moderate campaign, promising to end the culture of corruption within the PA while toning down calls for armed struggle against Israel and its own visions for an Islamic state. This appealed to a wider circle of voters beyond Islamist ranks, and in the election they even won the votes of some Christians, who wished to send a message of discontent to the ruling Fatah party.

The electoral success of Hamas reflected widespread frustration with the peace process, and with Fatah rule in the Palestinian Authority. However, it also reflected the significant social changes that had taken place since the early 1980s, and that had involved a conservative turn towards Islamic norms and everyday practices among segments of the Muslim population in Palestine. As visions for an Islamic transformation of society has been combined with a struggle for Palestinian self-determination, this has produced an Islamic nationalist project in which Christians and secularly-oriented Muslims can see no place for themselves.

Deterioration of Sectarian Relations

However, within the Bethlehem area, the rise of Hamas was a secondary concern among local Christians. Throughout the Second Intifada, sectarian tensions and Christian fears were fueled primarily by the general state of lawlessness and the ruthless behavior of the different resistance movements. In the Bethlehem-area, armed resistance against Israel would be dominated by a local wing of the Martyr brigades, many of whom belonged to one large family clan from Bedu. In 2001–2002, these and other militants used firearms and launched armed attacks on Israeli soldiers, military installations and settlements in the Bethlehem area. These attacks were launched from predominantly-Christian residential areas in Beit Jala, with the result that Israeli retaliatory attacks came to be directed at these areas.

Beit Jala residents living near the Israeli settlement of Gilo had their houses stormed by militants, who would use their rooftops to fire at Israeli targets before running away. As a result of these attacks, more than 400 houses in Beit Jala and a few in Beit Sahour were shelled by Israeli rockets and destroyed in 2001 and 2002. Many local Christians in Beit Jala and Beit Sahour saw this as

part of a deliberate effort to harm their communities by making them the targets of Israeli retaliation. The militants of Bedu were feared not only among Christians, but also among middle-class Muslims, some of whom felt that the militants were hurting their businesses through militant resistance that put Bethlehem in the line of fire. In addition, some of them found themselves forced to pay protection money to avoid unwanted attention from the militants. Nonetheless, many Christians felt that they in particular were targeted by militant thugs and this served to fuel wider tensions between Christians and Muslims in the Bethlehem area. At the height of the Second Intifada, these divisions were reflected in local recollections of one event that shook up the entire Bethlehem community: the Israeli siege of Bethlehem and the Church of the Nativity in April 2002.

The Siege of Bethlehem

In March and April 2002, Israel carried out a massive military operation in the West Bank, with the declared aim of rooting out Palestinian militants and stopping Palestinian terrorism against Israel. As part of this campaign, Bethlehem was invaded, and some 200 Palestinians fleeing Israeli forces sought refuge inside the Church of Nativity in the center of Bethlehem. For 37 days Israeli forces laid siege to the church, during which a church bell-ringer and nine other Palestinians were killed (Raheb 2004). Among the people present in the church were 39 militants wanted by the Israelis, a number of civilians, clerics, policemen, the Governor of Bethlehem and foreign activists. After several rounds of negotiations, the siege ended with an agreement that most of the militants would be exiled to Gaza, while the rest would be deported and sent to Europe (Rees 2004).

In its aftermath, details of the siege of the Church of the Nativity were retold and interpreted in widely different ways. In his book *Bethlehem Besieged* (2004), Mitri Raheb, a Lutheran Minister in Bethlehem, recalls how some Christians criticized the militants for fleeing into the Church of Nativity, instead of using the Mosque just across the square, claiming that the militants were reluctant to place a mosque in the line of fire, but had no reservations about placing the church in harms way. There were also claims that the clerics had been forced to stay in the church, and that the militants had deliberately filled the church with dirt, showing no respect for the sanctity of the place. Others would argue that, the militants had no such choice and if they had fled into the nearby mosque, the Israeli army could have invaded the place and probably killed most of them without fear of the bad publicity that would have come out of a church invasion. From this perspective, it was argued that the clerics had stayed in church of their own accord and that, considering the

circumstances of 200 people being forced to live inside the church for five weeks, they had left it in good shape and treated it with respect. Different versions of these events are still being told, reflecting conflicting perceptions of Christian-Muslim relations, and of Muslim attitudes towards local Christianity and Christian holy sites.

Class and Religious Divides

The economic depression following the Second Intifada also gave rise to strong social tensions based on class divide and economic differences. High rates of unemployment and a surplus of male laborers created a climate of fierce competition within a badly-wounded tourist industry as well as other sectors of the local economy, pitting different social groups against each other. Based on their historical prominence and their traditional hold on Bethlehem tourism, local Christians became the object of some resentment among the less-privileged sections of the community. Among camp-based refugees and villagers from the rural communities around Bethlehem, local Christians are sometimes seen as wealthy, spoiled and arrogant middle-class city-dwellers who live off generous donations from Western churches, remittances from relatives abroad, and from their general control of the local tourist- and pilgrimage industry. In a situation of economic hardships, the notion of local Christians as a privileged minority is a source of everyday conflict and tension in the Bethlehem community. Christian shopkeepers in Bethlehem complain that local Muslims avoid shopping at their stores, consistently choosing shops run by Muslim families instead. Local Muslims for their part argue that the Christian shop-owners are doing fine without their support.

In the northern part of Bethlehem all visitors from outside walk through the same gate in the Separation Wall when traveling from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Naturally, the point at which independent tourists and other visitors enter Bethlehem is a very attractive waiting spot for local taxi-drivers. In recent years, Muslim taxi-drivers have united to bar Christian drivers from entering this area, thus excluding them from accessing potential passengers as they come through the gate. One argument for doing so has been that Christian drivers use their sectarian background as a 'selling card' to establish a base of customers among internationals who work and live in the area and that, because of this, it is only fair that the Muslim drivers should have the short-term visitors to themselves. Claims of private wealth and comparative advantages enjoyed by Christians are used by some to justify everyday practices of informal discrimination against Christian shopkeepers, taxi-drivers, souvenir salesmen and others. A popular

perception of Christian wealth is kept alive by, among other things, patterns of recreational consumption and other indications of material wealth displayed by some Christians.

Nationalist Feelings Generated by International Events

In an increasingly interconnected and globalized world, events taking place in one part of the world can trigger reactions in another, and political dynamics involving world powers may dictate internal relations within a community under pressure. This is very much the case in Palestine. In recent years, dramatic events have taken place – in Palestine and in other parts of the world – that have mobilized a shared sense of belonging and solidarity at a local, national or a regional level among Palestinians.

Certain events can invoke experiences of nationness – a sense of belonging in which people become aware that their hardships and concerns, but also their emotional responses to specific events, are widely shared within the Palestinian community. Such a sense of nationness can be actualized through people's everyday interaction in informal settings, and through public expressions of shared sentiments.

The International Boycott of Hamas

The Palestinian Parliamentary election in January 2006, which was monitored by a number of international organizations, was widely recognized as a free and fair election. However, the result of the election took a lot of people by surprise in both Palestine and the international community. Hamas emerged as the victor, winning an absolute majority in the Palestinian Legislative Council. Unable to build a coalition with any of the other factions, Hamas had to establish a government on its own, with only a few independent ministers. The international community, led by the US and the EU, responded with an economic boycott of the Palestinian Authority. For the next 18 months, this boycott had a crippling effect on the Palestinian economy. Without international funding, the Palestinian Authority was unable to deliver the most basic public services. Schools and hospitals were closed, and thousands of public servants worked without pay for months at the time. Most secular Palestinians were unhappy about the outcome of the election, and feared that a Hamas government would only bring misery to its own people. Still, the international boycott of the new Hamas government was seen as deeply unjustified. A prominent Christian Fatah veteran from Beit Sahour expressed his anger over the international sanctions:

> I am Fatah, I would never vote for Hamas. But we had a free and fair election, and they won! The Americans and Europeans talk about democracy all the time, but when they don't like the result, they don't want democracy!

This sentiment seemed to be shared by most Christians of the Bethlehem area. The international boycott was seen as a violation of their democratic rights, and as an example of double standards shown by the international community in relation to the Palestinians. This was an issue on which most Palestinians could unite. A sense of internal unity in opposition to Israel was further strengthened by the escalation of the conflict in the summer of 2006 between Israel and the PA government led by Hamas. All through May and June 2006, there were a number of violent confrontations between Palestinian militants and Israeli soldiers in the Palestinian Territories. In the Northern cities of Nablus and Jenin several Palestinians were killed in Israeli attacks and in armed clashes. In particular, the Gaza beach blast – an episode in which a family of seven Palestinians were killed by Israeli artillery shells while having a picnic on the beach – caused great anger and resentment among Palestinians throughout the West Bank (BBC 2006a). In Bethlehem, people would refer to this and other incidents as proof of Israel's brutality and stress that the Israeli authorities were far more ruthless than the Hamas leaders who were now in charge of the PA. A few weeks later, 64 Hamas members including seven cabinet ministers and 20 members of the Palestinian Parliament were rounded up in their homes and detained by the Israeli army (BBC 2006b). Most Palestinians, regardless of sectarian background and political loyalties were outraged, and found this to be an unacceptable violation of what little sovereignty the Palestinian Authority had left. When talking to local Christians in Beit Sahour and Bethlehem, I was surprised at their passion in condemning the Israeli arrests. They stressed that they disagreed with the politics of the Hamas officials, but they were still a part of their government, and these arrests were a great insult to them all as Palestinians. Among the Christians of Bethlehem, the general escalation of the conflict with Israel served to emphasize their nationalist sentiments, and their sense of 'groupness' as part of a Palestinian community.

Local Responses to the War on Lebanon

This sense of internal unity was further fueled by another regional event involving Israel. On 12 July 2006, two Israeli soldiers were kidnapped during a Hezbollah offensive against an Israeli border post between Israel and Lebanon. Israel responded by launching a war on Lebanon, in an effort to root out

Hezbollah. Within the next five weeks, Israel's war on Lebanon would cost more than 1200 lives, and wreak enormous destruction on Lebanon's civilian infrastructure (Hanafi 2009, Makdisi 2010). Israel's war-making caused great anger throughout the Arab World. In Palestine, the lack of international intervention was another source of resentment. The United States supported Israel's military campaign without reservation and European governments were cautious about expressing criticism. Even the UN failed to condemn Israel's bombing of civilian targets in a clear language, while Arab states such as Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia directed their criticism primarily at the Hezbollah movement.

A Demonstration in Beit Sahour

In Beit Sahour, people were outraged by what they saw as an all-round acceptance of Israel's conduct, and three weeks into the war, a group of activists decided to vent their anger. On the first Sunday in August, a demonstration was started just after Sunday Mass outside the Orthodox Church in Beit Sahour. The demonstration took the form of a funeral procession, led by the Orthodox boy- and girl scouts, in which the demonstrators carried three coffins, representing the International Conscience, the UN and the Arab League. From the Orthodox Church, the procession snaked its way through the old city center of Beit Sahour, past the Latin Church where the Sunday Mass had just finished and more people joined in, before it ended up on a dusty parking lot in the middle of Beit Sahour. Here, the coffins were lowered into a big hole that had been dug out for the occasion (Appendix 5).

Once the coffins had been placed in the hole, the Catholic and the Orthodox parish priests of the village emerged, and the crowd went quiet. The priests then performed the ceremonial funeral liturgies of their churches, in Latin and in Arabic, before leaving the UN, the Arab League and the International conscience to their 'final rest'. Once the liturgies had been performed, the silence was broken by protesters who vented their anger by hurling rocks at the coffins. After a few minutes the crowd dispersed, people went home to their houses, and the coffins were buried in sand.

To some of the older participants who had grown up in the 1950s and 1960s, the demonstration was an emotional experience that reminded them of a time when the peoples of the region were united by a shared identity as Arabs and by a shared set of political sentiments that transcended national and sectarian divides. For those who grew up during the 1970s and 1980s, the demonstrations served as a reminder of the First Intifada, and the kind of national unity and passion that was mobilized within the Beit Sahour community in opposition to the Israeli occupation. For some of the younger participants who grew up

during the Oslo years, this demonstration manifested a sense of passion and shared sentiment among their townsmen that they had heard about from the First Intifada, but barely experienced at first hand. By placing the parish priests in such a prominent role, the demonstration also served as a powerful affirmation of people's self-ascribed identities as Arabs, as Palestinians, and as Christians, with a strong sense of commitment to the Arab world.

The emotions displayed by the demonstrators, reflected a strong identification with the people of Lebanon that in many cases extended to outright support for Hezbollah's campaign of rocket launches against Israel, and widespread admiration for Hassan Nashrallah, the leader of Hezbollah. During the war people would spend hours every day in front of their TV screens following the latest developments on Arab news channels. The success of Hezbollah in shaking up Israel's defense capabilities and mobilizing effective resistance against Israeli soldiers on the ground met with enthusiasm among Palestinians who felt that for the first time in history, Israel's military might was in fact being challenged. When I visited a local family, the mild-hearted father of the house would talk with great excitement about how Hassan Nashrallah had declared live on Al-Jazeera his intention to sink an Israeli navy vessel entering Lebanese territorial waters, and how only minutes later, the vessel was hit and destroyed by Hezbollah rockets. This excitement at Hezbollah activities and the widely-expressed compassion for Lebanese victims of Israel's warfare were strengthened by an overwhelming perception that Israel's bombardment in Lebanon was both grossly disproportionate and indiscriminate, harming innocent civilians rather than Hezbollah fighters. When explaining their respect for Hassan Nashrallah, they would emphasize not his role as a leader of militant fighters but as a leader who could deliver inspiring speeches carrying a vision of Arab unity and solidarity beyond sectarian divides. For many Palestinian Christians, this pan-Arab, non-sectarian message had a powerful resonance. Though a divisive figure in Lebanon, Hassan Nashrallah became a point of reference for Palestinian Christians frustrated at the lack of inspiring qualities among their own leaders, whether in Islamist or the secular ranks. In this context, they would place themselves firmly within a wider community not only of Palestinians but also of disenchanted Arabs throughout the Middle East who were disillusioned with their own leaders. These national and regional events throughout the spring and summer of 2006 served to invoke a spirit of national unity in opposition to Israel and the international community. However, this would not last for long. Political developments throughout the following year would have an equally divisive effect, with armed clashes between Hamas and Fatah culminating with the Hamas takeover of Gaza in June 2007, and a political split between the West Bank, which was controlled by Fatah, and Gaza,

controlled by Hamas. In the following years, the West Bank has been ruled by a Fatah-dominated government led by Mahmoud Abbas, while Hamas has established its own government in Gaza. After numerous failed attempts at reconciliation, the divisions between Hamas and Fatah-loyalists, in Gaza and in the West Bank are deeper than ever.

Divisive Events

While some events can invoke a sense of groupness and unity at different levels, others may spark division and conflict within a community. In a world connected through a global network of media and information systems, information about events in one part in the world is rapidly distributed globally, and reinterpreted and given new meaning in other parts of the world, generating new processes and reactions that cannot be controlled or predicted. Since 9/11, with the emergence of an increasingly confrontational climate between the Western powers and the Muslim world, minor events in Western countries have sparked large-scale and sometimes violent reactions in the Middle East.

The Mohammad Cartoon Crisis

One such event was the Cartoon Crisis, sparked by the printing in a Danish newspaper of a series of cartoons insulting the Prophet Muhammed. The cartoons were printed in the Danish paper *Jylland-Posten* in September 2005, and met with strong reactions from Muslim organizations in Denmark, who demanded apologies from the paper, and a denouncement by the Danish government. As these demands where rejected, the governments of a handful of Muslim countries tried to intervene asking the Danish Government to make a reconciliatory statement of some sort. These requests were flatly dismissed, and after a few more months, in January 2006, reactions to the cartoons escalated into large-scale protest aimed at Danish embassies around the world, as well as commercial boycotts of Danish products. The protests grew increasingly violent, and were soon directed at Norway as well, culminating with the attacks and burning of the Danish and Norwegian embassies in Damascus. In Palestine too, the Danish cartoons sparked massive protests. Local churches in Palestine were quick to denounce the cartoons as a disrespectful desecration of Muslim symbols. In Bethlehem, the heads of the main churches met local Muslim leaders to discuss the situation, and local Church representatives condemned the cartoons as an insult not just to Islam but to the Arab world as a whole. In doing so, they tried to reframe the crisis, describing the conflict in

cultural terms, as an expression of European arrogance towards the Arab world in general, rather than in religious terms, as a Christian insult to Islam. This reframing was seen as very important by the church leaders to prevent anger at Western Christianity from being directed at local Christians. In the wake of the cartoon crisis, local Christians would complain that this controversy had increased sectarian tension in the area by agitating their Muslim neighbors.

Papal Remarks

Six months later, another event in Europe would stir up tensions between Christians and Muslims in Palestine. During a speech at Regensburg University in Germany on September 12th, the Pope used a quote that included the following passage written by Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Paleologus: 'Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached'. (BBC 2006c)

Within a few days, the speech had provoked violent protests throughout the Muslim world, with crowds of angry protesters demonstrating against the Pope's remarks. In some parts of the world, including the West Bank and Gaza, the protests took on a more violent shape. In Nablus, a Greek Orthodox and an Anglican church were firebombed by local protesters. In Gaza and in the Northern city of Tulkarem, another two churches were firebombed in response to the Pope's comments.

The local churches condemned these attacks, but also criticized the Pope for his reckless comments, and called for Christian-Muslim unity. The affected communities were visited by church leaders and local Muslim leaders as well as by PA ministers, who all condemned the violent attacks, and pledged their commitment to protecting the local Christian communities. Local church leaders were quick to stress that Christian-Muslim relations were generally good, and that these incidents were exceptional. At the same time, in appealing for caution among their colleagues in the West, church leaders in Palestine pointed out that offensive statements from Church authorities in other parts of the world can have polarizing effects in the Middle East, and create unnecessary difficulties for local Christians. As a local priest put it: 'When they sneeze in Europe, we catch the cold!'

In the Bethlehem area there were no incidents of violent attacks on churches in response to the remarks made by Pope Benedict. However, the church-burnings in Gaza and in the northern part of the West Bank gave rise to fears that similar incidents might also take place in Bethlehem. In Beit Sahour, rumors were spread that a group of young Muslims had set fire to the entrance to the Latin Church in Beit Sahour but that the fire had been put out by some locals.

This heightened people's worries that their little town would also fall victim to Muslim anger. Being in Beit Sahour at the time, I decided to check up on the scene of the crime, a few hours after the alleged arson. There were no sign of arson anywhere, and locals living next to the church had not seen or heard anything about any arson attempt. However, the mere fact that such a rumor could spread indicated the sense of vulnerability that pervaded the area after the burning of churches in other parts of the West Bank. When I visited Beit Sahour a year later, people I had not met the previous year would repeat this story, claiming that the Latin Church had been set on fire just a few days after Pope Benedict's notorious speech. At the same time, local Christians speculated that the attacks on these churches, especially the ones in Nablus, had been perpetrated by collaborators working for Israel with the intent to spark internal confrontations between Christians and Muslims. This would fit neatly with widely-held notions of Israeli intentions to cause division and sectarian strife among Palestinians.

Nonetheless, such episodes have a significant impact on the sense of security experienced among Palestinian Christians. First, the sectarian aspect of these events cannot be ignored or denied. Social conflicts related to land disputes and the rule of law as described in the previous chapter may be explained as regional, clan-, community- or class-based tensions in the context of a weak Palestinian Authority. In contrast, the burning of a church, and the vandalizing of church property, is clearly an attack on the Church itself and on the Christian community. Such attacks may reflect a momentary flare-up of passionate anger among a few individuals rather than some enduring and widespread hostility towards Christians. Nonetheless, this anger is directed at the local Church and at local Christians. Secondly, these episodes have been catalyzed by external events, such as the publishing of the Mohammad cartoons and Pope Benedict's remarks about Islam, events that have taken place in other parts of the world, and on which local Christians have had no influence. When such events turn into public outbreaks of anger and violent attacks on churches in Palestine, local Christians are left with a profound sense of insecurity and powerlessness.

Nationalism in the Lives of Palestinian Christians

In general, the socio-political changes that have taken place within the community, the conservative turn among segments of the Muslim population and the growth of Islamic movements have raised concerns among many Bethlehem Christians. At the same time, local Christians of various backgrounds

and ages have perceived these developments differently, and hold widely-differing views on how they affect their own situation and future prospects in Palestine. The personal stories of a few local Christians can give us a glimpse of this diversity.

Wissam

Wissam was born in 1941 and grew up in Beit Sahour under British and Jordanian rule. He remembers the Jordanian period as a time of poverty, but also of calm and stability within the Bethlehem area, which was still largely dominated by the Christian communities of Bethlehem, Beit Sahour and Beit Jala, and there was little social difference between local Christians and Muslims. Jordanian authorities upheld the rule of law in the area and everyone was united against a common enemy in the shape of the state of Israel. The West Bank formed part of Jordan, and Wissam and his family could travel to Syria, Lebanon and Jordan without much difficulty and, as a Christian living in an epoch dominated by secular ideologies, Wissam felt very much at home in the Arab World. In 1963, he went to Turkey to study English at a University in Ankara. He spent four years in Turkey, and these were years that he remembers with great joy.

In 1967, he finished his studies in Turkey, but did not have time to return to the West Bank before the war broke out and Israel had occupied the West Bank. Unable to return to Bethlehem, he spent a year and a half working as an English editor for Radio Amman in Jordan before moving to Libya, where he got a job as press secretary with the Libyan Authorities in early 1969. After a few months, there was a *coup-d'etat* in Libya, and Wissam found himself working in the press section for the government of Muhammad Ghadaffi, a job he kept until 1976. While in Tripoli, he met a woman from Gaza, married and had two sons. In 1976, he left Libya and brought his family home to Beit Sahour, where he found a job as a Deputy Headmaster at the local Lutheran School.

When he returned to Bethlehem in 1976, the Pan-Arab dream had been broken, the West Bank was under Israeli occupation, and Bethlehem had seen a significant influx of Muslim immigrants from the Hebron area. At the same time, secular nationalism was still the dominant ideology and, in Wissam's recollection, the Bethlehem community was blessed with a liberal social atmosphere and good relations between Christians and Muslims. Working at a school with both Christian and Muslim students, Wissam also experienced the social changes that took place within the local Muslim communities. He describes a gradual drift towards more conservative norms of everyday conduct, and an embrace of Islam as a source of political mobilization, made visible through a set of everyday practices. Wissam found this development

deeply troubling and he had particularly strong feelings about the veil. In his recollection, there were few differences between Christians and Muslims in the Bethlehem of his childhood, and almost no women wore the veil. For this and other reasons, Wissam sees the veil not as an indigenous expression of a cultural identity but as an alien symbol of religious extremism and as a symptom of a growing cultural distance between local Christians and Muslims.

Lina

Lina is a retired school teacher who has experienced similar social changes in her own neighborhood in Bethlehem. Born in the late 1930s, she grew up in a neighborhood that was wholly Christian, and where everyone was linked through family relationships and generations of neighborliness. In the late 1950s, she married and moved into her husband's neighborhood, which enjoyed the same quality of intimate neighborliness. This sense of community would stay with them throughout the Jordanian period.

In her husband's neighborhood, many young men were working or studying abroad when the West Bank was occupied by Israel. After the war, many of them were not allowed to return to the West Bank. This forced them to settle in neighboring countries such as Jordan, Lebanon or, as preferred by most young men at the time in the US. With time, many of these young men would help their own families to get to the US as well. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, those who left were gradually replaced by large families from Hebron or from nearby villages. Throughout the 1960s, Lina had three children who grow up in a mixed Christian-Muslim neighborhood, and they were encouraged to socialize and make friends with their Muslim peers. Though their Muslim neighbors were mostly new-comers from other parts of the West Bank, they would get to know them and establish close and friendly relations with them. On an everyday basis, they found that they had much in common with their new neighbors.

For Lina, the changes were very noticeable within her local community in Bethlehem. From the early 1980s on, she felt that relations with her Muslim neighbors grew more distant and restrained. Her own neighborhood was entirely taken over by newcomers from outside – conservative Muslim families where all the women were fully secluded and stayed inside their houses most of the time. She felt that she had less in common with these latest newcomers to the area, and she also felt that her older Muslim neighbors were beginning to change their appearance, dressing more conservatively, being more controlling of their daughters and, in general, changing their conduct towards a more conservative style. Watching these changes take place, Lina felt that her little family grew increasingly disconnected from the rest of the families that lived in her neighborhood.

Since the early 1990s, and especially after the start of the Second Intifada, Wissam feels that the political reality in the West Bank has been defined by militant groups and Muslim extremists, creating a social gulf between Christians and Muslims that has widened beyond repair. As he sees it, the social changes that have taken place among many Muslim Palestinians, from a conservative turn in their everyday lifestyle to supporting Islamist movements, represents an embrace of a religious extremism that will be a growing threat to the Christian community. He is alarmed by the rise of Hamas as a dominant force in Palestinian politics and he thinks that the movement represents a vision for the Palestinian community that leaves no room for a vibrant Christian community. Wissam's bleak vision is informed by his recollection of a Bethlehem community characterized by a more liberal atmosphere and his marriage to a Christian woman from Gaza, whose family has faced the impact of Hamas dominance more directly.

Unlike Wissam, Lina does not engage with factional politics and she does not worry too much about the rise of Islamic political movements. On the other hand, she is deeply worried about the emergence of Islamic piety and the adoption of pious norms of behavior among her Muslim neighbors. She feels that these developments have profoundly changed her old neighborhood, creating unspoken social divisions between its Christian and Muslim components.

Jiries

Jiries from Beit Sahour has had a less dramatic experience of these developments. Born in 1958, he grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, a period dominated by the war of 1967 and Israel's occupation of the West Bank. His father was an officer in the Jordanian army who had to remain in Jordan for two years after the war before he could return to his family in Beit Sahour. Growing up in a predominantly Christian town, with what he describes as a liberal atmosphere, Jiries had limited but good relations with local Muslims throughout his childhood and teenage years.

Jiries was mostly out of the country between 1978 and 1984. He spent two years studying in Syria between 1978 and 1980. After that, he was admitted to a university in Vienna, where he studied engineering for four years before returning to the West Bank. After his return, he married and started working as an electrical contractor in Jerusalem. Living in a Christian neighborhood in Beit Sahour, establishing a family and working long hours six days a week, Jiries was, in his own words, 'too busy to notice any changes' within the local community during the first years after his return. For others like Wissam and Lina, a turn towards pious norms and everyday practices among local Muslims was

already causing some worries. Like most families in Beit Sahour, Jiries and his family were badly affected by the Intifada. He worked in Jerusalem at the start of the Intifada, but was banned from entering Jerusalem for three years during the uprising. In spite of this, he recalls the Intifada with some fondness and nostalgia, as a time of great unity and resilience within the community. Like others in Beit Sahour, his family had most of their furniture and other valuables confiscated because they refused to pay taxes to the Israeli authorities. Nonetheless, he was proud to have taken part in a collective protest in which the entire community demonstrated such resilience in the face of Israeli oppression.

After the First Intifada, Jiries noticed a growing support for Islamic movements and a drift towards conservative norms among local Muslims, but he never experienced these changes as very dramatic. Throughout the 1990s, he commuted between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, crossed Israeli checkpoints several times a day, and was constantly reminded of the fact that he was living under occupation. He made these trips together with Muslim neighbors who were also working in Jerusalem. This everyday experience reminded him that the constraints and ordeals associated with the Israeli occupation were his main source of worry, and that this was a situation he shared with his Muslim neighbors.

When the Second Intifada broke out, Jiries was once again badly hit. He lost his job in Jerusalem, and found himself partially unemployed and thus barely able to provide for his family. Throughout the next two years, he saw how the Intifada was taken over by militants loosely associated with Palestinian political factions, and how groups of militants were allowed to terrorize local Palestinian communities and launch attacks against Israeli targets in ways that placed other Palestinians in harm's way.

While many others saw these incidents – in particular the rooftop shootings in Beit Jala – as expressions of Muslim hostility towards local Christians, Jiries saw them as expressions of a more general problem within the West Bank: the lack of a functioning rule of law. Jiries comes from a small family, and he lives with his immediate family on the outskirts of Beit Sahour bordering the Bedu area, an area that has suffered from a lack of safety and that has seen a great number of thefts and break-ins because of its location. Jiries has experienced how the rule of law falls short when faced with the power of strong family clans. He feels the vulnerability of belonging to a small family and he thinks that this is a vulnerability felt by most Christians. He is confident that a strong Palestinian state with a robust police and security apparatus could solve this problem, establish law and order within the area, and provide adequate protection for vulnerable groups such as local Christians.

Jiries grew up before the emergence of political Islam as a force within Palestinian society and he has seen the changes that have taken place since the

early 1980s. At the same time, living in Beit Sahour, he has not experienced these changes as particularly dramatic. He still thinks the future has a place for Christians in Palestine and he considers the Israeli occupation to be a far greater threat to their community than their Muslim neighbors.

Samir – A Leftist Activist

This assessment is shared by Samir, a former leftist activist from Bethlehem. However, like Wissam and Lina, he has regarded with deep concern the emergence of Islamic movements and the growing cultural gap between Muslims and Christians within the Bethlehem community. Samir is in his mid-thirties, and works as a lawyer in Bethlehem. He grew up in Bethlehem before leaving to study in Jordan and the US in his 20s. After a few years working in the US, he has returned to live in Palestine. Samir recalls the First Intifada with sadness and nostalgia and he contrasts the social unity of that period with the divisions and fragmentations that he sees twenty years later:

> Back in the 1980s, I had a lot of friends in Deheisha Camp. They were Muslims, and I was a Christian, but that didn't matter. They were members of PFLP and they were not very religious. We enjoyed hanging out together, we could talk about anything, we had the same mindset; the way they lived their lives was not so different from the way I lived. During the First Intifada this started changing…Many of my old friends from Deheisha became more religious, and gradually they started shifting towards Hamas and Islamic Jihad. Today, I have nothing in common with them. If I meet them now, we have nothing to talk about. They have turned very religious, and they want to establish an Islamic state in Palestine. We have no common ground anymore.

As Samir recalls it, these changes started taking place during the First Intifada, with many of his Muslim friends starting a journey that in time would take them from the Leftist to the Islamist ranks. However, these changes at first appeared to be undramatic, taking place during a period that he experienced as one of unity between the different political factions. Only later, after the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, would he experience the divisive effects of these changes.

When Samir returned to Palestine in 2000, after four years in Jordan and three years in the US where he had studied law, he returned to a community that was far more divided than the one he had left. While he was away, many of his former Leftist friends had become staunch supporters of Hamas, the main Islamist movement within the Palestinian territories. Socially, this shift had

been accompanied by a dramatic change in their social conduct as well. During his absence, many of his friends had grown long beards, they had become much more observant of religious rituals, such as the five daily prayers, and they took great care to avoid any contact with women outside their own families. In addition they expressed strong intolerance of lifestyles and habits of consumption that did not correspond with their own codes of conduct, and they would, quite candidly, express discontent and suspicion of the Christians of the area. Faced with these sentiments, he found no common ground on which to reconnect with his old friends. Samir's estrangement from his former friends rested not only on their religious and ideological turn to political Islam but also on their turn to religious piety in their everyday practices and codes of conduct.[9]

At the same time, Samir's Christian friends, most of whom used to share his dream of a secular, pluralistic Palestinian society, had turned into sectarian alarmists, having little contact with their Muslim neighbors, and cultivating a self-pitying position as 'internal others' and their own suspicions of Muslims in general. Samir found this new 'sectarianized' reality profoundly depressing. To a great extent he blames this on the PA for creating a regime of corruption and power abuse that has fueled political apathy, internal fragmentation, lawlessness and sectarian resentment in Bethlehem. As he sees it, Palestinians have gone through a daze of paralysis and internal fragmentation since the First Intifada, one that has had a very destructive effect on Bethlehem. Having personal recollections of a community characterized by mutual solidarity and unity that cut across sectarian divides, he believes that local Palestinians can find their way back to this spirit of the past. Samir draws a particularly sharp contrast between the years of the First Intifada and the Second Intifada, when he returned to Palestine after several years abroad. This contrast may be built on a romanticized recollection of the past and a desire to blame the peace process for the internal disunity of later years.

Samir's account of the recent past is shared by many Christians who were active in the secular national movement of Fatah, or one of the Leftist movements that still enjoy strong support among Palestinian Christians. However, many local Christians dismiss Samir's account of the Intifada years

9 While some leftist activists in Deheisha-camp made an ideological journey in the years between the two Intifadas, not all of them did. Deheisha is still home to a substantial milieu of committed leftists, primarily affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Samir's account of an ideological transformation that turned a whole cohort of leftists into hardened Islamists, reflects most of all how unsettling these changes where to him, and the level of estrangement he experienced when reconnecting with his old friends after a few years abroad.

as a self-deceiving expression of Intifada nostalgia, and a longing for a sense of unity and solidarity which in their minds only existed for that short period of time. Even among those who share Samir's image of the First Intifada as a time of unity, the Oslo years of the late 1990s and the Second Intifada have been seen as periods of social fragmentation and disunity.

The Experience of Secular Muslims

Samir's account is also mirrored in the experiences of many Palestinian Muslims who are secular in lifestyle and political leanings. In the Bethlehem area, many Muslims of Samir's generation enjoyed close relations with their Christian peers while growing up. Among those who embraced a liberal lifestyle themselves, many have felt alienated by the resurgence of Islamic movements within their own communities. At the same time, they have experienced a gradual estrangement from many of their Christian friends.

This has been the experience of Ahmed, who lives in a village close to Beit Sahour. Like Samir, he was a teenager during the First Intifada, and during that period he was involved with a leftist political faction. Through his activism, he formed friendships with other youths from the Bethlehem area, both Christians and Muslims, in particular in Beit Sahour. During the early Oslo years, he remained a committed member of one of the leftist factions while studying at Bethlehem University. While at University, he had many Christian friends whom he liked to hang out with, and sometimes drink wine and beer without his family finding out about it.

After completing his studies, he worked with political advocacy within various NGOs based in the Bethlehem area but stayed mainly with one organization that was based in Beit Sahour. Here, he worked with old friends from the Intifada years, who were mostly Christians from Beit Sahour. He also had other friends in Beit Sahour who belonged to Christian families. As the years went by, his home village went through a gradual transformation. Once a Fatah-bastion, a great number of people in his village turned to Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and this shift was accompanied with a conservative turn in social conduct. The women of his village grew more conscientious about wearing the *hijab* or the *jilbab*, and the men of the village observed the daily prayers with newfound dedication. Ahmed followed this development with despair. Firmly planted on the secular left and skeptical of any merging of religion and politics, he felt increasingly disconnected from the majority of his fellow villagers, including members of his own family. In Beit Sahour, this shift met with great concern, and Sahouris grew weary of having any contact with people from Ahmed's home village. Gradually, he felt that this weariness extended to him as well. As the peace process collapsed, and the Second Intifada started, he kept close and

friendly relations with his Christian workmates. At the same time, he felt that other Sahouri friends, some of whom he had known for more than fifteen years, started to minimize their contact with him, some avoiding him altogether. They would still talk to him at factional gatherings, greet him in the street and treat him in a polite and respectful manner, but not as a close and personal friend. They would no longer invite him for dinner at their homes, he would no longer be asked to join them for a beer and some snacks at a local restaurant, and he would no longer be invited to attend Sahouri weddings. He felt that even though they knew him as a liberal and secularly-minded Muslim, who for the most part would share their outlook on social and political matters of the day, due to his religious affiliation and his village background there was now a stigma attached to him.

As such, he found himself doubly marginalized. On the one hand, he was increasingly alienated from his neighbors and co-villagers, due to their embrace of an Islamic ideology and more conservative lifestyles. On the other hand, many of his ideological allies and friends among Sahouri Christians no longer wanted to have much contact with him. Ahmed's experience may be special in that the socio-political differences between his home village and the leftist milieu of Beit Sahour, where he had invested in social relations, were especially pointed. Nonetheless, his experience is similar to that of other secular Muslims in and around Bethlehem. While seeing segments of their families and home communities turn more conservative, in religious views and political convictions, they often find that local Christians, even those they consider their friends, view them with growing suspicion and skepticism. This points to a development in which Christians and Muslims, even those who have a history of shared friendships, and who still share a set of core values and ideas about the world, can find themselves caught up in the dynamics of sectarian estrangement.

Local Christians have tried to make sense of these changes and discover for themselves how they affect their own situation, and their own place within the Palestinian community. At the same time, Palestinian churches have tried to figure out their own loyalties and to come to terms with new political realities. In doing so, they have made different choices in how to engage with the concerns of their local laity, with the Palestinian community more widely, with Israel and with their international mother churches.

Nationalism and the Role of the Churches in Palestine

Academic studies (Bowman 2001, 2011, Dumper 2002) as well as more popular publications (Aburish 1993, Sennott 2001) have discussed the tensions between

the churches in Palestine and the local communities of Palestinian Christians. In his book about the Christians of Palestine, Said Aburish delivers a damning critique of Christian church leaders for their failure to address local concerns, and for their lack of genuine efforts to rally their international church networks to confront Israeli policies towards the Palestinians (Aburish 1993).

All the main churches in Palestine have Jerusalem as their regional center, and the privileges of the different churches have depended on a certain degree of accommodation and cooperation with whoever held political authority over the city, whether these have been the Ottoman, British, Jordanian or Israeli authorities. Furthermore, the largest churches, in particular the Greek Orthodox and the Catholic Church of Jerusalem have been subordinate to international hierarchies and have been ruled by hierarchies of largely foreign clergy. Only at a local level have the churches been represented by local priests (Dumper 2002). Historically, the churches have been ruled with an eye to the interests of their mother churches rather than to the concerns of local Christians (Aburish 1993, Bowman 2011). After Israel's occupation of Jerusalem and the West Bank in 1967, regional leaders of the different churches cooperated with Israeli authorities in order to secure their own privileges in Jerusalem.

The Case of the Greek Orthodox Church

This policy of cooperation with Israel has been especially clear within the Greek Orthodox Church, the biggest and oldest of the churches, with a membership of some 51% of all Christians in the West Bank (Sabella 2005:76). The ruling body of the Orthodox Church, the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher has been made up exclusively of Greek and Cypriot Monks. The Brotherhood controls the activities of the church, as well as its vast properties. Palestinians are allowed to become priests but only on the condition that they marry, which, according to church regulations, will bar them from becoming monks and from obtaining access to the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher (Bowman 2011). This has been a source of discontent within the Arab Orthodox community for more than a century. Early manifestations of Arab and Palestinian nationalism were seen with the emergence of the Arab Orthodox Movement in the early 1900s, an organization dedicated to arabizing the church, and to wresting control of the church and its properties from foreign hands (Tamārī 2008:185).

Since 1967, The Greek Orthodox Church has maintained a policy of cooperation with the State of Israel and, for the most part, has refrained from taking a stance on political issues pertaining to the conflict. Throughout this period, the Orthodox Patriarchate has also sold church land to the State of Israel (Dumper 1999, 2002:65). Widely regarded by Palestinians as an act of betrayal,

this has been a source of tension between the Greek clergy and the local laity (Dumper 2002:118–120). In 2005, it was revealed that church property in the old city of Jerusalem had been sold to Israeli investors. This caused an upheaval among the Palestinian laity, but also among parts of the Greek clergy. The sitting Patriarch was ousted by the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulcher and replaced by a new one(Bowman 2011:391–392). The new Patriarch has been recognized by Jordan and the PA but not by the Israeli authorities, who have insisted on keeping the old Patriarch and, until December 2007, kept him installed in the Patriarchate offices, protected by Israeli soldiers. Some Palestinian Christians saw these upheavals as a step in the right direction, and some saw them as mere cosmetics. The Brotherhood is still controlled by Greek priests, and the new Patriarch, like his predecessor, is widely viewed as another corrupt foreigner who is oblivious to the concerns of the local community. The tension between an Orthodox Church led by foreign clergy and the local Christian community is illustrated by the encounter between Issa, a young man from Beit Sahour, and an Orthodox priest in Bethlehem:

It was an early afternoon a few days after Christmas Day, and Issa wanted to visit the Nativity Church in Bethlehem. He walked into the church at a time when he knew the church was open to the public, and sat down on a bench. Within a few minutes, a Greek priest walked up to him, and told him that he was not allowed to be in the church. He looked around and saw that there were others, foreigners sitting a few rows behind him. He told the priest that he just wanted to spend some time in the church but, according to Issa, the priest was rude and just told him he wasn't allowed to be there. He then asked the priest where he was from, and he confirmed that he was from Greece. Issa got up on his feet, looked sternly at the priest and said: 'Well I'm Palestinian, and this church is built on my land, so get out of my way! I want to spend some time in my church!' The priest walked away and threatened to call the police. Issa told him to go ahead, and sat back down on the bench. The priest got a hold of a police officer who was standing outside the church. The police officer was a Muslim from Bethlehem, and he asked Issa to explain himself. Issa told him: 'I'm from Beit Sahour, and I just want to spend some time in my church. The priest wants to kick me out because I'm an Arab!' The police officer just looked briefly at the priest, and said 'OK' before he walked out. According to Issa, the police officer understood the situation, and there was no way that he was going to side with the priest.

The confrontation between Issa and the priest illustrates conflicting notions of entitlement to a local Christian heritage and to the local churches. From the perspective of the priests, the Church of the Nativity, like other historic

churches in the area, is the lawful property of the Orthodox Church, and should be taken care of with the interests of the international Orthodox Church in mind. While the Greek Orthodox clergy may see themselves as custodians of the church buildings, properties, and the Orthodox Christian heritage in the 'Holy Land', Issa sees these churches as part of an indigenous cultural heritage that belongs to the local community, a community whose individual members are the true voices of Christianity in Palestine. The reactions of the Muslim policeman are interesting in that they reveal a clear identification with Issa, and support of Issa in his confrontation with the Priest. Formally, the priests are viewed as custodians of the Church, and the local police are expected to offer their assistance in preventing any disorderly behavior in the church, as viewed by the Priests. However, in this case, the policeman identifies Issa as a fellow Palestinian, in contrast to the Priest, who is widely seen as representing the rule of a foreign order.

In Beit Sahour, tensions between the Orthodox Church and the local community are particularly pronounced. People are keenly aware that the Greek Church hierarchy and its Palestinian laity hold widely different interests. The Orthodox Church is by far the biggest church community in the town, with more than 6000 members from the two largest family clans in Beit Sahour. However, in a community with a strong tradition of left-wing political activism, there has been a lot of resentment and distrust of the church for its enduring silence on political issues, and its reluctance to support local resistance against the Israeli occupation (Robinson 1997). During the First Intifada, even the local parish priest opposed the tax revolt in Beit Sahour (Robinson 1997). The Orthodox Church represents a special case, in that it remains firmly in the control of a foreign clergy.

The 'Palestinization' of the Churches

However, in the other main churches in Palestine, the higher clergy has been gradually 'Palestinianized', as foreign church leaders have been succeeded by leaders of Palestinian origin (Dumper 2002). Though still answering to the international hierarchies of their churches, Palestinian clerical leaders have been seen as being more in touch with the everyday concerns of local Christians. From the late 1980s on, churches such as the Latin church, the Lutheran, the Anglican and a few other churches have engaged more directly with the social and political issues facing Palestinian Christians, and developed clear voices in support of Palestinian rights in relation to Israel and the international community (Dumper 2002:121–123, Lende 2003).

An example of this was seen during the international boycott of the Hamas-led government in 2006, when several churches refused to serve as

institutions for channeling funds from European governments into the Palestinian territories as a way of circumventing the elected government. Churches refused to take on such a role because they considered the boycott to be illegitimate and an offence against the democratic rights of the Palestinian people.[10] More recently, in December 2009, a broad coalition of Christian church leaders and church-related organizations launched an unprecedented initiative, called the 'Kairos Palestine Document: A moment of truth'(Kairos 2009). Through this initiative they take a forceful stand against Israels occupation, and against any Christian defense of Israels policies, stating that:

> We, Palestinian Christians, declare…that the military occupation of our land is a sin against God and humanity, and that any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings.

The Kairos document borrows its name and idea from a similar theological statement issued by South African priests in 1985 as part of the struggle against apartheid. The Kairos Palestine Document compares the Palestinian situation with that of apartheid South Africa, and appeals to churches worldwide to protest against Israel's occupation by the same means and with the same moral clarity as they once fought the apartheid regime: through boycotts and disinvestments from Israeli companies.

The Kairos initiative has since been consolidated into a long-term advocacy platform, supported by all the main churches in Palestine through which Palestinian Christians communicate their concerns, and appeals to the international community to react against Israeli actions in the Palestinian Territories.

By taking a firm stand on the conflict, in clear support of Palestinian rights, the churches also make an effort to combat sectarian tension within the Palestinian community, and to counter internal doubts about the national loyalties of Palestinian Christians. When responding to events that may fuel sectarian divisions, this is a primary concern of the Palestinian churches. Within their own society however, Palestinian Christians are far from powerless. As mentioned in the previous chapter, they do have a voice within the Palestinian Authority and, thanks to their strong presence in politics, commerce and in educational institutions throughout the West Bank, they possess ways of advancing their own interests and concerns as a minority community.

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10 From a speech by Lutheran Bishop Munib Younan at the International Sabeel-Conference in Bethlehem, November 2006.

The Problem of Foreign Intervention

Palestinian Christians have another important asset at their disposal. Traditionally, West Bank Christians, and in particular Bethlehem Christians, have strong ties to the Western world. Local clergy, politicians, civil-society activists and academics enjoy extensive connections with financial donors, media outlets and diplomatic representatives from the US and from European countries. With the help of Western contacts, they can easily bring international attention to their internal problems in order to secure their own interests, their properties, their financial assets and their legal rights within the Palestinian Territories. However, most of them are cautious about doing so, even when they see their own interests as being under threat. As Palestinians, they find it difficult to engage in public criticism of their own community, partly because they know that there are always those waiting to use such criticisms to dismiss Palestinian national demands and question the justness of their cause.

Christian leaders fear that an international focus on conflicts along sectarian lines might harm the standing of the Palestinian community internationally. Such attention is regarded as highly damaging to Palestinian advocacy abroad and well suited to divert attention from Israeli land grabs and violations of Palestinian rights. Though concerned about internal corruption, land theft, and the failure of functioning law enforcement under PA rule, leading Palestinians do not trust international media to present these issues in a responsible manner and place them in the right context.[11] They know from earlier experiences that international reporting on internal problems of a sensitive nature, such as the issue of land theft can be used against the Palestinian Authority, to invoke an alarmist image of Christians being driven out of Palestine by their Muslim neighbors (Cook 2008). As an example, the proposal for in the US Congress for a resolution on discrimination against Palestinian

11 Local Christians are cautious about attracting international attention, but they do not entirely refrain from doing so. Internal concerns such as the issue of land theft have been raised with foreign authorities, such as the US consulate in Jerusalem. This is reflected in the section on Israel and the occupiedterritories in the International Religious Freedom Report 2008, issued by the US State Department:

> The PA did not take sufficient action during the reporting period to remedy past harassment andintimidation of Christian residents of Bethlehem by the city's Muslim majority. The PA judiciary failed to adjudicate numerous cases of seizures of Christian-owned land in the Bethlehem area by criminal gangs. PA officials appeared to have been complicit in property extortion of Palestinian Christian residents, as there were reports of PA security forces and judicial officials colluded with gang members in property extortion schemes. (USDS 2008).

Christians was seen as an attempt to undermine Palestinian interests and national unity by driving a wedge between Christians and Muslims.

As mentioned earlier, local churches, as well as Christian civil society activists and political figures were quick to condemn this proposal, arguing that it distorted the reality of Christian-Muslim relations in the area, and that it relieved Israel of its responsibility as the 'real' aggressor against Palestinian Christians. As it turned out, the proposal was partly based on a report written by Justus Weiner for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, in which he argued that Palestinian Christians were being systematically discriminated against in the Palestinian Territories. Known for a series of research projects aimed at delegitimizing Palestinian national claims,[12] Weiner is regarded as a political hit man by Palestinian academics, who dismiss his report as a distortion of Palestinian realities, conducted on behalf of an Israeli think-thank committed to defending Israeli policies and territorial aspirations against any external criticism (JCPA 2014).

Palestinian responses to these initiatives reflect fears that an international focus on internal tensions may draw attention away from Israel's military occupation and its crippling effect on the Palestinian economy. Following this reasoning, it is assumed that a focus on internal land disputes will also allow Israeli land confiscations to be ignored – confiscations through which local Christians have lost far more land than through land disputes within their own community. Most importantly, prominent Christians have reservations about criticizing Muslim Palestinians in general, anxious that this may reflect poorly on the Christian minority. Based on their historical prominence within the area, the Christians of Bethlehem, particularly the old landowning families are seen as a privileged upper- and middle-class minority of superior wealth and education, which enjoys a cultural and political influence that far exceeds their demographic presence. As such, claims of discrimination or anti-Christian hostilities are regarded by many Muslims as the unfounded and self-serving whining of a spoiled Christian elite.

Raising such concerns internationally is also seen as violating an ethos of national unity, the obligation to address internal differences through internal forums, while projecting national unity outwards. This ethos is based on the rationale that national liberation can only be achieved through unity, and that internal differences can be dealt with once the national struggle has been won.

12 Weiner's work includes an article published in 1999 in Commentary magazine, in which he claimed that famous Palestinian academic Edward Said had never lived in Jerusalem, and accused him of fabricating his own biography. Weiner was later accused of falsifying information in his work on Said (Hitchens 1999).

This rationale is eagerly exploited by government officials, who often discourage Palestinians from claiming their rights through the legal system in the name of 'national unity' (Kelly 2006:134–135). The public discourse on sectarian relations is very much shaped by such political concerns and ideals of self-restraint. At the same time, many Christians feel that unless these internal problems are discussed openly, they cannot be dealt with effectively. Among some Christian community leaders, this represents an enduring dilemma: How can they address their own concern as a sectarian minority without undermining national interests and an ethos of national unity? Many Christian leaders, both local Church leaders and political figures have been heavily committed to a secular nationalist vision of a Palestinian community, and many of them have been actively engaged in left-wing political factions such as the PFLP and DFLP as well as Fatah (Aburish 1993, Sabella 1999). As they see it, the secular nationalist project depends on a convincing projection of cross-sectarian Palestinian unity, both within the local community, and vis-à-vis the international community. What is at stake here is the very notion of a national 'We' in which Palestinian Christians can claim a sense of belonging.

Many Christians cling to a secular nationalist project, some out of a genuine ideological commitment, and some based on a realization that, as Christians, they have no alternative. As members of a tiny sectarian minority within a Muslim community, their only viable strategy is to fight for a secular political system and a government that does not try to shape society according to Islamic tenets. Looking at internal political dynamics, many Christians fear that a Palestinian state – if such a state were ever to materialize – might evolve into an Islamic regime, in which everyone would be subject to severe social constraints, and in which Christians and Muslims of a secular orientation would no longer feel safe and free to live the lifestyles of their own choosing. Still, many feel that this is part of an internal struggle and that, in relation to the outside world, such anxieties are best kept to themselves.

However, not all local Christians share these concerns. Since the end of the First Intifada, the popular growth of the Islamist camp, the malgovernance of the PA and the failure of the peace process have disillusioned and alienated many Palestinian Christians who once identified with the secular nationalist camp. Lybarger mentioned two directions that were open to those who give up on secular nationalism – one being a turn to religio-communal revivalism, emphasizing the distinctiveness of an Arab Christian heritage and identity, the other a turn to an apolitical, otherworldly religious piety, offering a spiritual escape from current political realities (Lybarger 2007a:777).

As already mentioned, many prominent Christians still retain a certain commitment to secular nationalism, and their reservations about speaking out

on internal differences may be seen as a reflection of this. In contrast, those who belong within a religio-communal camp are less troubled by such reservations. In fact, some are quite eager to focus on sectarian tensions, and on internal problems faced by Christians in the area. One of them is Khalid, an old Fatah veteran who returned to Bethlehem in 1994 after two decades in Kuwait. Back in Bethlehem he founded a Christian media center that focused on news and religious broadcasting, allegedly the only Christian media center based in the Middle East. He has been very concerned about what he sees as the informal discrimination and lack of legal protection for Christians under the Palestinian Authority. For years, he has accused Muslim Palestinians of trying to drive out local Christians through violence, intimidation, land theft and violations of their properties. He has also accused the Palestinian Authority of willfully allowing such abusive practices to take place. This has caused great alarm among other prominent Christians, who see him as a sectarian alarmist and a liability to themselves as Christians and as Palestinians. His most ardent opponents have accused him of playing the 'persecuted Christian' in his efforts to secure international funding for his media center.

In autumn 2007, Khalid had an interview appointment with a news crew from a German TV network, in which he planned to talk about the internal problems facing Palestinian Christians. Christians working within other media centers and NGOs in Bethlehem heard about the planned interview. Fearing that he would give a one-sided and overly-dramatic description of the Christian predicament in the area, they contacted the German TV crew, and talked them into canceling the interview. In this particular case, they were more worried about what kind of picture would be presented to a European audience than about the effect such a report could have within the local community.[13] Since this incident, Khalid has moderated his own message in dealing with the foreign press and, in recent years, he has increasingly coordinated his advocacy directed at the Western media and government with other media and civil-society actors among the Christians of Bethlehem.

This intervention by other members of the Christian community represented an effort to contain a dissenting voice within a discourse of national unity. The public airing of alarmist views by a prominent Christian was viewed as potentially damaging to sectarian relations in Bethlehem. When such views

13 Whereas English language channels based in the USA or the United Kingdom are seen and understood by many within the Bethlehem-community, German TV-channels are less available, and certainly less watched, in spite of a sizeable Bethlehem diaspora in Germany. It is therefore assumed that a news report on German Television could pass almost unnoticed within the local community.

are silenced and blocked out, while statements about sectarian harmony and Christian prominence in the community are reiterated, it serves to reinforce a discourse of national unity. At the same time, young Christians are socialized to understand and accept the boundaries of this discourse, and to separate between what kind of sentiments they can express in public, and what kind of sentiments they express in private. As a religious minority within a suppressed community, they face a double squeeze: As Palestinians, they face harsh repression at the hands of Israeli authorities, as Christians, they do experience significant social pressure as members of a predominantly-Muslim society. However, due to the overwhelming power asymmetries between Israel and Palestine, combined with their own history as a privileged minority, they find it difficult to publicly address social issues, and in particular issues pertaining to sectarian tensions. This represents a challenge and a constraint to their agency as political actors within a national setting. At the same time, their international contacts, and their relative access to Western authorities and media organizations are assets that open up opportunities, and that gives them some leverage in dealing with Palestinian and in some cases, Israeli authorities. In the field of Palestinian identity politics, knowing how, and when to use these assets is an important skill.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the emergence of national attachments and various processes of group formation in the Palestinian Territories and how these developments have been experienced by Palestinian Christians, affecting their perceptions of Christian-Muslim relations and of their own positions within a Palestinian national community.

Based on her study of nationalism in Yemen, Lisa Wedeen argues against the assumption of a necessary connection between nationalism and secularism and claims that nationalism may well coalesce with other forms of belonging centered on religious piety. In my view, the historical evolution of national attachments in Palestine supports this claim. Early manifestations of Palestinian nationalism included movements that sought to build a society based on Islamic tenets, but it also included secular visions for Palestinian self-determination, partly inspired by late nineteenth century nationalisms in Europe (Ayyad 1999). During the heyday of secular Arab nationalism, Christians and Muslims shared the same visions of Palestinian and Arab liberation, and differences in everyday practices and social conduct were less noticeable. Later, after a series of defeats associated with secular ideologies of liberation,

Palestinian society and other parts of the Middle East have seen the emergence of new forms of collective belonging and identification centered on Islam. The enactment of pious acts and practices connected with the observance of religious rituals, dress codes, and modes of social conduct have led to the production of pious Muslim self-identifications and the creation of boundaries between those who shared such pious identifications and those who do not. With the emergence of political Islam, as represented by Hamas, such pious practices and forms of identification have merged with a vision of national self-determination, producing a distinctly Islamic national project in which secular Muslims and Christians struggle to see a place for themselves.

Secular concepts of Palestinian national attachments and the acts and everyday practices associated with national belonging have emerged from traumatic events, and have evolved in response to new hardships and everyday realities. Traditional expressions of national commitment have been challenged, allowing nationalist meaning to be ascribed to new forms of behavior. At the same time, traditional conceptions and practices of national solidarity can be publicly enforced, while acts and practices that violate such conceptions, such as social gatherings and activities associated with liberal lifestyles, can be socially sanctioned. Among the Christians of Bethlehem, these developments, as they converge with their own shrinking presence in the West Bank, have fueled a sense of vulnerability and social estrangement from their Muslim neighbors. Some accuse Muslim Palestinians of pursuing an anti-Christian agenda, fearing that their rights and properties are under threat, while others fear the rise of an Islamic national project in which they as Christians see their position reduced to that of a 'tolerated presence'. These worries are not entirely unfounded. The cultural distance between local Christians and certain segments of the Muslim community has grown – along with the emergence of movements that advocate an Islamic vision for the future of Palestine.

The emergence of national attachments and other forms of belonging is a gradual process that takes place in the course of everyday acts and practices, but it also happens through dramatic events that create ruptures and shake up people's understanding of the world. The Arab defeat and Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories in 1967 and the two Intifadas were events that would shake up Palestinian social realities and in the case of local Christians, affect their perceptions of their own place within a Palestinian community. In line with Wedeen's approach, these dramatic events served to create a sense of nationness among Palestinians based on experiences of collective vulnerability and shared suffering at the hands of a common enemy. At the same time, these events generated diverging

reactions among Palestinians that in time would create greater internal divisions along sectarian and factional lines.

Occasionally, new confrontations with Israel invoke a sense of unity and national belonging, gathering Christians and Muslims and opposing political factions into a common front against the external enemy. At the other extreme, external events such as the Muhammad cartoon crisis can invoke a sectarian framing of international political realities, and generate temporary outbursts of emotions that have a divisive effect on the Palestinian community. In spite of such incidents, as well as more general concerns about sectarian tensions, prominent Christians are eager to project national unity and to downplay sectarian divisions, both within their own community and in relation to the outside world. This reflects pragmatic considerations of how their own interests are best served: as Christians in Palestine and as Palestinians in pursuit of unfulfilled nationalist aspirations.

CHAPTER 4

The Israeli Occupation

A Politics of Paralysis

Paula was born in Chile, but came to the West Bank with her Palestinian mother when she was four years old. At 34, she is married to a man from Beit Sahour and she has three children, who were all born in Bethlehem. However, according to the Israeli authorities, she and her oldest daughter are illegal residents and they have been told to leave the West Bank or face forcible deportation. Faced with this threat, the family plans to go to Chile where Paula has family but, for practical reasons, she has to leave before her husband, along with their three children.

The Israeli authorities tell her that her youngest children, aged three and five, hold Palestinian IDs, and therefore have to cross the border to Jordan at Allenby Bridge, near Jericho, while she and her oldest daughter, who are Chilean citizens, must travel to Jordan via another border crossing six hours further north. When she tries to explain that they must pass through the same border crossing, that her children cannot travel to Jordan on their own, she is told that border regulations are a matter of Israeli security and that they cannot make an exception for her family.

This chapter focuses on Israel's occupation of the West Bank, and its impact on the lives of Palestinian Christians. It will focus on Israeli measures that deprive Palestinians of access to their land, restrict their movements and activities within the Palestinian territories, sever their ties with the outside world, and restrict their social and economic ties to Israel. Throughout this chapter I will argue that these measures are built on a unifying rationale and serve to further the same strategic objective: a structural paralysis of the Palestinian society.

Building on Foucault's notion of biopower and Agamben's notion of the state of exception, Sari Hanafi analyzes Israeli rule in the Occupied Territories as a spacio-cidal project that aims to destroy Palestinian living spaces (Hanafi 2009). In line with Hanafi, and also with Halper's notion of 'the matrix of control' (Halper 2000) I argue that these objectives are pursued through a politics of paralysis: a set of processes and governmental techniques that serve to paralyze and obstruct institution-building, economic activities, social relations and people's everyday movements in Palestinian society. I will show how these processes shape Palestinian realities in the Occupied Territories, and in particular how they affect the social and economic opportunities available to Palestinian Christians.

 | DOI 10.1163/9789004276390_006

Biopolitics

Foucault argued that in earlier state-systems up until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, power tended to be directed at the control and management of territories, and that the modern state is characterized by a focus on managing its population (Foucault et al. 2009). In modern states, life is included in the mechanisms of state power, politics turn into biopolitics and, via a set of governmental technologies, power is directed towards the management of the population, and of people's lives, welfare, health, prosperity, etc. Foucault refers to the management of a nation's biological life as biopower (Foucault, Senellart, Burchell and Ewald 2009). In his work, biopolitics refers to a set of processes that take place within the framework of modern state systems. In contrast, Agamben argues that biopolitics is not confined to modernity but can be traced back to ancient Greece (Agamben 1998).

Honaida Ghanim explores the notions of biopower and biopolitics and their relevance to the context of the Occupied Territories. She argues that, in order to understand population management in the context of colonial occupation, it is inadequate to use Foucault's notions of biopower and biopolitics alone; concept developed with reference to population management within modern European states. Ghanim argues that, historically, the notion of biopolitics has had 'multiple positive meanings indicating the qualified life, as opposed to "natural life"' (Ghanim 2008:69) but that on the basis of different criteria, not everyone is deemed eligible for inclusion within the biopolitics. Throughout history, different regimes have taken dramatic measures against parts of their own population that they defined as external, and dangerous, to the society as a whole. Ghanim argues that, from the victim's point of view, 'at the moment that power is directed to destroying, eliminating, and dismantling their group, the decision about their life becomes a decision about their death'. (Ghanim 2008:68) At this moment, biopower is transformed into thanatopower, the management of death and destruction.

In the context of occupied Palestine, Ghanim sees thanatopower in its more extreme form manifested in Israel's killings of Palestinian activists and political leaders through targeted assassinations. In its more subtle forms, it takes the shape of continued closures, ongoing curfews, arbitrary closings of main roads, confiscation of agricultural land, and other means (Ghanim 2008:69). There is a need for concepts that resonate with the victim's experience of power in its more destructive aspects. As a concept, thanatopower represents a valuable complement to biopower. With reference to bombings of civilian areas, or targeted assassinations of activists and political leaders, the term resonates with the brutality of power directed at the 'unwanted'. At the same time,

it places great emphasis on the exercise of brute force at the expense of the more structural aspects of the occupation, such as the systems of checkpoints, curfews, arbitrary closures, travel restrictions, confiscations of land, etc. These are the techniques of government that for the most part define people's everyday experience of the occupation.

This concern is reflected in Hanafi's argument that Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories is spacio-cidal rather than geno-cidal, in that it targets land rather than people, and involves a systematic destruction of Palestinian residential and agricultural areas with the purpose of rendering inevitable the 'voluntary transfer' of the Palestinian population from the Occupied Territories (Hanafi 2009:106). The aim of Israel's spacio-cidal policies is not to kill Palestinians, but to render their living spaces uninhabitable. In his argument, the destruction of Palestinian living space is made possible by the implementation of a state of exception, and the deployment of biopolitics to categorize Palestinians into different groups. In a Palestinian setting, spaciocide involves a combination of three strategies, referred to by Hanafi as 'space annihilation', 'ethnic cleansing' and 'creeping apartheid' (2009:108).

Central to Hanafi's argument is the distinction between strictly military and non-military means of control, a distinction expressed most effectively by Jeff Halper. He describes the Israeli occupation as constituting a 'Matrix of Control' (Halper 2000, 2008) a system of three interlocking layers that serve to imobilize the Palestinian population. The first layer consist of the physical structures, such as settlements, bypass-roads, army bases, check-points and border-controls that serve to constrain Palestinian movements and bar access to certain areas. The second layer is the legal-bureaucratic layer, the web of laws and legal permits that places restrictions on Palestinian residency, mobility, house-construction etc. The final layer involves the use of violence to maintain control of the matrix, through targeted assassinations, military sieges, house demolition, mass arrests and the use of torture (Halper 2000).

A Politics of Paralysis

I find Halper's concept of the matrix of control to be very useful, and I agree with Hanafi that Israel's policies in the West Bank should be understood as spacio-cidal rather than geno-cidal. In large parts of the West Bank, the occupation is not maintained primarily through the direct use of military force, it is upheld through a bureaucratic apparatus that imposes severe restriction on people's everyday movements, and that impede productive economic activities, the development of sustainable economic infrastructures, and the

maintenance of social relations between different regions of the West Bank. These aspects of the Israeli occupation can be seen as a politics of paralysis, a set of techniques of governance that serve to paralyze and obstruct peoples activities and efforts to establish a self-reliant social body in opposition to an Israeli society.

The politics of paralysis can involve elements of brute material destruction, such as the destruction of Palestinian roads, or the uprooting of olive trees along the route designed for the building of the Separation Wall. But the main function of such destruction is to obstruct and suspend activities that depend on the property and infrastructure that is being destroyed, in this way producing a controlled paralysis of the community. Like thanatopolitics, the politics of paralysis is complementary to biopolitics, and it is directed at those who are excluded from the biopolitics. These techniques need not be guided by any specific objectives concerning the lives of those who are subject to them. Their primary objective is to further the interests and security of the biopolitics by subjecting those 'unwanted' within the biopolitics to a controlled paralysis of various degrees of severity. The means by which this is achieved are justified within an Israeli discourse that has marked Palestinians as

> morally inferior and socially impure" and "transformed them into a unique category: on the one hand they live in a continual state of exception (the Israeli occupation); on the other hand, their very acts of resistance to this occupation in order to gain political rights, confirms their "inherent" ineligibility to these rights.
>
> GHANIM 2008:73

Paraphrasing Hanna Arendt, Ghanim argues that the Palestinian has become nothing but 'a man who has lost the very qualities that make it possible for other people to treat him as a man, living as a bare life without the right to access life within the state that offers qualified bios'.[1] (Ghanim 2008:73) As such, Palestinians can be regarded as 'Homo Sacer' (Agamben 1998), in the sense that they may be killed with impunity by representatives of the Israeli state. In general, however, Israeli authorities see their interests better served by

1 According to Agamben, the ancient Greeks had two words for 'life' – *bios* and *zoē*. *Zoē* is thought to be held in common between all living things. Humans, plants and animals all have *zoē*; it is 'the simple fact of living'. In addition, each living being also has its own *bios* or particular *way* of living; for humans, this is often described as a political, social, thoughtful life. In Agamben's usage then, *bios* refers to a life that involves social and political inclusion within a community, with the rights and privileges this entails (Agamben 1998:1).

neutralizing Palestinians as potential threats to Israel rather than killing them. And this is where the politics of paralysis comes in. Through bureaucratic, structural means, Israeli authorities can keep a Palestinian population under control without a constant use of brute military force. In this context, the most sinister means of Israel's occupation involve its bureaucratic control of Palestinian residency within the Occupied Territories.

Restrictions on Residency in Palestine

Since 1967, Israel has controlled the Population Register and determined Palestinian's rights of residency in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem. Travels and residency in the West Bank are controlled through a set of Israeli policies on border-crossing and residency in the Palestinian territories. Under Israeli rule, Palestinians rights of residency in the occupied territories have been fragile (Makdisi 2010). Palestinians were given ID cards, indicating their place of residence within the territories, and allowing or banning their right to travel into Israel or to Jordan. Residents who left the territories for work, study or other purposes, and who remained out of the territories for more than three years could have their IDs and rights of residency stripped from them. Emigrants who were unable to return to Palestine before three years had passed were not allowed to return to resettle in their home communities. This was the case until 1994, when the PA was established. Following the Oslo Accords, Palestinians who left the West Bank or Gaza would no longer be stripped of their rights to residency, and Palestinians who had left the country after 1984 could apply to have their ID-cards and rights of residency returned. However, these applications had to be accepted by the Israeli authorities as well as by the PA, and the Israeli authorities refused to return more than 2000 ID cards a year, up until autumn 2000, when they stopped granting them altogether (Kårtveit 2005:120–121).

Since the start of the Israeli occupation, thousands of Palestinians have emigrated to the Gulf States, to the Americas or to Europe in order to study, to work, and to save money before returning to the West Bank. Many of these emigrants have obtained citizenship in their host countries, before returning home to marry and establish a life for themselves in the Occupied Territories. Because of Israel's rules of residency, most of these people had to stay in their own country on temporary tourist visas (Makdisi 2010:4–5). This means that they had to leave the country every three months to renew their visas, although a few lucky one's managed to get visitor permits for one year at a time. Palestinian returnees who have brought foreign-born spouses to the West Bank have had to go through the same process. For more than ten years, thousands of people have either left the country every three months, with the fear of

being denied re-entry, or have chosen to overstay their visas and stay illegally in the territories, with the constant fear of being caught and deported by the Israeli authorities.

Israel's control of the Population Registry and right to residency within the Palestinian territories has affected people in different ways. In some cases, these aspects of the Israeli occupation have defined their entire lives on the West Bank.

Paula's Story

Paula was born in Chile in 1972. She is the daughter of a Chilean man and a woman of Palestinian background, from a large Bethlehem family that has since disappeared through large-scale migration. Her mother and father divorced in 1975, and her mother brought her to Bethlehem in 1976 when she was four years old. After coming to Palestine, they first lived in a Catholic Nuns' school in Jerusalem. Paula's mother struggled to get a residence permit and, in the early 1980s, they settled in Bethlehem as illegal residents. Because of this, Paula had to move from one school one year and to another school the following year in order not to be caught by Israeli authorities and sent out of the country. The Church-based private schools in Bethlehem were all very understanding, and tried to accommodate their special circumstances.

After finishing high school, Paula spent 1988–1993 working as a maid for a Jewish-Argentinian family in Israel. In the late 1980s, her mother married a Palestinian in a pro-forma arrangement in order to obtain a '*Hawiyye*',[2] a Palestinian ID, for herself and for Paula – but Paula failed to one. In 1993, she traveled to Chile and stayed there for two years, marrying a Chilean. They separated, and Paula returned to Palestine, hoping that her daughter would get the *Hawiyye* if she was born in Palestine. In 1995, her daughter was born in Bethlehem, but she was not given a *Hawiyye* either. The same year they went back to Chile, but returned to Palestine after only a year. When they returned to Palestine in 1996, they entered on a three-month tourist visa that Paula had to keep renewing until 1999. In October 1999 she met John from Beit Sahour, whom she married in February 2001. Since then, they have lived together in

2 *Hawiyye* is the Arabic word referring to the Palestinian ID-cards that prove one's right of residency in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. The ID-cards are issued by the Israeli authorities, and indicate name, date of birth and other personal information as well as regional belonging within the Palestinian Territories. For the Israeli authorities, the *Hawiyye* is a vital tool of population control, for Palestinians, a proof of one's right of residence, and a necessary companion on all travels within the Palestinian Territories. For more information, see Bornstein 1998.

Beit Sahour, where she has been at home taking care of her children. In September 2001 she and John had a daughter, Samantha, and in April 2003 they had a son, Hanna. Both Samantha and Hanna got the *Hawiyye*, but her oldest daughter was still an illegal resident in Palestine. From 2001 until 2004, Paula stayed at John's place in Beit Sahour. As an illegal immigrant, she was forced to stay within the town limits of Beit Sahour to avoid arrest and deportation.

In 2004 she went for a short trip to Chile, and on her way back, she got a three-month tourist visa for Israel, which included the Palestinian Territories. After her return, John took her passport to the Palestinian Ministry of the Interior and had her visa extended to one year, which was accepted by the Israeli Authorities. In autumn 2005, she had to leave for Chile again, and returned to have her visa renewed once more. Since then she has had it extended again through the Ministry of the Interior. Her last visa ended in June 2006, and she was told that she would get no more extensions. She was also informed that her oldest daughter would no longer be allowed to go to school in Palestine, and that any school that accepted her daughter – an 'illegal resident' – would face severe sanctions from the Israeli authorities. John, being the legal resident of the family, tried to find out if he could legally adopt Paula's oldest daughter, as a way of getting a Palestinian '*Hawiyye*' for her. He was told that this would not be accepted by the Israeli Authorities. Under these circumstances, it became untenable to stay in Palestine and, in the autumn of 2006, the whole family went to Santiago, Chile. They were planning to stay for five years at first and see what kind of lives they could make for themselves in Chile. None of them where eager to go but, if staying on in Palestine would mean that Paula's daughter would not be allowed to go to school, they felt that they had little choice.

As it turned out, Paula and her family were victims of a new set of Israeli border policies that were introduced in the spring of 2006. Those who had returned home after some years abroad, and who had been crossing the borders on tourist visas for years, were now denied re-entry to the Occupied Palestinian Territories. As a result thousands of Palestinians found themselves stuck in Jordan and Egypt, separated from their children and spouses who were living on the West Bank (Makdisi 2010:4). Some of these families faced the choice of staying apart from each other or leaving their homes on the West Bank to settle somewhere else. These unannounced border practices provoked strong reactions among Palestinians as well as among internationals working in the Territories. Throughout summer and autumn 2006, a coalition of local and international NGOs launched the 'Right to Re-entry' campaign, spreading information about the consequences of these policies, and trying to bring international pressure on Israel to change their border policies. Faced with considerable international pressure, the Israeli authorities relented and issued new orders to

the military commanders. The 'Last Entry' stamps were officially cancelled, and Visa renewals were once again permitted. New orders were announced, allowing Palestinians without right of residency to renew their visas for up to a year at a time for a maximum of twenty-seven months, during which time they must obtain a West Bank identity card, without which they would have no legal right to remain (Beck and Soledad Martinez Peria 2007:5). Since Israel holds the power to reject family reunification applications, and controls the Population Register on the basis of which West Bank or Gaza identity cards may be issued, Israel alone determines what happens after those twenty-seven months (Makdisi 2010:5). Judging from past experience, a vast majority of these applicants will be denied a West Bank ID, and face deportation once their twenty seven months have passed. In the meantime, there are thousands of Palestinians that live 'illegally' on the West Bank, under the constant threat of being caught and deported by the Israeli authorities. With the ever-increasing number of checkpoint and road blocks in the Territories, the areas within which these illegal residents can move around freely are shrinking. This leaves entire families confined within small geographical enclaves, severely limiting their mobility.

Father George

One of the families facing this problem is that of Father George, a Parish priest in Bethlehem. He was born in Bethlehem, and has lived there all his life, apart from a few years spent abroad studying for the priesthood. He leads one of the smaller church communities in the Bethlehem area, one with roughly five hundred members left in the all of the West Bank. In the late 1990s he married a woman from Jordan and they now live together in Bethlehem with their two sons. Since they married, it has been made clear that the Israeli authorities would not allow her to obtain legal residency in Palestine. At first, she stayed on a tourist visa and visited Jordan every three months to have it renewed at the border. After a few year of harassment and the constant threat of being turned back, she stopped crossing the border and, for the last five years, she has lived illegally in Bethlehem, without being able to leave the town or to see her family in Jordan. This is a strain on the whole family. Father George has a strong sense of commitment to his own parish, and if he leaves the country, the local church would be left without a priest. If this had not been the case, Father George would have taken his family to Jordan in order to avoid the stress caused by his wife's residential status.

Samir

Not having the right papers can be a heavy social impediment as well. Samir is 27 years old and lives in Beit Sahour. His father is from the town, and his mother

is a Palestinian refugee who grew up in Lebanon. His parents met in Lebanon in the late 1970s, when his father worked as a doctor in a refugee camp, and his mother was a nurse. They married in Lebanon before moving to Syria and then to Jordan shortly after the Israeli invasion of Lebanon. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, they had five children, one of whom was Samir. In 1994, they all visited Beit Sahour, and Samir's father decided that they would stay. This was where he had grown up, where he had most of his family and life-long friends, and this was where he had plenty of family land and a house for his family. There was one problem: He and his wife had been stripped of their Palestinian IDs, and their children, having been born abroad, were not entitled to Palestinian IDs. Since then, the entire family has lived illegally in Beit Sahour. Samir's two sisters have married local men, and he also wants to get married soon. After business studies at Bethlehem University, Samir started a small business of his own in 2004. After a slow start he is now doing quite well. In 2008 he had paid all his debts from starting the business and, since then, he has enjoyed a regular income of some 1200–1500 USD a month, almost three times the average salary in the area. In the summer of 2007, he started seeing a girl from Beit Sahour. The two of them were very fond of each other, and they got to know one another quite well before telling their families about each other.

From the outset, Samir seemed to be good catch. He is a charming young man, well liked in the neighborhood, and he belongs to a resourceful family that owns a lot of land. He has established his own business under trying circumstances, he makes more money than most of his peers, and his prospects look good. By every measure, he should be a very eligible candidate for marriage. In spite of all this, the girl's family was totally against their relationship and they made it very clear that they would not allow her to marry Samir. The reason for this, as stated clearly by her family, was that Samir does not have Palestinian ID. Samir may well be a hard-working entrepreneur who will do well for himself but, at the same time, he is an illegal resident in the West Bank. This means he is under constant threat of being deported and, as such, he is not regarded as being capable of offering a safe and stable family-life with social and financial security for a wife and their future children. To make matters worse, if the two of them were to marry, their children would inherit their father's rather than their mother's citizenship, making them illegal residents as well. Unofficially, people working in the Beit Sahour Municipality estimate that there are at least four hundred people living illegally in Beit Sahour alone. It is not easy for an illegal resident to convince a girl's family that you will be a stable presence and a reliable supporter of her and your children. After two years of trying to win over the girl's family, the two of them gave up, and decided to let each other go.

Samir has Jordanian citizenship, and he is confident that if he was living in Jordan he could probably do quite well building up a business of his own. Earlier, he had thought a lot about emigrating to the West, to study, to work, and to enjoy an easier life someplace else. However, some years ago, he decided to drop that idea and commit himself to improving his own situation in Beit Sahour. For Samir himself, this commitment has paid off and he is happy that his business plans have worked out well. Still, fearing that not having a Palestinian ID would make him an unacceptable marriage partner in his own town, he spent years playing with the idea of leaving Beit Sahour to and try to settle in Jordan. Finally, in 2010, Israeli authorities allowed him to obtain Palestinian ID. Shortly after that, he was engaged to a girl from the town. Having obtained a legal right of residence, he was now considered 'husband material' within his local community.

Israel's control of the Palestinian Population Register and its restrictions on Palestinian residency in the West Bank represent the least visible aspect of the occupation, and it is one that involves little use of military force. At the same time, these are the measures that affect people's lives and restrict their freedoms and opportunities in the most dramatic terms. Israeli restrictions residency and entry to Palestine apply not only to the length of stay but also to the point of entry to the Palestinian territories. As Israel surrounds the West Bank, and controls all its borders, there are four main ways of getting to the West Bank. From Europe or the US, the easiest way to get to the West Bank is to fly to Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv, and travel to the West Bank from there. The other ways of getting to the West Bank involve flying to Amman, Jordan, and traveling to the West Bank through one out of three border crossings. Only one of these – the border-crossing at Allenby Bridge – does not involve passing through Israeli territory, and this is the only crossing point available to Palestinians who hold West Bank ID.

Earlier, West Bank Palestinians who held foreign passports could use any entry point, but since 2000 they have faced shifting and arbitrary travel restrictions, and for many Palestinian migrants, it has been difficult to find out where they can 'legally' travel in order to get to the West Bank. Wafa experienced this when she traveled to attend her sisters wedding in Beit Sahour. Wafa is 30 years old, she has lived in Berlin for the past eight years, and she holds a German passport. In the summer of 2007, she was planning to attend her sisters wedding, and she was also supposed to be her Maid of Honor. On her last visit to the West Bank, she had traveled through Ben Gurion without experiencing any problems. This time however, she arrived at Ben Gurion only to be told that she was not allowed to enter Israel and that she had to fly back to Germany. When she suggested that she could fly to Amman in Jordan instead, security

personnel at the Airport would not allow her to do so. Instead, she was placed in a prison cell for the night, and forcibly returned to Germany the next day. By the time she got back to Germany, it was impossible to get to Amman in time, and she missed her sister's wedding.

Wafa's story is far from unique. Every summer hundreds of Palestinian migrants are denied entry to the West Bank because they chose the wrong point of entry, or for other reasons that are not always clearly stated. At family weddings in Beit Sahour, it is almost expected that some visitors from Western countries will be turned back at the border. Such arbitrary restrictions add an extra level of insecurity and emotional strain to the experience of visiting the West Bank. These measures strengthen the reservations some migrants have about going home, making it more difficult to maintain close social ties between migrants and their home communities. These measures are complemented by other, far more visible measures that restrict Palestinian movements within the West Bank, as well as their access to land. Some of these measures are designed to both sever social and economic ties between the West Bank and Israel and facilitate the confiscation of more Palestinian land. The most important of these measures have been the building of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure, including the Separation Wall.

Israeli Settlements

The settlements are organized communities of Israeli civilians established on Palestinian land within the Occupied Territories, with the approval and direct or implicit support of the Israeli government. Although the transfer of Israeli civilians to the occupied territories is illegal under international law, new settlements have been built since the late 1960s and in 2007, more than 450,000 Israeli civilians were living in 149 settlements throughout the West Bank and in East Jerusalem (OCHA 2007). More than 38% of the West Bank consists of settlements, outposts, military bases, road networks and other infrastructure related to the settlements. These are areas that have been confiscated by Israel, and are largely off limits to Palestinians (OCHA 2007). In the Bethlehem Governorate, there are 86,000 Israelis living in 19 settlements (OCHA 2009).

The settlement of Gilo has been built on land confiscated from the town of Beit Jala, and the settlement of Har Homa involved the confiscation of large areas of land from Bethlehem and Beit Sahour. Built on hilltops overlooking urban Bethlehem, these settlements are part of a block of settlements that encircle and isolate East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank (OCHA 2007). With the building of settlements, military camps, and the road networks that connect them, the West Bank has been dissected into dozens of enclaves.

This fragmentation of the Palestinian Territories has been further extended with the building of the Separation Wall.

The Separation Wall

In the summer of 2002, following a campaign of Palestinian suicide attacks in Israel, Ariel Sharon announced his plan to build a wall to separate the Israelis from West Bank Palestinians (Makdisi 2010, OCHA 2009). The construction of the Wall started a few weeks later. In the summer of 2003, a part of the wall was built through the northern part of Bethlehem. It had been clear from the start that the wall would not be built along the Green Line but that it would cut deep into Palestinian land, in order to encircle Israeli settlements on the West Bank.[3] This was the also the case in the District of Bethlehem, where large swathes of land have ended up on the Israeli side of the Wall, out of reach of their Palestinian owners. The effects of the wall have been particularly devastating in Northern Bethlehem, where the wall cuts right through what used to be a commercial center, full of restaurants, clothing shops, garages and other enterprises that where frequented by both Israeli and Palestinian customers. In 2000, there were 80 businesses in this neighborhood. After four years, only eight were still open (OCHA/UNSCO 2004:12) and what used be a thriving area had turned into a ghost town. This area used to be inhabited by entrepreneurial middle-class families, both Christian and Muslim, and many of them had their own businesses in the neighborhood. Since the Second Intifada started, most of those families that could afford to have left the area, abandoning old family houses.

A Family Encircled by the Wall

Emily belongs to one of the families that have been most brutally affected by these changes. Emily lives with her husband Hannah, their four children and her mother in-law in a large three-storey house. Hannah's twin brother George lives with his wife and five children across the corridor in the same house. Emily grew up within a wealthy family living just across the street from the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. She married in 1986 just before the First Intifada broke out, driving her father's business bankrupt in the course of the next three years.

On their marriage, she and her husband moved into his big family house, and a year later, George also married and moved into the other main apartment.

3 The Green line is the common term used for the Armistice Line between Israel and the West Bank after the War of 1948, that marks the border between the areas internationally recognized as belonging to Israel, and the areas illegally occupied by the State of Israel.

The two brothers are trained mechanics, and since the mid-1980s they have shared a workshop built into the ground floor of the house. The house was located on the Hebron-Jerusalem road, which was the main street in Northern Bethlehem and the main road connecting Bethlehem with Jerusalem to the North and Hebron to the South. The garage was doing well; the two brothers had gained a reputation as good and reliable mechanics and they had plenty of customers from Jerusalem and around Bethlehem. The families could have lived well on the brother's garage. However, Emily wanted to run a business of her own and, soon after she was married, she opened a gift shop and, later on, a clothes shop on the ground floor of the family house, on the opposite side from her husband's garage. With the help of George's wife, she could keep both stores open at peak business hours.

The house is located on what used to be a busy shopping street in Bethlehem. Emily used to work long hours like her husband, and financially, they were doing very well. The family enjoyed the comfortable wealth of successful middle-class entrepreneurs, adopting lavish consumption habits, buying expensive clothes, running two new cars at a time, and hosting big dinner-parties for their family and friends. Emily and her family took some pride in their wealth. She felt that this created envy and resentment among some of her neighbors and members of her church parish, but she was guilt-free and considered their wealth to be well deserved and entirely of their own making. During the First Intifada, business went down, the family had to close their businesses for a while, and they faced some financial hardships. In the early 1990s however, things got better, business was good again, and the families could enjoy the same level of comfort as they had before the Intifada. The whole neighborhood was doing well, and most of their neighbors enjoyed the a similar position as wealthy middle-class entrepreneurs. In 2000, when the Second Intifada started, customers stopped coming from the Israeli side of the Green Line, leaving local businesses dependent on their Bethlehem customers. As the Bethlehem area became more and more affected by the closure of the border, the economy went downhill, unemployment rose dramatically and the local population could no longer afford to buy new clothes or have their cars fixed by professional mechanics. Emily had to close her shops in 2000 and, in 2002, Hannah and George had to close down their garage as well. Based on their experience from the First Intifada, they were waiting for better times, hoping that they could reopen their garage at a later point.

Those hopes were shattered in 2003, when the Separation Wall was built straight through Northern Bethlehem, only a hundred meters from the family's house. Shortly after, the Israeli authorities decided to build an extension to the Wall, to include the nearby Rachel's Tomb – a religious site holy to both

Muslims and Jews – on the Israeli side. Because of this, an extension of the Wall was built along the Hebron-Jerusalem Road, making a 180 degree turn around the family's house before it continued to encircle a large chunk of Northern Bethlehem (Appendix 6). This meant that the house itself was surrounded by the wall on three sides. The garage can no longer be used, since the wall blocks any access to that side of the house. Also, surrounded by the wall on all sides, their family house is trapped in the most depressing surroundings in all of Bethlehem, brutally affecting the family's social life. Friends and relatives have stopped visiting the family, as they find the view of the wall surrounding the house too depressing. Most of their immediate neighbors in the area have sold or abandoned their houses and left the country. This option is not available to Emily and her family. They lost all their savings on trying to keep the family businesses going for too long. Since then, they have placed themselves in debt and grown dependent on financial support from relatives just to stay alive and provide for their children. Hannah and George have opened a new garage in Beit Jala, but their income barely covers running expenses. Their nine children have all attended Catholic private schools in Bethlehem, sponsored by the Catholic Church. In a few years, the family has gone from being a well-connected, resourceful middle-class family with a wide social network to living barely above subsistence level, totally dependent on economic aid from friends and relatives, and from the local Catholic Church.

This dramatic change has been unbearable for Emily. She feels that because her family was in such a good position in the past, their current hardships are not taken seriously by the local community. They cannot simply leave the family's house, and they cannot sell it at a decent price, since no one is interested in buying a house that is encircled by the Separation Wall. After many years of a continually-deteriorating situation, the family is now looking for a way out of the country, perhaps to Sweden where Emily's younger brother lives, or to Germany where the family has other relatives. They have given up on the idea that the wall will come down and that their situation will improve in any meaningful way. Having reached this level of disillusionment, they are now eager to get out of the country by any means, and to resettle, preferably somewhere in Europe.

Though especially dramatic in Northern Bethlehem, the building of the Wall has had dramatic consequences in other parts of the district as well. In Beit Jala, 50% of the land belonging to the town has being confiscated by the Israeli authorities, and the wall is being built to encircle the built-up parts of Beit Jala, leaving little space for the inhabitants to build new houses for themselves (OCHA 2009). In Beit Sahour the Wall will cut off access to olive groves belonging to Beit Sahour. While the wall is still under construction, the land is

available to their owners through two gates, and only for limited periods of time during the harvest season. When it has been completed, the Beit Sahour landowners fear that they will be entirely cut off from their olive groves.

The Enclavization of the West Bank

In addition to taking people's land, and moving the border between Israel and the Palestinian Territories, the Wall serves another purpose that is central to Israel's new system of control: a further restriction of Palestinian movement within the occupied territories. In the Bethlehem District, the Wall is being built in a half-circle around Bethlehem and the neighboring towns of Beit Jala and Beit Sahour, and all travel in and out of this area, whether one is heading north towards Ramallah, east towards Jericho, south towards Hebron, or north-west towards Jerusalem, is heavily monitored and restricted by Israeli checkpoints.

In January 2007 there were more than five hundred checkpoints regulating the movements of Palestinians throughout the West Bank (Taraki 2008:19). Designed to restrict Palestinians' movement near Israeli settlements and roads, these checkpoints further the gradual enclavization of the West Bank into separate regions. In the course of a few years, the Israeli authorities have divided the West Bank into four distinct regions (Appendix 2). Bethlehem, along with Hebron is part of the southern region; there is a middle region centered on Ramallah; a Northern region which includes cities like Nablus, Jenin and Tulkarem; and finally there is East Jerusalem, which has been cut off from the rest of the West Bank (Falah 2005, Weizman 2012). An ever-increasing number of checkpoints and unforeseen road closures have made it much more difficult to travel between different parts of the West Bank. Palestinians need special permits to drive their own cars outside their own districts, and people are left feeling trapped within their own tiny enclaves on the West Bank.

Overall, the Israeli closure system, and the enclavization of the West Bank has had a devastating effect on the Palestinian economy, especially the agricultural sector, where farmers have been denied access to their own land (OCHA 2007). Though less dramatically, the closure system has also affected the most privileged and resourceful city dwellers of the Bethlehem area. Due to their middle-class profile and access to church-run private schools, a high portion of Bethlehem Christians have obtained university degrees, in Palestine or abroad. However, there are not nearly enough jobs in the Bethlehem districts to support these graduates. Jobs that require higher qualifications are heavily concentrated in Ramallah, in ministries and other PA institutions, non-governmental organizations and international institutions. Throughout the 1990s, the trip

between Ramallah and Bethlehem was quick and without complications, so young professionals from Bethlehem who held jobs in Ramallah could easily commute between the two cities on a daily basis.

This became far more difficult after 2000 as the number of checkpoints increased, roads were closed without warning, and region-wide curfews were enforces. As traveling between Ramallah and Bethlehem became more difficult, those who had jobs in Ramallah were forced to stay in the city during the week, living in rented apartments. Renting an apartment in Ramallah is expensive, usually costing at least 250 USD a month, a crippling expense for most Palestinians. In any case, many Bethlehem Palestinians are reluctant to live in Ramallah, away from their family and local community. Rather than moving to Ramallah for work, many young professionals prefer to go to other parts of the Middle East, which is far easier than going to the West. Dubai and Jordan are popular destinations where salaries are higher, and where working conditions are favorable compared to Palestine. Nuha and Samer, a young couple from Bethlehem with a one-year-old daughter, faced this choice in 2007. They were both offered jobs in Ramallah that fitted well with their career plans, and they were offered decent salaries. However, if they were to live in Ramallah, away from their home in Bethlehem, they would have to rent a rather large apartment and hire someone to take care of their baby, since they had no close family living in Ramallah. These extra expenses would take a heavy toll on their family finances, and they would have to live away from an extensive family network that could help them take care of their daughter.

When they were offered jobs in Dubai, with an apartment and child-care taken care of through Samer's job, they accepted these offers instead. They were both sad about leaving Bethlehem, and they had strong reservations about living in Dubai. Nonetheless, the offers they received from Dubai allowed them to take care of their daughter while holding well-paying jobs. Nuha and Samer are in a very privileged position compared to most young couples in the area. Still, their story illustrates how the restrictions on travelling between different regions can have a decisive impact on people's lives and the choices they make. In Bethlehem, these restrictions make it increasingly difficult and less attractive to pursue a professional career in the West Bank, creating an added push factor for work-related migration to other parts of the world.

Among many Bethlehemites, the travel restrictions create a mental barrier to traveling to other parts of the West Bank and, as social interaction, economic transactions and movement of goods between regions decrease, these regions are gradually turning them into separate socio-economic entities. Until 2002, young people from the Bethlehem area would make spontaneous trips to Ramallah to eat at a restaurant, attend a concert, have a night out, or just visit

friends. After seven years of permanent checkpoints, sporadic road-blocks and closures between the cities, such recreational trips are much less common. Hannah, who tends a bar in Bethlehem, says he used to visit Ramallah almost every weekend, and he used to have a good time there, going out and visiting friends. In the last five years, however, he has scarcely been to the city. He considers the trip to be to unpleasant, unpredictable and simply too much of a hassle, so these days he prefers to stay put in Bethlehem. His sentiment is shared by many young Christians who used to visit Ramallah frequently. As time goes by, they tend to find that their mental barriers to making the trip are rising, while their circles of friends living in Ramallah are shrinking, reducing their incentives to visit the city in the first place. As people's movements and social connections are shaped by new territorial barriers, social ties between the regions of the West Bank are gradually weakened as well.

The main instrument through which this is achieved is a monitoring system by which Palestinians are compelled to carry ID cards on which they are categorized according to age, gender, place of legal residence, religion, record of political involvement or militant activity, and other factors used to determine the extent to which individual Palestinians are seen as potential threats to the state of Israel. As Palestinians are stopped at checkpoints, the message is sent that their movements between different parts of the West Bank are regarded as a threat to Israel and therefore have to be monitored, and in some cases prevented. The main impact of these measures may not lie in the actual denial or acceptance of passage through checkpoints along certain roads, but in that they compel Palestinians to adjust and regulate their own patterns of movement, in order to avoid the risk of being turned back at checkpoints, or to just avoid checkpoints altogether.

When Hannah stops going to Ramallah, and loses touch with his friends who live there, or when Samer and his wife do not find it worthwhile to live and work in Ramallah, this is not because they are prohibited from going there but because they have embodied the uncertainty and arbitrariness of Israeli travel restrictions. In the light of new restrictions and complicating procedures involved in traveling around the West Bank, their 'comfort zones', the areas where they feel safe and in control of the situation, are increasingly confined to their home district of Bethlehem, geographically defined by Israeli checkpoints and roadblocks within the West Bank. When people's everyday zones of mobility are reduced in this way, their mental landscapes are affected as well. To many Bethlehem Palestinians, Jerusalem is increasingly perceived as a city far, far away. Ramallah, which is within the West Bank, some 35 kilometers north of Bethlehem, is also considered a rather distant place due to the hassle of getting there. In order to ease their own lives, people avoid confronting Israeli travel

restrictions on a regular basis, and choose to remain within their home region rather than facing the hassle of being stopped at Israeli checkpoints. And, as time goes by, people adapt their movements within the territories, and adjust their personal and professional relationships along regional lines.

The politics of paralysis does not only involve measures aimed at restricting Palestinian movements, activities and relations within the West Bank. It also involves a whole set of measures aimed at blocking Palestinian ties to East Jerusalem and to Israel. In the following, I will examine some of these measures, and their impact on the Palestinian community.

Hani

Hani runs a souvenir shop in the center of Bethlehem and spends his days sitting outside the shop waiting for tourists to pass by. The last ten years have been rough on him, and at the age of 27, he looks like he is approaching 40. He is the youngest of four children of a father from Jerusalem and a mother from Bethlehem. Hani and his brothers grew up in Jerusalem and, thanks to their father's Jerusalem origins, they were entitled to a Jerusalem ID card, which gave them the right to live and work in the city. In the mid-1990s, the family inherited a house in Bethlehem from the mother's side. The house was conveniently located on a wide pedestrian street close to Manger Square in Bethlehem. At the time, Bethlehem tourism was growing and, with its vicinity to the Church of Nativity, Hani's father thought the house was a gold-mine. Hani's parents soon moved to Bethlehem, where they settled on the first floor of the house and Hani's father opened a café on the ground floor. Meanwhile, Hani and his brothers kept a house in Jerusalem in order to keep their Jerusalem IDs. If they were found to be no longer residing in Jerusalem, they could risk having their IDs revoked by the Israeli Authorities.

In 1999, his two older brothers were both accepted at universities in the US, allowing them to go there on student visas. After completing their studies, they both obtained Green Cards and found jobs in the US. Since then, they have both obtained US citizenship, married girls from Jerusalem families, and started their own families in the US. In 2000, Hani was awarded a scholarship and a student visa as well, but he chose to postpone his studies for a year to help his father run the family café in Bethlehem. Throughout the summer of 2000, Bethlehem received many tourists and the family expected to make good money the following year. Then the Second Intifada broke out, and the tourists stopped coming. In October 2000, the road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem was closed by the Israeli Authorities and Hani was stuck in Bethlehem for a full week. In the meantime, the Israeli Authorities carried out an unannounced registration of residency in East Jerusalem. Hani was registered as 'absent' from

his official residence, and had his Jerusalem ID revoked by the Israeli Authorities. He was now a stateless Palestinian, without a legal right to work or reside in Jerusalem or in the West Bank. The change of Hani's legal status also led to the cancellation of his student visa to the US. The US immigration authorities would not accept a student without a legal country of residence to which he could return.

With a complete halt in tourism, the family had to close the café in late 2000. Due to the growing system of Israeli checkpoints, Hani, having no valid ID for Jerusalem or the West Bank, was trapped in Bethlehem, and unable even to search for work in other parts of the West Bank. In 2005, with financial aid from his brothers in the US, he turned the family café into a souvenir shop, hoping that this would give him some business. The first few years were tough, as the summers of 2006 and 2007 were ruined by political turmoil in the region. Since then, his souvenir shop has had some turnover during the peak tourist seasons, but he still depends on financial aid from his brothers in the US. His mother wants him to get married, but without identity papers and unable to support himself financially, his prospect of finding a wife are poor.

Until autumn 2000, Hani was a privileged young man by Palestinian standards. He could live and work in Jerusalem or anywhere in the West Bank, and he had the opportunity to go to the US if he wanted to. Eight years later, he was stuck in Bethlehem where he had no rights of residency. He was unable to support himself and he had not seen Jerusalem for six years. Since 2000, the Israeli authorities have implemented a series of measures aimed at blocking Palestinian access to Israel and severing contact between the West Bank and Israel. Hani's situation was the result of some of these measures.[4]

In earlier decades, Israel pursued a policy of de-development, obstructing economic development within the West Bank, and creating Palestinian dependence on access to the Israeli economy. The severance of ties between Israel and the West Bank has had a devastating effect on Palestinian society. As such, I will argue that these measures are another aspect of a politics of paralysis directed at the Palestinian communities of the West Bank. While some of these measures were introduced shortly after the start of the Second Intifada, they build on measures that were introduced in earlier periods. As will be demonstrated in the following sections, the politics of paralysis has a history that goes back several decades.

4 Hani's situation is also a result of Israeli measures directed towards the Arab population of East Jerusalem. Though this book will not engage with Israeli policies in East Jerusalem, these policies are more clearly aimed at 'minimizing' the Arab presence in the city, through forced expulsion, house demolition and other structural measures.(Zink 2009).

Israeli Border Policies

Since 1967, the West Bank has been under Israeli military rule and, since 1994, while the area is still subject to Israeli rule, certain governing responsibilities have been transferred to the Palestinian Authority. After 20 years under Jordanian rule, Israel's occupation created new realities for West Bank Palestinians. Social and economic ties with Jordan were cut off, and the Israeli authorities soon started confiscating Palestinian land to make room for Jewish settlements and bypass roads that would benefit Israeli citizens. The Israeli occupation was also organized so as to obstruct the emergence of a viable Palestinian economy with its own industries, and to ensure the 'de-development' of the Palestinian economy (Roy 1995) In pursuit of this policy, Israel restricted the building of factories and other facilities, only allowing industries with limited economic potential, such as textiles, footwear and chemicals, to develop in the West Bank and Gaza (Bornstein 2002a). At the same time, Israel introduced a policy of 'Open Bridges', allowing Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza to work in Israel throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Bornstein 2002b). Earlier researchers have illustrated how under development and exploitation by Israel turned the Palestinian economy into a third world colony for the Israeli industry in this period (Owen 1989, Sayigh 1986, Tamārī 1980).

With little chance of building a viable economy of their own, Palestinians were forced to seek employment in the Israeli labor market or to work for Israeli capital in the West Bank. Due to discriminatory regulations, access to the Israeli labor market was largely restricted to construction work for minimum pay and with no rights in the case of sickness, accidents, etc. (Bornstein 1998). Under these circumstances, growing frustration with the occupation culminated with the First Intifada, which lasted from 1987 until the early 1990s. In March 1993, while the Oslo negotiations were under way, the Israeli authorities erected checkpoints on the major roads between the West Bank and Israel, ending almost twenty-five years of the Open Bridges policy (Bornstein 2002a:207). For the first time, East Jerusalem was separated from its neighboring Palestinian villages and the towns of Ramallah and Bethlehem. Officially, these closures were a response to terrorist attacks committed by Hamas but they soon turned into permanent measures. The Israeli government argued that these closures were part of the process of separating Israelis and Palestinians, and a move towards Palestinian Autonomy. However, only Palestinians were banned from crossing while Israeli soldiers and settlers could travel freely between Israel and the West Bank (Bornstein 1998, 2002a:207).

With the signing of the Oslo agreement, the Palestinian Authority was created in May 1994. Within the framework of Oslo, it was given control of the main urban centers in the West Bank and Gaza. Having withdrawn from Palestinian cities, the Israeli army retained military control of most of the West Bank, where roadblocks and army patrols were used to restrict Palestinian freedom of movement, facilitate further appropriation of Palestinian land, and the continued expansion of Israeli settlements (Bornstein 2002a:207–208).

After the 1993 closure of the border, it became more difficult for Palestinians to find work in Israel. Throughout the 1990s, West Bank Palestinians were dependent on an Israeli patron to obtain a work permit in Israel. This strengthened their dependence on individual employers and facilitated their exploitation by the Israeli labor market. The possibility of crossing the border illegally allowed some Palestinians to work in Israel without work permits. Those who did so were even more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, and withholding of payment from Israeli employers (Bornstein 2002a:210). Bornstein argued that, although motivated by security concerns, Israeli border policies, including restrictions on Palestinian workers from entering Israel, have served to strengthen the asymmetry of economic relations between Israel and the Palestinian territories, and to intensify the 'superexploitation' of Palestinians as low-wage workers in Israel, and as producers of cheap products for Israeli industries (Bornstein 2002a). Due to Israeli border policies, these dynamics of exploitation grew stronger throughout the 1990s, adding fuel to popular frustrations that eventually led to the Second Intifada in 2000.

The Second Intifada

Since autumn 2000, the Bethlehem area has been dealt one structural blow after another, ending the moderate growth and optimism that characterized the area at the end of the 1990s. During the summer of 2000, Bethlehem received more visitors than ever before. The city's hotels were fully booked, the restaurants were packed, local guides had plenty of visitors to show around, and local souvenir shops had plenty of customers. The stone masons in Bethlehem made good money selling building stone in Israel, in Jordan and throughout the West Bank. The olive-wood carvers of Beit Sahour could travel the seven miles into Jerusalem and sell their handicraft products in the Old City. Some 1600 Palestinians, mostly from the Bethlehem area, had jobs at the luxury casino in Jericho, making four times the average salary in the West Bank. In addition, thousands of Palestinians from the Bethlehem area would commute to Jerusalem for work in Israel.

After 28 September 2000, when Ariel Sharon walked across the Temple Mount guarded by Israeli soldiers in combat gear, the good times came to an

end. The following day, violent riots broke out in the Old City of Jerusalem and two young Palestinians were killed by Israeli soldiers. The Second Palestinian Intifada had started. Rawan, whose family runs a hotel and a restaurant in Bethlehem, recalls the first signs of what was to come:

> The Hotel was almost fully booked for the next three weeks and we were hosting a big conference the following week. When news of the riots broke out, the first cancellation came within half an hour. In the next two days the cancellations kept coming in. The phone and the fax just wouldn't stand still.

When the Second Intifada broke out, the Bethlehem area was launched into a long-lasting economic crisis. The collapse of the tourist industry was only a part of a crisis that extends to all sectors of the Palestinian economy. The economic depression that hit the Palestinian territories and greater Bethlehem in particular, was partly the result of a series of measures aimed at limiting Palestinian access to Israel while strengthening Israel's control of the West Bank.

Israeli authorities exert their control of the Palestinian territories through a combination of military and structural measures. In Bethlehem, Israeli measures aimed to sever ties between the West Bank and Israel have been particularly damaging. These have included the separation of Bethlehem from East Jerusalem, the expulsion of Palestinian workers from employment in Israel, continued confiscations of land, and the construction of the Separation Wall on Bethlehem land.

The Separation from Jerusalem

The city of Bethlehem lies just five miles south of Jerusalem. For hundreds of years, the city has been integrated with, and dependent upon its social and economic ties with Jerusalem. Palestinians from Bethlehem have worked in Jerusalem on a daily basis, married Jerusalemites, and some families have been spread between Bethlehem and Jerusalem for generations. Locals claim that the main road between Bethlehem and Jerusalem has been open since biblical times – until the autumn of 2000. When the Second Intifada broke out, this road was closed, and passage between Bethlehem and Jerusalem was severely restricted. Since then, Palestinians with Bethlehem IDs have been banned from entering Jerusalem while it has also become more complicated for foreigners to visit Bethlehem. The most visible effect of this border closure is the crippling of Bethlehem's tourist industry. Between 2000 and 2004, there was an 85% drop in tourism to Bethlehem, and thousands of locals lost their income

(OCHA/UNSCO 2004:15). Since 2000, hotels, restaurants and souvenir-shops have been empty, tourist guides authorized by the PA have been without work, and the olive-wood carvers of Beit Sahour have piled up their handicraft in storages.

Amer

The separation from Jerusalem represented a brutal blow to anyone involved in local tourism, regardless of religious background. Amer belongs to one of the old Muslim families of Bethlehem, and he is one of some four hundred tourist guides in Bethlehem who is licensed by the Palestinian Authority. He is an engineer by training, but having failed to find employment as an engineer, he decided to take a course organized by the Ministry of Tourism to be a tourist guide. The course lasted for two years and had to be financed through a personal loan. In 1999 this was considered a smart choice and his family was very supportive. Tourism seemed to be an industry with unlimited growth potential and a safe source of livelihood. When Amer completed his course in 2001, the Intifada had started, and tourists had stopped coming to Bethlehem. After six years of few tourists, he estimated that there are less than eighty licensed guides who still try to make a living from tourism. Amer has a brother who lives in the US, and who is trying to help him get a visa so that he can join him in the US. In the meantime, Amer spends his days sitting outside the Church of the Nativity, trying to make a living off the few tourists who still pass by. Amers story serves as a reminder that Israeli policies in the West Bank affect Christian and Muslim Palestinians in much the same way.

For Palestinian tourist guides, hotels and restaurants, the problem is not only the small number of visitors coming to Bethlehem but that most tourists visit Bethlehem only on three-hour bus tours that are organized from Jerusalem and are controlled by Israeli tour agencies. Before 2000, tourists could easily visit Bethlehem for a day or two and spend a night at one of the local hotels. Back then, it was also quite easy to make a day trip from Jerusalem on your own. The transportation of tourists by buses to and from Jerusalem requires a special permit from the Israeli authorities, and such permits are given almost exclusively to Israeli tour operators, which means that the organization of day-trips from Jerusalem is completely dominated by Israeli agencies. The restrictions on travel and tourist transportation from Jerusalem have been especially damaging to the hotel sector in Bethlehem. To many visitors, Bethlehem may appear to be an 'unsafe' destination, located in the Palestinian Territories, on the 'wrong side' of the Green Line. As such, most visitors prefer to visit Bethlehem on a short bus tour from Jerusalem, and this tendency has grown

stronger with the closing of the border to Israel. Only a tiny fraction of visitors to Bethlehem actually spend a night in the city, which leaves local hotels largely empty, except during the absolute peak seasons at Christmas, Easter and the end of August.

Rawan and her family still keep their hotel open after six years, but most of the time they have scarcely any guests. Next to the hotel, they also run the only restaurant in Bethlehem serving Mexican food. Rawan's history serves to illustrate how the events of the last fifteen years have affected people's everyday lives in the area.

Rawan

Rawan belongs to one of the biggest families in Bethlehem. When she was growing up, her family was quite wealthy. Rawan had one sister and two brothers, who all attended expensive private schools in Bethlehem. In the mid-1980s they sent her oldest brother abroad to study in London. Rawan wanted to stay at home, and started studying at Bethlehem University in 1985 but, due to the conditions created by the Israeli authorities, her father insisted that she should study abroad rather than in Bethlehem. So in 1986, a year before the Intifada started, she went to England to join her brother in London. In retrospect, she is grateful for her father's decision. When the Intifada broke out, the Israelis closed Bethlehem University so, if she had stayed in town, she would not have been able to finish her studies.

She enjoyed being in London, and she enjoyed the freedom of living as a student in a big city. However, she also felt very guilty about having a good life in London while the Intifada was going on at home. In England she acquired a new sense of pride and self-assertiveness about her identity and origin as a Palestinian Christian from Bethlehem and, in 1990, after finishing their studies, Rawan and her brother returned to Palestine. She stresses that they could have stayed on in England and found good jobs there, but she wanted to go home and build a life for herself in Palestine.

Back in Bethlehem, Rawan met Ibrahim, a relative from her own extended family, who had been living in Honduras for the past 16 years. He was born in Honduras as the son of Bethlehem migrants but grew up in Bethlehem, before he returned to Honduras on his own at the age of 18. At 34, after a few years of running his own business in San Pedro Sula, he decided it was time to return to Bethlehem. He came in 1994, met Rawan shortly after, and they were married the same year. Rawan's family owned a big building in the centre of Bethlehem, that used to house an old club and which their father had wanted to turn into a hotel. However, before the First Intifada, the Israeli authorities would not permit them to do so. After 1994, when the PA took over, they were able to

implement their hotel plans and, in 1996, Rawan, her two brothers and two paternal cousins had the place renovated and turned into a hotel. Ibrahim wanted to start a restaurant and, having lived in Honduras his entire adult life, he wanted it to serve Mexican food. At the time, there were no such restaurants in Bethlehem and Ibrahim was confident that it would be a hit. Rawan's family believed in the idea, Ibrahim invested his own savings, and in 1996 they built a Mexican restaurant into the hotel. Ibrahim also brought along a chef whom he knew from Honduras. During the late 1990s, both the hotel and the restaurant went quite well, and they made good money.

In 1999, Rawan and Ibrahim also had a son. In the late 1990s both of Rawan's brothers and her cousins married local girls and started having children of their own. This meant that there were four families depending on the hotel and the restaurant for their livelihood, in addition to a number of employees, but business was good, and they were all doing quite well. When the Second Intifada broke out, everything fell apart. Since then, they have had two good summers and a few good Christmas seasons but, aside from that, they have scarcely had any guests at the hotel or at the restaurant, and the family business that they have all depended on, has made serious losses for more than six years. Rawan's brothers have started working elsewhere, on the side, just to get by. Ibrahim, who holds a Hondurian passport, wants to return to Honduras and take his wife and son with him. Rawan is reluctant to do so. She does not want to leave Bethlehem, and she is not willing to give up on the family business. She feels that Bethlehem is where she belongs. This is where she has most of her family and life-long friends, and she would feel that she is betraying her town if she were to leave at this point. Still, unless the situation improves within a year or two, the family is preparing to leave Bethlehem and start a new life in Honduras.

Rawan's youngest brother, who works with a London-based firm is preparing to go back to London and get a job with his company there. Her older brother and her two cousins are also looking to get out of the country and raise their families somewhere else, preferably in Europe or in the US. With a failing family business and no other economic opportunities in view, Rawan and her brothers and cousins are all planning to leave the country in the near future. Rawan's story is an indication of how the drop in tourism has affected people's lives, and how a family determined to stay in Bethlehem can be driven to leave after years of economic depression.

Aside from those who are running hotels and restaurants, there are others who are indirectly dependent on the tourist industry, such as the olive-wood and mother-of-pearl craftsmen of Beit Sahour and Bethlehem. More than four hundred craftsmen, mainly in Beit Sahour, work with olive-wood or mother of

pearl. The dominant techniques of carving religious motives and icons from olive wood and mother of pearl where brought to Palestine by Fransiscan monks, sometime after the arrival of the Franciscan order in the fourteenth century. These techniques were passed on to local people, who passed on the craft within their families (Arab Educational Institute 1999, Elali 1991). Many of those who work with olive wood and mother of pearl today descend from a long lineage of craftsmen. Known for their detailed and skillfully crafted depictions of the holy family in Bethlehem, Jesus on the cross, and other biblical motives, the craftsmen of Beit Sahour have been a source of pride to the local community. Throughout the twentieth century, they have relied on tourism to Bethlehem to sell their work through local souvenir shops. Some craftsmen have also had their own stalls in the old city of Jerusalem, or they have had contact with local shop owners, to whom they would bring their work. Some families have also exported their handicraft to other parts of the world, but most depended primarily on local sale for their personal income. This too changed dramatically after the autumn of 2000.

George is a mother-of-pearl craftsman who lives in Beit Sahour. He has a workshop in the basement of his house, where two of his three children help him out in the evening, finding good pieces of mother of pearl. George makes everything from small crosses to what is generally referred to as 'holy art', elaborate depictions of the holy family in the manger and other religious motives. George is known as a skilled craftsman. According to some of his colleagues, his work was much sought after at the souvenir shops of Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and he used to make good profits selling his own products in Jerusalem. When the Intifada started, tourists stopped coming to Bethlehem and throughout the next seven years they never returned in large numbers. Business went down for the souvenir shops in Bethlehem, so they could not take any more of his handicraft. Things were slow in Jerusalem as well but, if the souvenir shops would not take his handicraft, he could always erect his own stall at some strategic spot and sell his own handicraft at a greater profit.

However, as the Intifada escalated, Bethlehem Palestinians such as George were banned from entering Jerusalem. Since then, he has not been able to sell his handicraft to local souvenir shops and he has not been able to take his work to Jerusalem. In the meantime, he has no other choice than to keep on making crosses, Christmas mangers and other motifs that are easily sold under normal circumstances. A few times a year, he is given a permit to visit Jerusalem for a day to sell his handicraft. Apart from that, he gets an occasional order from someone who exports 'Holy Land' handicrafts to the US. Export has been the rescue for most of Beit Sahour craftsmen in recent years. With the collapse of tourism in Bethlehem, most of the craftsmen of Beit Sahour started looking

abroad, concentrating on making handicraft products for export. Most Sahouris have plenty of family and close friends living in the US, in Canada or in parts of Europe, people they trust, who can sell their handicraft in their host countries at great profit.

People with the right connections abroad, or who can travel to the US during the Christmas season to sell their handicrafts do quite well for themselves. In the past few years, a growing number of craftsmen have traveled to Western countries, mainly to the US during the last three months of the year to sell their products. If you speak English well, if you get a visa, and if you have some contact in your country of destination, you can make good money in those three months. George is not one of the lucky ones. He is a skilled craftsman but he lacks the contacts he needs to export his handicraft, or to travel abroad and sell it on his own. To George, the drop in tourism to Bethlehem was a hard blow, and the closure of the borders to Jerusalem made it even harder.

The Expulsion of Palestinian Labor from Israel

Israel's closure of the border between Jerusalem and Bethlehem had dramatic consequences far beyond the tourist industry. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, thousands of Palestinians from the Bethlehem area used to work in Israel, mostly in the construction industry but some in more lucrative jobs. In Bethlehem, as in other parts of the West Bank, this was an important source of income. When Israel closed the border, banning Palestinians from entering Jerusalem, thousands of Palestinian workers found themselves suddenly out of work. One of these was Jiries from Beit Sahour.

Jiries

As mentioned earlier, Jiries studied in Vienna in the early 1980s and, after returning to the West Bank, he started working as an electrical engineer in Jerusalem. After a while he ran a firm of his own along with an Arab-Israeli partner, as he was not be permitted to run a firm in Israel on his own. He worked hard, made good money and enjoyed a comfortable financial situation. His wife would stay at home and take care of their four daughters, since he made such good money from his work.

When the Intifada broke out and the road to Jerusalem was closed, Jiries lost his permit to work in Jerusalem and was banned from entering the city. No longer able to work in Israel, Jiries was confined to the West Bank, where there was very little work to be found. For the next six years, Jiries managed to eke out a living by doing occasional small jobs in his own neighborhood, mostly

installing electricity in new-built houses on the outskirts of Beit Sahour. After 2001, he had work only for a few days a week, and he could not make enough money to support the family on his own. Adapting to their new financial conditions, his wife signed up for a one-year course in practical nursing, and in 2005 she started working full time as a nurse. She also took a number of other courses to better her situation on the labor market. For Jiries, who took great pride in being able to support the family on his own, this was a painful concession to make. However, his wife has adapted well. She has found a sense of empowerment in having a job of her own. Meanwhile, their two oldest daughters have finished high school and been able to study at Bethlehem University, thanks to a number of scholarships.

Jiries has struggled with the family finances since 2000 and one of his greatest worries has been the education of his daughters. Until 2006, all his daughters had attended the Orthodox High School in the village associated with the Orthodox Church. After that, however, he was unable to pay the annual fees of 600 USD per year that the school demanded, and he had to send his two youngest daughters to the public high school. He felt strongly about obtaining a proper education for his daughters, so he did not feel good about sending his two youngest daughters to an underfunded and understaffed public school.[5]

Jiries also has a sister who lives in the US, and who has helped him out through his worst hardships. She has also offered to help her brother and his family move to the US. He was determined not to leave Beit Sahour but after six years without steady work, he started considering this option. Finally, in the autumn of 2006, Jiries landed a full-time job as a janitor at a social institution in Beit Sahour at a monthly salary of 800 USD a month and, with shifting working hours, this gave him the opportunity to work as a part-time electrician on the side. This is very little compared to the 2000–3000 USD that he used to make in Israel. All the same, Jiries is happy to have a steady job again that enables him to support his own family. He is more determined than ever to stay in Palestine, and he hopes that his daughters will end up staying there as well.

Few people share Jiries's steadfastness on this issue. In the course of the past six years, he has seen a large number of his friends and relatives leave Beit Sahour for an easier life in other parts of the world, among them his sister and her husband. They had been living in the US for some years until they returned

5 This happened at a time when the public schools where closed down for months at the time due to boycotts organized by teachers who – as a result of an international boycott against the Hamas government – had not been paid in months.

to Palestine in 1993. They had three boys they wanted to raise in Beit Sahour, and whom they sent to the Lutheran High School in the village. The family was doing fine and enjoying their life in Beit Sahour. Nihad's husband Khader worked as a driver, transporting clothes made in Beit Sahour to their contractors in Israel, and occasionally driving people to the airport in Tel Aviv. In 2000, however, Khader started facing systematic harassment at the checkpoints whenever he crossed into Israel, making his workday increasingly unpleasant.

When the Intifada started and most Palestinians were banned from entering Israel, Khader was one of few people who retained a permit to enter Israel, so he kept working as a driver. However, as the harassment at checkpoints and border-crossings grew worse, Khader grew angry and resentful. In late 2001 his permit to enter Israel was revoked and Khader had reached his breaking point. Having lost his main source of income – his permit to drive into Israel – he decided he had had enough, and that the family should move back to the US. He went in advance in 2002 with two of his sons, and Nihad and their youngest son followed them the next year, when he had completed high school. Since then, the family has started a restaurant in their home county in Virginia, and they are determined to stay there. They still have a big house in Beit Sahour, and they hope their sons will marry girls from the town, but they have given up on the idea of returning to live in Palestine again. The freedom and opportunities they enjoy in the US have strengthened their determination to stay there. When I visit the family in the US, Khader points out, while giving me a ride in his car:

> In this country, I can drive hundreds of miles in a day, and no one will stop me to check my ID, to arrest me, or tell me that I'm not allowed to drive on this road. Back in Bethlehem, I can't leave the city without being stopped and harassed at a checkpoint.

Having spent long periods in the US, enjoying the freedom to move around wherever he wanted, he found the restrictions he faced in Bethlehem to be unbearable. Nihad and Khader's three sons have spent half their lives in Beit Sahour, and they have a very clear opinion that Palestine has nothing left to offer them; no jobs, no life, no future. They want to build safe and decent lives for themselves, and as they see it, they can do that without much difficulty in the US, but not on the West Bank.

George, Khader and Jiries all held jobs that in various ways depended on access to Jerusalem. Losing access to Israel has been a painful change for those who had work there, but in particular for those who have close personal relations on the other side of the border.

Restrictions on Residency in Israel

Since 1967, there has been extensive contact between Palestinians living in Israel and Jerusalem and those who live in Gaza and the West Bank. Throughout the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s West Bank Palestinians were allowed to work in Israel, and Palestinians with Israeli citizenships could visit and live on the West Bank without too much difficulty (Bornstein 2002b). Social and family ties were established across the Green Line, as marriages between Palestinians living in Israel and those living in the West Bank became quite common. In the course of the years, many Palestinian Christians from the Bethlehem area have married Palestinians from Haifa, Nazareth or Jerusalem who hold Israeli citizenship or Jerusalem IDs. Those who have married across the Green Line have faced considerable obstacles. In the 1970s and 1980s, Palestinians carrying West Bank ID would not be granted an Israeli ID when they married a Palestinian with Israeli citizenship. However, their joint children would be granted Israeli citizenship, while the spouse carrying a West Bank ID could be granted a temporary residency and a work permit (Carmi 2007). In 1993, however, the Israeli authorities reduced the number of work permits for West Bank Palestinians, limiting the number of Palestinians who could legally cross the Green Line for work, and restricting available arenas for interaction between Palestinians from each side of the Green Line (Bornstein 2002b). Through established family ties, Palestinians from the West Bank and Israel still interacted, sometimes resulting in marriage. Moreover, since the 1980s, Palestinian universities in the West Bank have been important meeting places for young people from both sides of the Green Line, as many Palestinians in Israel find it difficult to gain admission to Israeli universities (Solheim 1999, Soudah 2006).

Stricter policies on residency and work-permits in Israel for West Bank Palestinians married to Israeli citizens have gradually made such marriages more complicated. In 2005, the Nationality and Entry into Israel Act was passed in the Knesset, banning West Bank Palestinians married to Israeli citizens from obtaining Israeli residency and citizenship (Carmi 2007). This law also withholds Israeli citizenship from the children in cases where one parent is an Israeli citizen and the other a Palestinian from Gaza or the West Bank. In spite of international criticism and condemnation from human rights groups, the law was accepted and upheld by the Israeli Supreme Court in 2006 (Carmi 2007). This created a new situation in which marriage between Palestinians from both sides of the Green Line is generally regarded as undesirable, since there is little room for such a couple to live together in the same area.

Walid

Walid grew up in Beit Sahour but went to the US after high school, to study engineering. In the mid-1990s he returned to Palestine and worked freelance as a film and TV technician with a film studio in Jerusalem. He made good money, sometimes up to 4000 USD a month. When the Intifada started, he was banned from working in Israel. Now he has a small repair shop in his family's house where he repairs televisions, hi-fi equipment, and other technical devices. He also has an occasional job with one of three Bethlehem-based TV-stations. He now usually makes around 400–500 USD a month, a decent income by local standards but a dramatic drop from the good times of the 1990s.

While working in Jerusalem, he met a Palestinian woman from Haifa. They got to know each other and had started to become serious when The Nationality and Entry into Israel Act was introduced in 2005. This dramatically altered their prospects for a future together. Her family opposed their relationship and made it clear that they would not allow her to marry a West Bank Palestinian, as he would not be allowed to live and work in Israel and their children would not be given Israeli citizenship. Since 2005, it has also been forbidden for Israeli citizens to enter those parts of the West Bank that belong to area A and that are under full PA jurisdiction, such as Bethlehem. Technically, this meant that they had no place where they could still legally meet each other. From the perspective of a Palestinian family living in Haifa, the difficulties and disadvantages involved in marrying and building a life with a West Bank Palestinian were overwhelming. After four years, and under heavy pressure from her family, his girlfriend ended their relationship.

Walids story is not unique. There may be hundreds of West Bank Palestinians who have had their relationships and marriage plans ruined by Israeli legal measures, designed to keep them out of Israeli society. Within a community of little more than forty thousand Christians in the Occupied Territories (Sabella 2006:49), this dramatically limits young people in their choice of possible marriage partners, and it is a powerful restriction on social interaction between the Palestinian community in Israel and Palestinians in the West Bank.

A Narrowing of Personal Mobility

In a 20-year perspective, the most recent travel restriction imposed on West Bank-Palestinians is the latest in a long line of measures that limit people's freedom of movement. In the mid-1980s, West Bank Palestinians could take their own cars into Israel and visit Jerusalem on a daily basis, or take weekend trips to the Galilee, the Red Sea, or the Mediterranean without problems. When wages were low on the West Bank, they could find better-paid jobs in Israel. Palestinians from the Occupied Territories could marry Israeli Palestinians and

obtain legal residency, if not full Israeli citizenship. Israeli-Palestinian relations were strained, and the political and economic difficulties of living under occupation were significant but, on an everyday level, most West Bank Palestinians could travel around the entire West Bank and all of Israel without too much trouble. Until 2001, young professionals from the Bethlehem region could live in Bethlehem, commute to work in Ramallah, and catch a movie at the theatre or have a night out in Jerusalem during the weekend. A few years later, the same people were forced to find work in Bethlehem because they could not afford an apartment in Ramallah, and they are not allowed to visit Jerusalem.

Maher, a 30-year-old man from Beit Jala, contrasts his childhood experience with his current situation in the West Bank:

> When I grew up in the eighties, we used to go for weekend-trips to the Beach in Tel Aviv in our own car. The trip took little more than an hour. Now, I can't go to Jericho, I need a special permit to drive my own car outside of Bethlehem, and I haven't been to Jerusalem in seven years.

Israel's occupation of the West Bank illustrates the excluding aspects of state power. Here, a system of movement control is designed not to control the population of the state in question but to control an outside population, with the purpose of excluding them from national territory, and protecting its own population from any contact with it. This is not new. For decades, keeping the Arab presence at a minimum has been a seen as essential to protect the 'Jewish character of the state of Israel'. However, since the start of the Second Intifada, Israeli fears appear to have reached a level at which West Bank and Gaza-Palestinians represent not only a demographic threat as a group but where every single Palestinian is regarded as a lethal threat to all Israelis. Partly as a reflection of such fears, Israeli efforts to keep all Palestinians out of Israel and away from Jewish settlements in the West Bank have intensified, with public support. As a further continuation of this logic of separation, the Wall has also been routed with the purpose of encapsulating Palestinian communities within special 'cysts', thus preventing them from harming Israeli citizens. Glenn Bowman refers to this as the logic of 'encystation' (Bowman 2007).

The measures aimed at 'protecting' Israelis from the presence of Palestinians include concrete, physical barriers as well as legal restrictions to their movements. However their most profound long-term effect lies in disciplining Palestinians into adjusting their own everyday movements and activities, their own social relations, and their own social expectations in profound ways. The above words of Maher illustrate the extent to which Palestinians' freedom of movements have been further encroached upon within a period of two

decades. Throughout this period, Palestinians have come to internalize these restrictions, to some extent to take them for granted, and adapt to them with minimal reflection.

Young Palestinians learn that Israel is entirely inaccessible, while Jerusalem may be within reach only for a daytrip and, that establishing social relations, especially romantic relations, with Palestinians in Israel is a hopeless endeavor. They learn that they can visit other parts of the West Bank, but only if they have the right papers and only at the risk of facing hassle and abuse at the hands of Israeli soldiers. They learn that if they try to leave Bethlehem at all, they can be stopped at a checkpoint or be confronted by Israeli settlers from one of the many settlements surrounding their home towns.

Based on their own experiences and the stories told by others, they learn to avoid or minimize these risks. They make no attempts to visit Israel or East Jerusalem. They try to avoid visiting other parts of the West Bank, even Ramallah and nearby Jericho, unless they have professional errands or personal obligations to attend to. As a result, they can end up imposing the greatest limitations of movement on themselves. Maher quoted above, spent his childhood traveling all over Israel and the West Bank. Holding Palestinian ID, he could legally reside and travel throughout the West Bank. However, in late 2007, he could not recall having traveled outside the triangle of Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour in a period of four years. He had not even been to the outskirts of Beit Sahour, knowing that if he did, he might face an Israeli checkpoint. Throughout this period, he had managed to avoid any personal interaction with soldiers or settlers as representatives of the Israeli occupation. At the same time, his personal movements and activities were more constrained because of the occupation than at any time before.

The Flight of the Resourceful

The separation of Bethlehem from Jerusalem, the exclusion of Palestinian labor from Israel, the construction of new settlements and the Separation Wall, the checkpoints, road closures and restrictions on residency and family reunification within the West Bank are all structural measures that profoundly affect people's lives and social relations within the Palestinian Territories. Whatever their underlying intentions, these measures serve to paralyze efforts to create a viable Palestinian economy, impede individual efforts at providing social and economic security for themselves, and dramatically infringe people's right to move around freely within their own homeland. Over time, these measures have led to a structural paralysis – of individuals and local

communities. In combination, they have such a crippling effect on people's everyday lives that many of those who have the opportunity to leave the country have chosen to do so. By all accounts, these policies have been effective: between 2000 and 2004, around 100,000 Palestinians left the country, i.e. 3% of the Palestinian population in West Bank and Gaza (Hanafi 2009:110). In the same period, more than 2000 Bethlehem Christians, or 9.3% of the Christian population of the area, chose to emigrate (OCHA/UNSCO 2004:18).

In line with Hanafi, Julie Peteet has referred to Israel's structural measures in the Occupied Territories as a 'policy of immiseration' designed to make Palestinians lives so miserable that they choose to 'leave voluntarily' (Peteet 2009). Experiences from Palestine, as well as other communities that face large-scale emigration as a result of political and economic hardships, show that those who are most inclined to emigrate, and have the opportunity to do so, are from well-educated, urbanized middle-class families, particularly those who have extensive family networks in the diaspora. In the Bethlehem area, this would include many Christian families and a few wealthy Muslim families. As mentioned earlier, most local Christians on the West Bank have attended Christian private schools, where they have been familiarized with the European languages and cultural traditions associated with various churches. In Catholic schools, they have been taught French and Italian, and learned about the history and cultural heritage of France and Italy; in Lutheran schools students have been introduced to the German language and culture; and in the Orthodox schools, students have learned about the Greek language and cultural history.

After high school, some have traveled to Europe or the US to study. In addition, many people have childhood memories of holidays abroad, and of an everyday life blessed with a sense of security and freedom of mobility that they can no longer find on the West Bank. Colored by such experiences, many have grown up in the expectation of enjoying a safe and comfortable middle-class life, with a solid economy, an exciting career, enriching cultural experiences, the freedom to travel wherever they like and, not least, good prospects for the future of their children. Current realities in Bethlehem can be difficult to reconcile with such expectations and with early memories of enjoying work, business opportunities and social relations across the Green Line that are unimaginable today.

On a more general level, few people are forced by military means to leave the Occupied Territories in order to settle in other parts of the world. However, the set of structural impediments that constitute Israel's occupation make life so difficult, so stagnant and filled with so much insecurity that many people choose to leave of their own accord. For those who have close relatives living in

North America or in Europe, such family networks in the diaspora are windows on the outside world, and a powerful reminder of the opportunities available to those who can leave and resettle in another part of the world.

Conclusion

Israel's occupation of the West Bank relies on a robust military apparatus, and often involves the forceful use of military power against Palestinians. On a day-to-day basis, however, the Israeli occupation dominates Palestinian lives through a series of structural and bureaucratic measures rather than the use of military force. These measures include restrictions on Palestinian residency and entry to the West Bank, expropriations of Palestinian land, the building of settlements and the Separation Wall, restriction of movement through the use of checkpoints and road closures throughout the West Bank. In sum, these measures have severely undermined the functional continuity of the Palestinian Territories in the West Bank, furthering the emergence of three distinct social and economic entities within the West Bank.

In addition, Palestinian access to Israel and ties between Israel and the West Bank has been severed through a gradual shift in Israeli border policies. For several decades, the Palestinian territories were economically integrated with Israel, allowing West Bank Palestinians to grow dependent on access to the Israeli economy as low-wage construction workers in Israel, as providers of retail services for Israeli companies, and as consumers of Israeli products. In the Bethlehem area, primary industries such as tourism and stone-masonry have relied on open access between Israel and the West Bank. Under these circumstances, Israeli border closures and measures aimed at severing ties between Israel and the West Bank have had devastating consequences for the Bethlehem community. Through a number of individual stories, we have seen how these policies have affected Bethlehem Palestinians, killing local enterprises, cutting off employment opportunities, and obstructing social ties and family relationships within the West Bank, and between the West Bank, East Jerusalem and Israel.

Further on, these measures, along with restrictions on movements and land confiscations in the West Bank, serve a common purpose. Building on Agamben's notion of biopolitics and Hanafi's analysis of Israel's occupation as spacio-cide, I have argued that these Israeli measures add up to a politics of paralysis – a set of structural measures designed to paralyze vital community functions, economic activities and social ties within the Palestinian community, and to sever ties between the West Bank and Israel, thus obstructing the

emergence of a viable, contiguous Palestinian polity. This facilitates Israel's takeover of new areas of Palestinian land by immobilizing coordinated resistance, and inducing further 'voluntary' emigration among Palestinians. With time,

Palestinians adjust to these measures by limiting their own movements and activities in accordance with Israeli regulations. In doing so, the constraints they impose on themselves may be more far-reaching than the ones directly enforced by Israeli authorities. As families and individuals, they adapt to these measures in other ways as well. They try to circumvent them, to minimize their damaging effects, and in some cases to escape them altogether through emigration. Though the individual stories presented here are mostly those of Christians, the politics of paralysis affect the lives of all Palestinians, regardless of religious background. While the various regions of the West Bank are affected in different ways, Christians and Muslims within each region are subject to the same regulatory measures. Within the Bethlehem community, the hardships resulting from Israeli policies have created a powerful structural drive towards ongoing emigration, a drive to which internationally oriented, well-educated, middle-class Christians may be especially sensitive. As such, Israel's occupation serves to drain the community of some of its most resourceful and ambitious members. When people choose to emigrate or to stay behind, their decisions are informed not only by current realities but also shaped by a long history of emigration from Bethlehem, by family networks abroad, and by dynamics of emigration that have taken shape through more than a hundred years of emigration. The next chapter will explore the emergence of a culture of emigration among Palestinian Christians, and look at how local communities in Bethlehem are affected by emigration today.

CHAPTER 5

Bethlehem Emigration and Diaspora Relations

Ibrahim is giving visiting relatives a tour of his garden in the hills overlooking Beit Sahour. Over the last thirty years, he has put a lot of effort into transforming this plot of land into his own personal paradise, a garden filled with exotic trees and plants, some of which are rarely found in this part of the world. After a long and colorful life, he looks forward to an active retirement where he can devote all his time to family and friends, visit relatives in Europe and the US, and take even better care of his garden at home. Ibrahim and his wife are happy to have raised three children who have all married and started their own families. At the same time they are saddened that their two sons had to seek opportunities in other parts of the world, one as an engineer in the US, and the other as a doctor in Germany. Ibrahim's only daughter lives in Bethlehem with her husband; they both have good jobs, and their two sons attend one of the best schools in the area. As far as possible, Ibrahim wishes to see his grandchildren enjoy a happy and carefree childhood in Bethlehem and Beit Sahour. As he sees it, this may be the only thing their homeland can give them. He cannot see a future for Bethlehem in which his grandchildren will be able to find good jobs and make a decent living, and a social environment in which they will feel free and comfortable as Christians. When they are old enough, he believes they will leave the country and seek better lives for themselves in Europe or the US. When they do, there will be no one around to take over his paradise garden.

Ibrahim's concerns are shared by many of his fellow townsmen. As younger members of the community leave the country in search of better futures in other parts of the world, they feel that their home community, their extended family networks and the overall Christian presence in Palestine are gradually dwindling away.

These worries are not new. As early as during the first wave of emigration in the early twentieth century, people expressed their anxiety about emigration from Bethlehem and its consequences for the local Christian presence (Musallam 1992). In the 1970s, when Mitri Raheb studied theology in Germany with the hope of serving as Lutheran minister in Bethlehem, his local friends told him there would be no Christians left for him to serve by the time he had finished his studies (Raheb 1995:15). For more than three generations of Bethlehem Christians emigration has represented a gateway to better, safer and wealthier lives in other parts of the world, but also a threat to their home communities in Bethlehem.

 | DOI 10.1163/9789004276390_007

This chapter focuses on emigration as an economic strategy and as a response to shifting realities since late Ottoman times. I show how certain events in Palestine have triggered large-scale emigration in different periods, and how, with time, Palestinian Christians have established extensive family networks throughout the Americas and later in Europe. With the aid of individual and family histories, I illustrate the need for a transnational approach to understanding the historical developments of emigration as a way of life, and as a response to local hardships among Palestinian Christians. In looking at the role and impact of emigration from Bethlehem, this chapter will also explore the relationship between a global Bethlehem diaspora and the home community in Bethlehem.

Perspectives on Migration

In anthropology, early studies of migration were dominated by modernization and development theory, in which migration was widely viewed as a positive force, allowing a surplus workforce to migrate to other countries. Migrants were assumed to support their home communities through remittances, or to return home with fresh capital and newly-acquired knowledge, thus serving as agents of growth and development within their home communities. Studies of migration and migration-based households have shown that in fact, labor migration has rarely fulfilled this promise of development (Brettel 2000, Kearney 1986). In the West Bank, the potential benefits of migration returns have been frustrated by political realities, and efforts to utilize human and economic capital acquired abroad have been effectively thwarted. Dependency theories and, later, World Systems Theory focused on the asymmetric relationships between economic centers and their peripheries within a world economic system (Wallerstein 1974). Migrant-sending countries at the peripheries were seen as being at the losing end of uneven exchanges within highly exploitative economic structures. This perspective tends to highlight the negative effects of migration in terms of economic disparity, powerlessness and dependency on remittances in migrant-sending communities. World Systems Theory emphasizes the structural impediments facing migrants who wish to generate growth and development in their home communities (Brettell 2003). In line with this focus, migrants who return to the West Bank and who wish to utilize resources acquired abroad face considerable challenges. However, such a structural perspective is less appropriate as a means of exploring the constraints and opportunities facing families and individuals in their home communities or as migrants. For this, a transnational approach may be more useful.

A focus on transnational networks and processes permits us to situate individuals within family networks that both enable migration and constrain the actions of individuals in their host communities. Transnationalism may be defined as 'processes whereby migrants operate in social fields across geographical, political and cultural boundaries' (Glick Schiller, Basch, and Blanc-Santon 1992:ix).

Since the late 1800s, advances in transportation and communication have shortened the distance between different parts of the world, and made it possible for migrants to relate to numerous social networks simultaneously, and to play out different parts of their lives in different parts of the world. A transnational approach focuses not on the individual as such but on social networks that exist across geographical and cultural borders. Individuals are seen as members of households and social networks that set the terms for the choices made by its individual members and that are affected, in turn, by their actions. From previous research among Muslim Palestinians, I have learned that transnational family networks have been crucial in shaping the opportunities of individual migrants (Kårtveit 2005). I also found striking similarities between how Muslim migrants from the Ramallah area and Christian migrants from Bethlehem organize their family networks to facilitate further migration, and support the pursuits of individual migrants in their host countries. As such, a transnational approach to long-term processes of emigration necessarily involves exploring the relationship between the home community and the diaspora.

Approaches to the 'Diaspora'

Since the early 1990s, diaspora has been a central term within studies on globalization, nationalism and migration. Since then, the meaning of the term has been stretched in multiple directions. Anthias (1998) distinguished between two main approaches to the diaspora. One of these is descriptive, represented by Safran (1991) and Cohen (2008). Building on the Jewish diaspora as an ideal type, they define diasporas as groups of people that have been displaced from a place of origin, and who are linked by a shared 'longing' for their homeland, and a shared identity that separates them from their host communities (Safran 1991:83–84).

A 'post-modern' approach is represented by Clifford (1994) and Gilroy (1993) who employ the term diaspora to refer to a condition of hybridity that is a creative mixing of culture and identities across geographical and national boundaries that does not have to be centered on a place of origin (Gilroy 1993). This approach rests on the idea of a globalized world in which cultural phenomena and ethnic identities transcend territorial borders, and where actors combine

aspects of various cultural traditions and social groupings in their processes of identification (Clifford 1994).

Anthias advocates a third approach that attends to intersectionality, and to issues of class, gender and trans-ethnic alliances. In her perspective, the diaspora is a field in which multiple identities and processes of categorization are at work simultaneously; a field that opens up for local complexity and contradictory processes and in which gender roles, class and age divisions and power relations within groups, and in opposition to host communities, are subject to continuous negotiation (Anthias 1998). This approach is also represented by for example Brah, who introduces the concept of 'diasporic space': 'Diasporic space is the intersectionality of diaspora, border and dis/location as a point of confluence of economic, political and physic processes' (Brah 1996:181). The diasporic space as a conceptual category includes not only those who live in a diasporic setting but also by those who are constructed as indigenous, those who have stayed put in a 'place of origin' (Brah 1996:209).

While a descriptive approach is too static in its emphasis on the centrality of the homeland, and a postmodern approach neglects the role of cultural, political and economic structures in constraining individual freedom and capacity for self-construction, I believe that Anthias focus on intersectionality, and Brah's concept of the diasporic space capture the complexity of diaspora identity formation. Among Bethlehem migrants and their descendants, the importance of Bethlehem as their place of origin, the qualities they attach to it and the way in which this informs their sense of identification with a greater Palestinian 'diaspora' varies with their social class, gender, new country of residence, migration history, and their continued attachments to Bethlehem.

'Homeland Claims' towards the Diaspora

However, my own research has focused on the home community, rather than on the diaspora itself. For this reason, I do not engage with processes of identity formation within a Bethlehem diaspora. Instead I approach the diaspora as seen from the Bethlehem community. To this end, Brubaker's notion of 'diaspora claims' provides a useful starting point. He suggests that we should think of diasporas not as bounded entities, but as stances or claims (Brubaker 2005).

> As a category of practice, "diaspora" is used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilize energies and to appeal to

> loyalties… As idiom, as a stance or a claim, diaspora is a way of formulating the identities and the loyalties of a people.
>
> BRUBAKER 2005:13

A diasporic claim may involve a self-asserted right to represent one's home community in a host country, or to represent a diaspora network in relation to one's home community. In the case of Palestine, there are many examples of expatriate Palestinians who devote themselves to communicating Palestinian frustrations and national aspirations in their host communities (Said 1979, 1996). In the absence of political recognition, Palestinians in the diaspora also emphasize their cultural heritage and use occasions such as weddings to highlight their national and communal identities (Serhan 2008). In addition, there are diaspora organizations and individuals who have claimed a voice in Palestinian politics and in the decisions being made by the Palestinian Authority or the PLO in relation to Israel,[1] engaging in what Anderson calls long-distance nationalism (Anderson and Kligman 1992). However, such claims can be made in both directions. A reversal of Brubaker's notion of diaspora claims in the form of 'homeland claims' towards the diaspora, offers a starting point for exploring local images of diaspora networks and their place within a discourse on migration in their home communities. Among steadfast Bethlehemites, earlier migrants and the diaspora networks that they established have been credited with great business successes and capacities. On the basis of such notions, diaspora networks also face certain expectations, not to mention demands for financial and material support from their home communities on the West Bank. Such demands may strain homeland – diaspora relationships, create discomfort and alienation among returning migrant (Hammer 2005), and be a source of resentment and disillusionment within the home community.

A History of Bethlehem Migration

Historical circumstances explain why Christians have enjoyed greater access to migration than their Muslim neighbors since the late Ottoman period. A focus on transnational processes reveals the crucial role of migrant family networks in reproducing these advantages, facilitating a continuous flow of

1 The most powerful of such diaspora-voices has probably been that of the late Edward Said 1935–2003, by far the most prominent advocate of the Palestinian cause in the US and a vocal critic of the Oslo-accords and of Yassir Arafat's rule of the Palestinian Authority.

Palestinian Christian emigrants to the Americas throughout the twentieth century. By presenting a historical outline of Bethlehem emigration, I show how, during different periods, emigration has been triggered by political and economic realities in Palestine and facilitated by emerging family networks in the diaspora.

Bethlehem – the Ottoman Period

In 1516 the Ottoman Turks conquered Palestine and the area was incorporated into the province of Syria in the Ottoman Empire, an Empire which at the time covered an area from Algiers in the west to the Balkans in the North, and the shores of the Caspian Sea in the east (Hourani 2002).

After the Ottoman conquest of the area and until the early nineteenth century, there was a gradual migration of Christians from rural areas towards the main urban centers of Palestine, such as Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth. This migration may have been partly motivated by concerns for their own safety, and for the maintenance of their own communal networks and religious life (O'Mahony 1999:34). As a result of this process, a number of Christian villages disappeared while Bethlehem experienced a gradual population growth, becoming a Christian stronghold. As Bethlehem expanded, its new inhabitants settled in several quarters, and in the seventeenth century, Bethlehem was consolidated as a small town. Due to its vicinity to Jerusalem and its position as a scene of important biblical events, Bethlehem has a long history of extensive contact with the Western world. Recognized in Christian tradition as the birthplace of Jesus Christ, Bethlehem has been a center of Christian pilgrimage and religious attention for centuries. As a result, much of Bethlehem's economic activity has been centered on Christian pilgrimage and tourism from the West. During the Ottoman period, Bethlehem was also integrated in regional trade and commercial activity, benefiting from trade networks that stretched to Beirut and Damascus in the north and to Bagdad in the west (González 1992, O'Mahony 1999). Through pilgrims and Christian missionaries from Europe and later the US, local merchants were also able to establish valuable Western business contacts.

A growing international presence in the city enabled Bethlehem families to establish trade connections with the Christian West, providing industrious local people with work as merchants, agents, guides and money traders. The late 1800s also saw a large increase in pilgrimage to the city, making mass production of craft products a profitable enterprise. All this international attention boosted the local economy and created many new jobs. Bethlehem expanded, with new houses and villas being built around the quarters of the

old city. With the construction of new houses, stone quarrying and masonry also emerged as a lucrative business in the area (González 1992:48–50).

An Entrepreneurial Minority

From the mid-1800s onwards, Christian Arabs in Palestine managed to establish themselves as a resourceful enterprising minority with a leading position in certain business sectors, as well as in cultural and educational activities. In the course of the centuries, they attained this position through a combination of internal and external factors.

As mentioned earlier, the Ottoman millet system confined Christians to a status as dhimmi as a protected minority, subject to formal discrimination in some areas (González 1992, O'Mahony 1999). In some respects, local Christians could use their status as 'dhimmi' to their own advantage. Their limited property rights encouraged entrepreneurial creativity, as they had to develop economic activities in directions other than agriculture. An important source of income was the mass production of olive wood and mother-of-pearl carvings, which was boosted by a growing trade with Christian Europe. Local Christians were also in a favorable position to establish business contacts in Europe and subsequently in America. A few Christian families also benefited from the Capitulations (González 1992:49). As successful entrepreneurs, leading Christian families in the Bethlehem area were able to amass a certain amount of wealth and, after the Ottoman Land Reforms of 1858, they could purchase land in and around the city of Bethlehem (Arab Educational Institute 1999:47).

Along with significant entrepreneurial achievements, Christian Arabs emerged as a cultural and intellectual elite in Palestine from the mid-1800s onwards. This tendency was reinforced by their privileged access to schools established by European Church Missions and local churches in Palestine. These Church-run schools were mostly concentrated in Christian-dominated areas, where pupils were introduced to European languages such as English, French, Italian and German, as well as learning about European culture and history. Through these schools, they acquired language skills and knowledge of the Western world that would prove valuable in their contact with European pilgrims and their efforts to establish business contacts in the West.

Christian Emigration – the Early Phase

During the early nineteenth century, the Ottoman Empire began to be adversely affected by the economic reverberations of the European industrial revolution, fueling outmigration for economic reasons towards the West. Some historians, like Karpat, argue that Muslim Ottoman oppression has been overrated as a push factor for Christian emigrants under Ottoman rule (Karpat 1985:179).

However, Gonzáles argues that within the Bethlehem area Christian emigration must have been fueled by conflicts and oppression of different forms. As the Empire weakened, Christians found themselves persecuted in the form of labor levies and increased extractions of money and goods. A general climate of discontent affected all Ottoman citizens and, in their growing distress, many Muslims would take out their frustrations on local Christians, sometimes in the form of violent attacks (González 1992:87–88). In response to lawlessness, political repression and economic hardships, some people decided to leave their homes and search for wealth and better lives in other parts of the world. This was not a new phenomenon. The Christian community of the Bethlehem area already had a long history of labor emigration and long-distance trading within the Levant. Leaving for more prosperous parts of the region to work for a few years and then returning home had been an aspect of local adaptation during periods of economic hardship (González 1992).

In the West Bank, Christians from Bethlehem, Ramallah and Jerusalem pioneered West-bound emigration to the Americas. Within a few years, many Muslims would follow the same tracks but, until today, the relative rate of migration has been consistently higher among Palestinian Christians. There were several reasons for this. As mentioned, Christians were subject to brief periods of religious persecution during the late Ottoman period, making their lives increasingly unpleasant and insecure (González 1992:88). With little chance to improve their own situation at home, emigration appeared to many to be an attractive option. Due to their social profile as a well-educated entrepreneurial middle-class, often with knowledge of at least one European language, Christians also saw themselves as well prepared to handle the challenges of creating new lives for themselves in the Americas. Migdal argues that those who left their home were not the poorest of the poor but those with some education or other liquid assets (Migdal and Baer 1980:59). According to popular perception, those who emigrate have always been, and still are, the most industrious and resourceful. In that sense, emigration has been seen as causing a drain of valuable human resources from the local community. Being wealthier, owning land that could be sold, or possessing sufficient savings, some Christian families were also more financially capable of leaving for the Americas than most of their Muslim neighbors (Sabella 1999).

From the early 1800s on, there were sporadic cases of individuals who left the Bethlehem area and ended up in the Americas. But such people were few and far between, and they did not establish new bases or blaze a trail for others to follow (González 1992). Large-scale emigration only started in the late nineteenth century, and early Palestinian Christian emigration took the form of a regional wave of emigration from the Ottoman Empire to the Americas, which

lasted from approximately 1880 until the First World War (Karpat 1985, Musallam 1992). At first, some emigrants sailed straight to the USA; but most of them landed in South America, and especially in Chile, which was the final destination of the main shipping routes between Palestine and South America at the time (González 1992).

This wave of emigration peaked in the years prior to and during World War One. Throughout the nineteenth century, Christians were able to avoid conscription in the Ottoman army by paying a fee. After 1909, this was no longer possible, and local Christians found themselves subject to an aggressive campaign of large-scale enrolment into the army. To many young Christians, emigration seemed to be the only way to avoid the army (González 1992:28). When the Ottomans entered World War One, and conscription actually meant going to war, it triggered a sudden wave of emigration (Hitti 1970). Among families in Bethlehem, there are many stories of young men who found local brides and got married in a hurry, before fleeing Palestine by sea to the Americas (González 1992:54). Most Christians in Bethlehem can also recount stories of specific relatives who left Palestine in order to escape the coming war.

The majority of emigrants who left in the early 1900s ended up in Santiago, Chile at first. Some of them subsequently moved further north and eventually ended up in the US, which was a widely-preferred destination. Some also stopped half way, and settled in Central America, in countries such as Honduras and El-Salvador in particular where there are sizeable and resourceful Palestinian communities to this day. However, the biggest group of Palestinians from the Bethlehem area ended up staying in Chile, which still hosts the largest Bethlehem diaspora community. Although reliable statistics are lacking, Chile is assumed to be home to some 100,000–300,000 people of Palestinian decent, a majority of whom are assumed to be of Bethlehem origins (Abu Eid 2008). Many of those who ended up in Latin America did so involuntarily, as a new US immigration law introduced in 1920, brought to a halt Arab immigration to the US (Cainkar 1999). A less well known fact is that Palestinians who had left for Latin America during the dying days of the Ottoman Empire were banned from returning to their home communities throughout the 1920s, after Palestine came under British Mandate rule. In accordance with the Treaty of Lausanne, and its law on state succession for former Ottoman subjects, Palestinians in the diaspora were given a two-year period between 1924 and 1926 to apply for and obtain Palestinian citizenship, which would enable them to return to Palestine. However, British Authorities made no efforts to inform Palestinians settled in Latin America about this opportunity before the window of return had closed (Musallam 2012). Thus, they had little choice but to stay in their countries of emigration or to settle elsewhere in Latin America. This reflected a British

policy of allowing Jewish immigrants to settle in Palestine on the easiest conditions while placing obstacles in the way of Palestinians who wanted to return (Musallam 2012).

Those who stayed behind in Palestine soon heard about emigrant success stories and families received remittances from emigrants who found a wider range of economic opportunities in their host countries. By the early 1920s, emigration had become a way of life (González 1992:55, Musallam 1992) and many left simply to join elder brothers or other relatives, usually with the hope of returning to Bethlehem with a certain amount of money. For a variety of reasons, most emigrants ended up settling down in their new countries of residence.

The Mandate Period

During the British Mandate, 1921–1948, Palestinian Christians who were better educated, spoke several languages and were more experienced at dealing with Europeans than their Muslim neighbors were singled out for jobs in British Civil Administration offices throughout Palestine (Arab Educational Institute 1999). As the number of Jewish immigrants multiplied, and Arab resistance to the British Mandate grew more intense, those who worked for the British authorities often found themselves in a difficult position. Throughout the 1930s, tensions between Palestinians and Jewish immigrants streaming in from Europe became higher and, after the Arab Revolt 1937–39, the Palestinian population was subjected to more systematic forms of suppression and discrimination from the British Mandate authorities (Swedenburg 2003).

Throughout the Mandate period, emigration remained an important strategy for financial improvement. Christian Bethlehemites had established solid networks in a number of overseas locations, and remittances had been good. Young men from the Americas came to Bethlehem to seek brides from within their *hamula*, and prospective emigrants could count on having someone from their family in their country of arrival who would provide a job, or at least help them out with shelter, advice or help to start a business of their own (González 1992:56–57).

1948

During World War Two, Jewish immigration from Europe intensified and the conflict between Arabs and Jews in Palestine grew more violent. In 1947, a plan was presented at the UN, calling for a partition of Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab state, and with Jerusalem as an international zone. Despite Arab opposition, the plan was followed through. Preparations were made to establish a Jewish state, and when the state of Israel was declared on 15 May 1948, it

was already at war with its neighboring Arab countries. The Jewish forces were better trained, better equipped and far better organized than the Arab forces. As a result, they were able to defeat the combined forces of six Arab countries, claim far more land than had been assigned to them in the UN partition plan, and forcibly expel more than 700,000 Palestinians from the areas that were to become a part of Israel (Khalidi 2001, Pappé 2006a, Rogan and Shlaim 2001).

After 1948, there were new waves of emigration from the Bethlehem area when the majority of the emigrants sought the US as their final destination. Now, however, emigration was subject to stricter rules of entry and, before traveling to the US, you needed a visa of some kind, or a visitor permit from the US authorities. For different reasons, Palestinian Christians found it easier to obtain visas to the US and other Western countries than their Muslim neighbors. Many Christians could turn to family networks abroad for valuable assistance and advice on what to do to obtain permits to visit and eventually settle in the US and in other countries. Sennott argues that Palestinian Christians were probably given preferential treatment by embassy and consulate employees, who could identify more easily with Christians who had gone to European private schools and often spoke one or two Western languages, while Muslim Palestinians would be treated with far more skepticism (Sennott 2001). As a result, in the 1950s and 1960s Christians emigrated in large numbers, further weakening their relative presence in the Bethlehem area.

In 1948, Beit Jala, which had been an affluent, urbanized and fully-Christian city until the 1940s, experienced the influx of an entire family clan from a village near Hebron (Isotalo 2005). At the same time, the Muslim village of Doha expanded to the borders of Beit Jala, and two refugee camps were established on each side of the city. The people of Beit Jala soon found that their immediate surroundings had been dramatically altered. The demographic changes in Beit Jala were intensified by ongoing Christian emigration to the Americas, which further weakened the Christian presence in the town. This resembled the developments that were taking place in Bethlehem, though in Bethlehem these changes were more gradual.

Unlike Bethlehem and Beit Jala, the small town of Beit Sahour faced no influx of internal migrants. Until the 1960s, Beit Sahour retained a certain agricultural profile, with many families still making their living as farmers. As such, they saw their land as a source of collective security and as a resource of which they were fiercely protective. After the war of 1948, and through long periods marked by internal migration within the West Bank, most of the families of Beit Sahour, unlike those of Bethlehem and Beit Jala, refused to sell their land to outsiders, keeping it in their own hands instead. As mentioned earlier, this has shielded Beit Sahour from the kind of demographic changes that have

taken place in Bethlehem and Beit Jala and, to this day, most of the land in Beit Sahour still belongs to the families that have their origins in the town itself.

In the Diaspora

As in Latin America, emigrants to the US and to Europe often helped close relatives to join them, doing the necessary paperwork and helping them out with jobs and a place to live once they arrived. In this sense, established emigrant networks were instrumental in 'pulling' new emigrants to a host country. Through this kind of network migration, people would settle down in clusters and establish family bases all over the US and Europe that could pull together and help newcomers from their home community to get a good start in their host countries.

Throughout Latin America, migrants of Bethlehem origin have done well for themselves. In Chile, they have built a resourceful community network, among other things by establishing a dominant position in the national textile industry (Abu Eid 2008). In Honduras, Peru and El Salvador, Bethlehem families have started out as peddlers before branching into other niches, establishing themselves in the economic and political elites of their new countries of residence. Gonzáles' study of the Bethlehem diaspora in Honduras gives a rare and detailed insight into the emergence of a large and vibrant diaspora community, and its enduring relationship with the home community in the West Bank (González 1992).

Starting in the late 1800s, early Palestinian immigrants were met with skepticism in Honduras, where they were commonly regarded as cunning, deceitful opportunists. For their part, the Palestinians disparaged their host country and its people, and paid little regard to what the Hondurans might think of them. This social distance between the Palestinians and the Honduran community lingered and was further fueled by the reawakening of a Palestinian national consciousness among the immigrants following the Middle East Wars of 1948 and 1967 (González 1992).

In spite of their social segregation, Palestinians in Honduras have stood out as industrious businessmen. Starting out as peddlers, early Palestinian immigrants in Honduras often went on to establish small stalls, often in municipal market-places, and later small stores of their own. The next step would be to establish a larger store with a wider range of merchandise and, finally, for the most successful storeowners to establish branches in other towns. Some of the most entrepreneurial Palestinians also established factories to manufacture items that had to be imported, or that were previously unavailable in the local market. Later migrants would start out working for more established relatives while they grew familiar with the country, and learned the ropes of the

business before branching out and starting their own business (González 1992:93). Some migrants have been less successful, getting stuck at one of the first stages of the merchant ladder as some form of traveling salesmen, or running small stalls. But those who have done well have established themselves within a variety of sectors, running general stores, textile factories, specialty stores, repair services, construction companies, pharmacies, etc. (González 1992:94). To a large extent, Palestinians in Honduras established enterprises following a model of *patrimonial management* brought from their home communities in Bethlehem, where ownership, executive decision-making and a significant portion of other jobs within the hierarchy were carried out by members of one extended family, led by the male heads of the family. The eldest son within each family would take charge of all family enterprises after his father's death. In the Honduran setting, this arrangement appears to have fueled entrepreneurial expansion and growth among Palestinian immigrants and to have facilitated a steady flow of new immigrants from Bethlehem throughout the 1900s (González 1992:104). According to Honduran-Palestinians interviewed by Gonzáles, Palestinian prosperity in the diaspora can be attributed, to a large extent, to the uncredited work of Palestinian wives and daughters in attending to customers and looking after family businesses while their husbands were on business trips or tending businesses in branch locations (González 1992:106).

The way in which Palestinians in Honduras organized their businesses and financial affairs served to facilitate a continuous migration network into which new arrivals would be absorbed and provide cheap labor for family-run businesses. In the course of time, extended family groups stretching between Bethlehem, Honduras, and other countries throughout Central and later North America, would constitute transnational family networks that enabled leading figures within the families to utilize contacts and extract valuable resources through their bases in different countries. Throughout Central America, and later in North America, these family networks would be instrumental in furthering the entrepreneurial achievements of Palestinian immigrants.

In the Americas, Palestinian migrants have established themselves and built their community networks by focusing on specific economic niches. In the US, much as in Central America, most of the early emigrants started out as peddlers (Suleiman 1999), but in the past 40 years, gas stations, liquor stores and restaurants have been popular enterprises among Palestinian emigrants (Suleiman 1999). These are enterprises where there is a need for relatively-unskilled labor and where people with little formal education can find employment. Applying a looser version of the patrimonial management model, Palestinian diaspora networks have been rather effective in providing jobs for newly-arrived migrants within their own enterprises, giving them time to learn

the language and the opportunity to learn the ropes of doing business in America (Cainkar 1999).

In the US, Palestinians in pursuit of economic advancement have followed much the same steps as in Central America. After some years of working in someone else's business, ambitious emigrants have secured loans and financial support to start their own businesses through family networks. With the help of resourceful family and village networks, many Palestinian emigrants from the Bethlehem area have done very well for themselves, often expanding their businesses into commercial chains and larger businesses in the US. In the early- and mid-1900s, the success of some emigrants, and the absorption of those less successful into vibrant family networks in Central and North America, contributed to keep many Palestinian emigrants in the diaspora. Meanwhile, new developments in the Middle East were also making it more difficult to return to Bethlehem.

1967 – the Israeli Occupation

After 19 years under Jordanian rule, the West Bank experienced another upheaval. During the war of 1967, Israel took Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank from Jordan. This marked the beginning of an Israeli occupation that has since defined Palestinian realities on the West Bank (Farsoun and Aruri 2006). Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the total defeat of the Arab armies was a shock to Palestinians, in Bethlehem and elsewhere. Shortly after its occupation of the West Bank, Israel began to build their own register of the Palestinian population of the West Bank, in which only those who were present at the time would be registered, and allowed continued residence in the West Bank (Makdisi 2010). At the time, thousands of Palestinians from the Bethlehem area were working or studying abroad. Those who were based in Western countries, in Europe and in the US were mostly unable to make their way to the West Bank, while those who were in Jordan, Lebanon or Egypt were banned from crossing the border back to the West Bank. Because of this, thousands of West Bank Palestinians were not registered as legal residents in their home towns, and were forced to stay abroad during the first years after the 1967 war. In the Bethlehem area, hundreds of young men and some women, were studying abroad at the time of the war. Israel's occupation of the West Bank, and their refusal to let them return to settle had a decisive effect on many young Palestinians, most of whom chose to stay abroad and to build new lives for themselves in the countries in which they were living at the time, or in other countries that seemed more attractive. Lina, a retired school teacher in Bethlehem, recalls how a number of young men of her family had been

excluded from the country in 1967, never to return. Some of these people were able later to return and settle in the West Bank, and to regain their right of residence. But to many of those who were abroad in 1967, the idea of returning to live in Bethlehem under Israeli rule had little appeal, while others established new lives for themselves while waiting for the chance to go back.

Under Israel's occupation, social and economic ties between the West Bank and Jordan were cut off and the Israeli authorities soon started confiscating Palestinian land to make room for Jewish settlements and bypass roads that would benefit Israeli citizens. As mentioned earlier, The Israeli occupation was also organized so as to obstruct the emergence of a viable Palestinian economy with its own industries. As a result, Palestinians were forced to seek manual labor for low pay in Israel or to work for Israeli capital in the West Bank throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Bornstein 2002a, 2002b).

All this reinforced the desires of young Palestinians with educational aspirations to seek more promising opportunities abroad. Many Bethlehem Christians went to the US to study or to work. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, they found that getting a student visa or a green card in the US was relatively easy, especially with the help of relatives who had already settled there. Some also went to Europe, where they had to establish new lives for themselves without existing family networks to lean on. Though many migrants initially planned to return home after a few years, most of those who left for North America or Europe ended up settling there permanently.

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of educated Palestinians also found well-paid work in the Persian Gulf, especially in Kuwait and in Dubai (Hilal 2006) During the Cold War, thousands of Palestinians, many involved with the leftist faction PFLP or with Fatah, traveled to the Soviet Union to study on PLO scholarships. Among these young men were many Christians from Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour; many of them married in the Soviet Union and brought their Russian wives along when they returned to their home communities. However, their family migrant networks in North and South America meant that most Christians from the Bethlehem area chose to travel there when they left the country.

Throughout the twentieth century there was a steady flow of emigration and, at times of economic hardships and political turmoil, the rate of emigration was especially high. However, in 1993, after the signing of the Oslo agreement, for the first time there was a significant return migration of both Muslim and Palestinian Christians who had been living in North America and in Europe. Those who returned to settle down during the 1990s were mostly resourceful, middle-class Palestinians who wished to start up businesses in the West Bank, and build a future for themselves and their families in a future

Palestinian state. As such, Bethlehem saw the return of many Christian families during the first years of the Oslo period.

The Oslo Years 1993 – 2000

A cautious optimism during the first years of the peace process soon turned to disappointment and discontent. The Palestinian Authority had been expected to bring peace and prosperity to the Occupied Territories and to secure the building of a Palestinian economy that would bring jobs and money to the Palestinian population. Palestinians soon found that their everyday situation and private economy did not improve, while the peace process faced a five-year stall. Many of those who returned from the diaspora, whether from Western countries or from other parts of the Arab world, also experienced a painful disconnect between their imagined homeland and the reality of their return (Hammer 2005). The Palestinian Authority, at national and regional levels, was fraught with corruption, incompetence and gross mismanagement of public funds. Bethlehem was no exception. In addition, the district of Bethlehem depended very much on its vibrant tourist industry. After the troubled years of the First Intifada, Bethlehem, like Jerusalem, experienced a boom in this sector in the first years after Oslo. This joy was short-lived. In 1996 Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party won the election in Israel, declared an end to all negotiations and escalated Israeli confiscations of Palestinian land and military confrontations with the Palestinian Authority. In 1999, with the election of Ehud Barak as Prime Minister in Israel, there was a new wave of optimism. Barak promised to revitalize the peace process and finalize peace agreements with all of Israel's neighbors including the Palestinians within a year. However, in late September 2000, after failed peace talks at Camp David and, amid growing frustrations among Palestinians, the Second Intifada broke out, marking the start of a new period of low-intensity warfare, and a hardening of Israeli rule in the West Bank. As described in the previous chapter, this period involved great hardship for the Palestinian population, and the region of Bethlehem faced numerous Israeli military assaults resulting in large-scale destruction of civilian infrastructure, and a collapse of its tourist industry.

As a result, the emigration of local Christians increased dramatically in the first years of the Second Intifada as hundreds of families joined their relatives in Europe and in North America, many of them being granted residence permits in Western countries on humanitarian grounds. Among these new migrants, as among their predecessors, family and village connections in the diaspora often had a decisive impact on who would leave their home community, and where they would go.

The Case of a Migrant Family

Amali was born in 1978 and belongs to a small family in Beit Jala. Her family has a long history of migration, and as a result, they are now spread all over the world, maintaining only a small presence in Palestine. Their story shows how the opportunities that people have had, and the choices they have made, have been shaped by shifting realities both in the Palestine and in the diaspora.

Amali's great-grandfather Khalid was in his early 20s and had a wife and a son in Beit Jala when the First World War broke out in 1914. Like many other young men at the time, he fled the country in haste in order to avoid conscription into the Ottoman army, leaving his family behind, and traveling on a ship headed for South America. He ended up in Peru, where he settled down, married again, and had several of children. He only returned to Palestine as an old man. Years later, his children in Peru made contact with their relatives in Palestine. Khalid's only son in Beit Jala lived in Palestine all his life. He married in 1932, and had five children in the course of the next ten years. The oldest child was Amali's father, who was born in 1933 in Beit Jala. He went to school, graduated from college in Amman in the late 1950s and became a teacher. As a teacher at a private school in Jerusalem, his financial position allowed him to help other members of his family get by. In the late 1960s he married Amali's mother, who was also from Beit Jala. Working as a teacher, he was able to save some money, and in the 1970s he invested in sock-knitting machines and started large-scale production of socks. He had found his own niche within a local textile industry that served the Israeli market. In the meantime he had one son and three daughters, of whom Amali was the youngest. Lisa, the eldest, was born in 1971, Luma was born in 1972, and her brother Ibrahim was born in 1975.

Amalis father had three sisters and one brother. One of his sisters married a man from Bethlehem, and ended up in Jordan, while his other two sisters went to the US, spent a few years living in Ann Arbor, Michigan, before settling down in North Carolina, both married to men from the Bethlehem area. His brother studied in Egypt, where he was arrested for communist activity in the late 1950s. He then studied in Moscow, where he obtained a PhD in Mathematics before returning to Palestine in 1973 to work at Bethlehem University.

In 1987, the First Intifada started, and this turned out to be a disaster for Amali's father. His business suffered badly and he could not travel to buy equipment and to meet customers and distributors. Schools were closed and the children had to attend underground home schooling during the worst Intifada period in 1988–1989. In early 1989, Amali's father applied for a Green Card with the help of his sister in North Carolina on the grounds of family reunification. The whole family obtained Green Cards and went to North Carolina, where

things did not work out very well for the family. Amali's father had a hard time finding work, and he invested a large portion of his personal savings in a business project that failed. After six or seven months they left North Carolina and the US. The family had then been invited to stay with relatives of Amali's mother in Peru, though they also met their relatives from her father's side. However, after three months in Peru, Amali's father was unable to find work there either, so in early 1990, they went back to Palestine.

After returning to Beit Jala, Amali's father reopened his sock factory but business was bad, and he could not make money to support his family while the Intifada continued, and he could not find any other kind of work. The children, especially Amali and Ibrahim, had to work in the sock factory after school in order to make ends meet. In 1993 came the Oslo agreement and, in 1994 the PA, which did not make their situation any easier. After 1993, it became more difficult for Amali's father to enter Israel and to meet customers and distributors for his socks. All through the 1990s, he had to struggle to keep his business alive.

Ibrahim, who was a teenager in the early 1990s, got heavily involved in violent demonstrations and clashes with Israeli soldiers. Anxious for his safety, his parents sent him to live with his mother's sister in Florida in 1992. Amali's sisters Lisa and Luma had been sent to study in North Carolina in 1987 and in 1989. When it was Amali's turn, her father could not afford to send her to study in the US, so in autumn 1995, she started studying at Bethlehem University instead. However, studying options were limited there so, in November 1996, Amali went to the US to live with her aunt and study at a State University in North Carolina. She financed her studies through part-time work and by taking up a government student loan that left her with a 100,000 USD debt. She worked hard in between her studies, and graduated in 2002 with a major in Theatre Studies and a minor in Political Science. By then, she had obtained an American passport. Now in possession of a passport, she wished to return to Palestine and live and work in Jerusalem. However, this was complicated by her family situation. Amali's parents left Beit Jala in 2001 when the town and their family's house were shelled by the Israeli Army. They did not think it would be safe to stay on and went to Amali's aunt in North Carolina, with whom they have stayed ever since. Amali stayed in North Carolina for the sake of the family. She completed a Master's in Cultural Anthropology and stayed until 2005.

Amali's parents settled in North Carolina in 2001. At that point her father was already 68 years old, unable to find work and not entitled to retirement benefits. He has not made any real money since 1989, so Amali, her brother and her sisters have to support their parents financially. Amali feels bad for her father. After a lifetime of hard work, he is left in a difficult position; he has

no economic security because the occupation took everything away, and no social network because they are stuck in a foreign community, cut off from family and life-long friends in Bethlehem. Amali's mother has found a job in a store in Greensborough, North Carolina, and the two of them will stay on in the US. Amali's father would prefer to go home but he knows that, financially, they would be even worse off in Bethlehem without his wife's income.

Amali returned to Bethlehem in the autumn of 2005, after completing her studies. She wished to stay in Palestine but she had a hard time finding a job. She had some work at a local research center, and she worked as a drama instructor for children in Palestinian refugee camps. However, these were all short-term or part-time assignments and it was difficult to find a full-time job.

In the autumn of 2006, Amali got a job in Los Angeles, managing the social and humanitarian program of a church-based organization. Amali was pleased with the new job she had been offered. It seemed interesting and the salary was good. But she was not at all excited about leaving Palestine and moving to Los Angeles. In Bethlehem she felt happy and at home. When she took the new job and left for Los Angeles, she did so with a heavy heart. Amali's two sisters both ended up staying in Palestine. Lisa went to the US in 1987, studied in North Caroline and got an MA in Political Science. She then worked with a number of development organizations and women's rights projects, before returning to Palestine in 2005 since when she has worked on a project on women's health funded by US-Aid. She has an American passport, and her family assumes that she will return to the US at some point.

Luma went to the US in 1989, where she also studied in North Carolina, taking an MA in Psychology. She returned to Palestine in 1993, where she married Amer, a man belonging to one of the old elite families of Bethlehem, and had two children. She never obtained an American passport, and intends to stay in Beit Jala. She works at Bethlehem University and is involved in a number of local NGOs. Ibrahim, Amali's only brother, grew up in Beit Jala but moved to his maternal aunts in Florida in 1992 after finishing high school. A few years later, he was admitted to the police academy, and began working as a police officer in North Carolina. He married an American girl, with whom he has two children. According to his sister Amali, his children do not speak a word of Arabic, and he has no ambition to ever take his family to Palestine. He has not been to Palestine since 1992, so according to Amali, his impression of the region is still shaped by his memories from the First Intifada. After working for a few years, he got an MA in Sociology in addition to his Police training, and works as a criminal investigator at a police department in North Carolina.

The story of Amali and her family illustrates how political and economic changes in the home community can serve as a push factor for emigration as

well as return migration. This story also illustrates the importance of family networks in facilitating emigration, and by serving as centers of social gravity in influencing decisions about whether to stay in the home community or opt for migration. Different members of Amali's family, from her great-grandfather to her father and finally herself, have found themselves compelled to leave Palestine for political or financial reasons. Her great-grandfather emigrated because he did not want to fight for the Ottoman army. During both the Intifadas, her father brought his family to the US in response to warfare and economic crisis. She herself left Palestine because she could not find a steady job with a decent salary in the West Bank.

The Home Community and the Diaspora

While many people choose to remain in Bethlehem, those who have left retain a powerful presence in their home communities, representing for those who have stayed behind opportunities lost and roads not taken. For good and bad, family networks in the diaspora have an important impact on their home communities on the West Bank.

In spite of a wide diversity of migration experiences, stories of triumph and success are greatly emphasized within the home community. Past migrants have been credited with creativity and a powerful drive for success, and new migrants face popular expectations about wealth and personal achievements. The spread of migrant success stories has also given rise to essentialist projections of a wealthy, resourceful Bethlehem diaspora dispersed throughout the Americas and in Europe. Based on such notions, migrant communities that are regarded as a Bethlehem diaspora are subject to normative claims and demands for financial support from the home communities in Bethlehem.

The View from Home

Going abroad, to study or work in the US or in Europe is a dream shared by many young people in the Bethlehem area and those who manage to get out are envied by their local peers. Sitting at a café in Beit Sahour with a group of young men, I was given a sense of the frustrations experienced by those who have not managed to get out. Bassam is a 23 years old and lives with his family in Beit Sahour. He has finished a bachelor degree in Economics at Bethlehem University, and found a job at a private research centre in Bethlehem. He makes only 400 USD a month, and he is not happy with his job, but considers himself lucky to have one. Hosam is in a similar position. He is 24 and finished his studies two years ago. Now he works at a local NGO, doing work that he enjoys but

at a salary that does not enable him to set aside any money for a house of his own, or for a future marriage.

Bassam and Omar are hanging out with four friends who live in the West but who are visiting Beit Sahour for the summer. One of them is Amer, who left Beit Sahour for the US in 2001 and now lives in Washington DC, where he has studied business and is set to take over a branch of a business owned by his uncle. The second is Issa, who lives in New Jersey, where he works at a family-owned gas-station while waiting for his US citizenship, and setting aside money to start a business of his own. Then there is George, who has spent the past four years in Cyprus. He has studied engineering, has just landed a well-paid job in Cyprus, and has a Greek-Cypriot girlfriend whom he hopes to marry. Finally, there is Ibrahim, who studies medicine in Ukraine. He has been there for five years, has adjusted quite well to life in Ukraine, where he shares an apartment with a Ukrainian-Russian girlfriend whom he has not told his family about.

Bassam and Hosam are both doing well, but when they compare themselves with their friends who have left the country, they feel that they are missing out on life. Their friends have been able to obtain a solid education beyond bachelor level to obtain well-paid jobs that enable them to save for the future. At the same time, they have managed to establish everyday lives that are free of the social constraints of the local village and family network, to socialize and get involved with girls their own age without facing any village gossip, and they have familiarized themselves with new cultures and languages. When they return to Beit Sahour, whether to stay or only for short visits, they meet their home town with the worldly assurance of someone who has traveled the world and proven himself in a new environment beyond the safety of his home community. They often come home with Western passports, a solid education, substantial personal savings and financial prospects that are far more promising than those of their local peers. As such, they are much sought after as potential husbands within the community. Young men like Bassam and Hosam know this, and there is little they can do to level the field and compensate for their lack of social and economic capital in comparison with some of their migrant peers.

Ambitious young people who remain in Bethlehem find themselves unable to pursue their own aspirations, obtain the kind of education they want, develop their personal skills in specific areas, or get enough money to secure their own futures. In addition, their lives in the Bethlehem area are marked by excruciating boredom. There are barely any recreational activities available, except for a few gyms and coffee-houses where the young men of the village can hang out and play cards or pool. Young people live with their parents until they get married, and interaction with the opposite sex is subject to severe

social constraints. Young men hang out at each other's houses, or drive around in their cars all night, while young, unmarried women for the most part stay at home or visit each other's homes. Through Skype, Facebook, and Internet social networking sites, they keep in touch with siblings and friends in the US and in Europe and hear about their lives in other parts of the world. This contact with their friends abroad tends to reinforce their perception of their own lives as repetitious, boring and uneventful, and of their own best years being wasted.

Khader

A sense of personal deprivation, of missing out on greater opportunities, can be invoked by the stories of friends and fellow townsmen who have managed to get out, and even more so by the success stories of close family members.

Khader is in his mid-30s and lives with his parents in Beit Sahour. He has two sisters and one younger brother, all of whom live in the US. Both his sisters are dentists, one of them educated in Toronto, the other in Baghdad. After finishing their studies, they both married men from Beit Sahour who lived in the US, and who had established themselves as successful businessmen in New Jersey. Through their husbands, both sisters have obtained US citizenship. Now they each have three children, they both work as dentists, and they and their families are doing well. Khader's younger brother Fares is only 24. With the help of his eldest sister, he went after high school to the US where he studied accountancy for four years at a renowned university. After his studies he found a job with an accounting firm in New Jersey. They were pleased with his work and wanted him to stay on, so they helped him get a five-year work visa and offered him a steady job. If things kept going his way, he was expected to obtain US citizenship by 2010. During the summer of 2007, Fares came home for the summer, met a local girl that he got engaged to and married one year later, in the summer of 2008. At 24, he was awaiting US citizenship, he had landed a well-paid, steady job that would keep him financially comfortable in the future, and he was about to marry a beautiful girl from a good family in his home town.

The contrast with Khader's situation is brutal. Khader finished high school during the First Intifada, and started working in the construction industry in Israel shortly after. After 2000 he could no longer work in Israel and since then he has unemployed most of the time. In 2002 he wanted to visit his sisters in the US, but his request for a visa was turned down. Without a job, he is unable to support himself. He lives with his parents and he can not afford to build his own house. At 33, he is still unmarried and, without any prospect of finding a job, his chances of finding a wife in his hometown are slim. If, by a stroke of

luck, he can find a wife and establish a family on his own, he will not be able to offer them material comfort and financial security like his brother and two sisters. Khader is bitterly aware of this and, though his misery is shared by many other bachelors in his home town, his perception of losing out is reinforced by the fortunes of his own siblings. The dramatic gap between the possibilities offered in Western countries and the limitations at home fuels a strong personal drive among young people to seek better lives for themselves by way of emigration. Prospective migrants are often strongly encouraged by their families as well. In some cases, family pressure to emigrate can be far stronger than personal motivation.

Pressure to Emigrate

Rami is 30 years old and lives with his family in Beit Sahour. He works at a local business owned by his uncle, and he hopes that one day, he will be able to open his own business. He belongs to a small, but relatively wealthy family that owns a lot of land and several well-run businesses. Among other things, the family owns a large banqueting hall that is used for weddings parties and other big events, and which can cater for up to 1100 guests at a time. This banqueting hall supports a substantial number of his extended family. Even so, the young men of the family all face a strong pressure to seek better futures outside Palestine. Rami's older brother Maher went to Flint, Michigan in 2001 on a tourist visa, and he never came back. According to Rami, he was not acting on his personal drive: 'Our grandfather pretty much forced him to leave. Our whole family did. He didn't make that decision on his own'.

The family had some connections in Michigan that could help him out with a temporary job so that he could stay and work illegally after his three-month visa ran out. This was what they expected of him, and this is what he did. His family in Beit Sahour made it clear that they expected him to stay in the US, find some kind of work and start making money, even though he was only allowed to stay in the country for three months. After a few months, he found a job at a gas station run by a fellow Sahouri. Later on, he worked at a restaurant run by another Sahouri and, throughout the next few years, he kept living on temporary unskilled jobs within the Sahouri network in Michigan. In 2006, he somehow managed to get a Green Card, even though he had been living and working illegally in the country for some years, and if things worked out the way they hoped, he was set to have US citizenship by 2013. In 2002, the family managed to obtain a three-month tourist visa to the US for Rami as well. The family was thrilled on his behalf, and the whole neighborhood soon learned that Rami had managed to get the visa. Most of his peers deeply envied him, and they all expected him to go. But he chose not to.

Rami had been reluctant to leave Bethlehem in the first place, and he had no personal desire to try his luck in the US. Based on the accounts of friends and relatives, the US, particularly the areas where Sahouri-migrants would settle, did not seem very appealing to him. It seemed to be a cold, brutal world where everyone had to look out for himself. He had applied for a visa just to please his family, secretly hoping that he would not be given one. When he obtained the visa, his family bought a plane ticket to New York, where he would be welcomed by his brother. Friends and relatives congratulated him on the visa and wished him good luck. He was expected to follow his brother's example, get a job, eke out a living for himself and stay beyond the duration of his visa. A week before his planned departure, he told his family that he was not interested in going to the US and that he would stay in Bethlehem. His family was shocked and disappointed. His father threatened to disown him, and to throw him out of the family house if he stayed in Beit Sahour. But Rami had made up his mind. His decision provoked negative reactions beyond his nearest family. His peers and neighbors reacted with disbelief and disdain. After that, Rami found himself without work for long periods of time before getting a job in his uncle's jewelery store in 2004. He is quite happy working in the store, and hopes that he can open his own store in a few years. This will depend on financial support from his family, which can no longer be taken for granted.

After several years, some members of Rami's family are still upset with him for throwing away his chance to go to the US. Neighbors and more distant relatives look at him askance and he is convinced that they badmouth him behind his back. Once seen as a smart ambitious young man, he is now seen as a timid, homebound guy with little ambition and personal drive. Carrying a stigma of being 'the guy who turned down the visa', Rami fears that he may find it hard to find a girl to marry in his home community, and he sees himself as the victim of a social evaluation that he finds one-sided and deeply unfair. In spite of this, he is determined not to leave Beit Sahour and he insists that he made the right decision when he chose to stay at home. Nonetheless, his experience, and the price he has had to pay for his reluctance to leave, gives an idea of the social pressure involved in fueling further emigration. Those who have made it to North America or to Europe are expected to do well for themselves, build a professional career or establish a business of their own. In order to meet such expectations, most emigrants have to rely on family support along the way.

Maher – an Emigrant Success Story

The story of Maher illustrates the importance of family networks for individual emigrants. Maher was born in Beit Sahour in 1952, as the second of six brothers. He finished High School in Beit Sahour before leaving his home town.

At school he got to know a Canadian teacher who helped him get a student visa for Canada, and in 1971 he went to Ottowa where he started to study medicine at university. His studies did not go so well and, after a year in Canada, he spent the summer in Palestine. When he returned to Canada in the fall of 1972, he found that his student visa was rejected and he had to leave the country. One of his brothers knew some people in West Virginia, and they invited Maher to stay with them for a while. He then entered the US illegally and attended law school in West Virginia, but he was expelled after one year because of his status as an illegal immigrant.

He spent the next two years traveling from state to state, taking whatever temporary, poorly-paid job he could get. He sold falafels at a stand in New York and he undertook various kinds of manual labor all over the US. After two years, he was invited to visit his mother's uncle who lived in California. His great-uncle helped him find work in a garage and advised him to get married soon so that he could obtain legal residence in the US. Being only 22 at the time, he was reluctant to make that kind of commitment. However, a few months later he was introduced to a young woman from a Palestinian Christian family who was born in Jerusalem but had grown up in the US. They got married, he obtained a Green Card, and he could get on with his life as a married man and a legal resident of the US.

He soon got a job as an assistant mechanic at a garage in Arcadia, California. While working there in the daytime, he attended a mechanics school at night. In 1977, he helped another brother to immigrate on family-reunification grounds and in 1980 he helped two more brothers in the same way. Maher and his oldest brother started working together and opened their own garage in 1977. After two years of hard work, they expanded and opened a gas station as well. When his two other brothers came over in 1980, they joined the family business and, in the course of time, they expanded their investments. From the early 1980s onwards, the brothers invested in real estate and they opened another gas station.

By the mid-1980s, they had established a solid family business, and Maher found that he was now in a comfortable situation and that he could take the time off to study. In the late 1980s he started attending law school, obtaining a law degree in the early 1990s. He then worked as an attorney assistant for several years before passing the bar exam. As a certified barrister, he worked for a law firm for some years before starting his own firm, which focused on business law and immigration in particular. At the same time, he still takes part in running the family business.

Maher has invested most of his own savings from the family businesses and from his law firm. These investments have paid off well, and he has now

acquired a considerable personal fortune. Maher's story is one of great personal accomplishments. However, these would not have been possible without the help of his family along the way. When he had to leave Canada, one of his brothers helped him find a place to stay in West Virginia. During the two years between 1973 and 1975, he had to rely on his family and Sahouri contacts in the US to find short term employment in different places. It was through an uncle on his mother's side that he managed to land his first job as a mechanic at a garage in California, and it was through family connections that he met his future wife, enabling him to obtain legal residence in the US. Later on, he relied on family loans to start his own garage, and on two of his brothers to work a great deal of overtime at a minimum wage in order to make ends meet during the first critical years. When he went to law school and later on established his own law firm, he depended on his brothers to run their garages responsibly.

Even among Sahouri emigrants, Maher stands out as a very resourceful person. He is a lawyer and businessman and, through the Arab-American Institute, has been a committed advocate of Arab-American rights and interests. He has also taken the initiative to strengthen ties between the Beit Sahour diaspora and its home community in Palestine by creating a website for the promotion of Sahouri exports end enterprises (olive-wood and mother-of-pearl crafts, hotels, etc.), based in Beit Sahour and in the US. He is still married to his Jerusalem-born wife, and is the father of three adult daughters who all live in the US.

Maher's story illustrates how a strong personal drive for success combined with vital family support has enabled a substantial number of Bethlehem emigrants to achieve great success in their Western host countries. However, when their stories are retold within their home community, the instrumental role of family connections is often left out. Maher's story is that of a permanent migrant whose accomplishments are the results of decades of hard work. For short-term migrants, having family or village connections in their host countries can be even more vital.

A lot of people have visited family members who live in Europe, coming only as visitors for a few weeks or months. Obtaining a visa to work in Europe is well-nigh impossible and it is regarded as difficult and not very lucrative to find illegal work in Europe. The US is a different case. In the US, part of the economy is dependent on illegal workers who can work for the minimum and who are not entitled to the public services for legal workers. If you have the right connections, it is not difficult to find illegal work that pays relatively well, and there is little risk of getting caught by the authorities. In this context, family and community networks are instrumental. In the Bethlehem area there are plenty of men who have spent periods of up to two years working illegally in

the US, amassing as much money as they can before returning to Palestine. One of them is Issa from Beit Sahour.

Issa – a Short-term Migrant

Issa is in his mid-thirties, and lives with his wife, children and widowed mother in an old family house in Beit Sahour. Issa has a degree in engineering from a university in St. Petersburg, where he studied for five years in the 1980s. After returning home, he married a girl from Beit Sahour and they now have three children. In 1996 he got a job as technical manager at the Oasis Casino in Jericho, a casino run by the Palestinian Authority but catering to Israeli and international gamblers. The casino was a great success, and a very lucrative place to work. Issa made an average of 1500 USD a month, more than three times the average salary in the West Bank at the time. He had no difficulties in providing for his family, and he could afford to send his children to one of the best private schools in the area. However, when the Second Intifada started, the good times came to an end. The casino had to shut down and, in January 2001, Issa, along with almost 2000 other Palestinians were put out of work.

This left Issa in a financial pinch. Suddenly out of work, he found himself unable to provide his family with more than the bare necessities. After a few months of looking for work in the Bethlehem-area, Issa decided to leave the country to find some work and put aside some money for the family. He still had contacts in Russia from his student days and he spoke the language fluently, but going to Russia for work was out of the question. He had relatives in Sweden who might be able to help him out, but even to get a visitors permit for Sweden was a time-consuming process, and finding illegal work that would actually pay well seemed very difficult. In any case, he did not speak Swedish. He also had a sister who lived with her family in France. Going to France to find work might have been an option but, in terms of economic prospects and bureaucratic formalities, he had the same reservations about France as he had about Sweden.

In the US however, Issa had plenty of relatives and friends but no close family. Still, he managed to get a three-month tourist visa for the US, and he left for New Jersey in autumn 2001. In New Jersey, he got in touch with some friends and relatives from Beit Sahour, who helped him out with a place to stay, and with an acquaintance from Bethlehem, who owned a service station where he could work. For 18 months, Issa worked there 12–14 hours a day, seven days a week. He was working illegally and paid no taxes. In any case, he did not have the time or opportunity to spend much so, in the course of those 18 months, he managed to set aside a considerable amount of money. When he returned home, he found the occasional odd job doing electrical repairs. He had

overstayed his US visitor's permit by more than a year, and he assumes that he will never be able to enter the US again. In Issa's view, this was a price worth paying. As it turned out, the money he managed to set aside in the US was enough to secure his family's economy for the next five years. During his short stay, Issa experienced at first-hand what it means to have the right connections, as these had enabled him to make a considerable amount of money in a short period of time.

Migrants Networks as a Window to the World

When they are considering whether to emigrate and where to go, Bethlehem Palestinians make their decisions on the basis of where they have family and village networks, and where they may be allowed to go. On the basis of information from relatives abroad, potential emigrants also make their own evaluations of the opportunities at hand. Migrant family networks are both a vital source of support and a primary source of information when people decide which countries to emigrate to. Among the Christians of Bethlehem, most families have close relatives spread all around the world and can make continuous comparisons between different countries, based on the accounts of family members, and the superficial impressions they make for themselves during shorter family visits.

Issam lives in Bethlehem but runs a corner shop in Beit Sahour. He has close relatives living in Sweden and in the US, mainly in New Jersey. He has a wife and two children, and with his cornershop he is barely able to support the whole family, including sending his children to a Catholic School in Beit Sahour. He is very eager to take his family abroad and, having been to both Sweden and the US, he is very clear on where he would go if he could choose:

> The US is the place! That's where it's happening, you know what I mean? Two years ago, I visited my sister and her family in Sweden. They have a good life there, they have everything they need, but I didn't like it. You don't have to do anything there! The government gives you everything you need! Her [his sister] husband's brother lives there, and he doesn't have a job. He doesn't have to get a job, because the state pays for his house, and gives him money. The state makes people lazy so they don't do anything. I don't like it… But in the US you don't get anything for free, there you have to work, and you have to work hard, but if you do, you can make it big. If you're willing to work hard, anyone can make it big there!

Issam's impression of Sweden and the US was echoed by other Palestinians who had visited relatives in one or both countries. Through migrant relatives who had entered Sweden in recent years, Palestinians in the Bethlehem area had heard about the generosity of the Swedish welfare system. They were clearly impressed and grateful for the goods and services they could access through the public system, but many also found it to be pacifying, and facilitating laziness rather than encouraging hard work among new immigrants. As such, some families who had lived in Sweden for a few years complained to their relatives in Bethlehem that it was difficult to instill a good sense of morale and work ethic in their children.

In contrast, the US was seen as a brutal society, but also full with opportunity. It was regarded as brutal in the sense that unless you were willing to make an effort and work hard, you would not make it at all, and the state certainly would not take care of you. On the other hand, if you were smart and creative, and willing to put in a few good years of hard work, the US was seen as a place where you could make good money and make a comfortable life for yourself. However, evaluations of different countries as migrant destinations are far from static. Certain core ideas – such as the image of the US as the land of great opportunities and risks – are relatively stable, but the appeal of this image, compared to that of European countries, varies from time to time.

In the spring of 2008, the sub-prime mortgage crisis started unraveling in the US. It soon became clear that this was only the start of a financial crisis that would shake up both the US economy and the global economy in the course of the next few years. Michigan was among the states hit most forcefully by the mortgage crises, with thousands of families losing their homes. Michigan also has the strongest Arab presence in the US, with an estimated 500,000 Arab Americans (Hassoun 2012). In the course of the past 20 years, thousands of emigrants from Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour have settled in Flint, Michigan. This immigrant community has felt the blows to the state's economy. Some have lost their houses, many have lost their jobs, and almost everyone has been affected by the crisis in some way. Their families and home communities in the Bethlehem area have felt these changes in the form of smaller remittances from family members in Michigan.

In 2008, a young emigrant from Beit Sahour was shot and killed during an armed robbery in a liquor store in Flint. The man had left Beit Sahour some years earlier to find work in the US. For the first few years he had remained illegally in the country, working at a gas station run by a relative from Beit Sahour. On his marriage to an American woman, he obtained legal residency and, for some years, he had been running a liquor-store owned by a relative from Beit Sahour, while saving money to open up a business of his own. His

story was strikingly similar to those of many other emigrants from Beit Sahour and from other parts of the West Bank (Kårtveit 2005). In the following weeks, this tragedy attracted a lot of attention. A camera recording of the murder taking place was shown on ABC NEWS, and was later put out on You Tube, which allowed most of Beit Sahour to see it. In its aftermath, this episode was highlighted by many as an expression of the dangers of living in the US, in a society regarded as ridden with crime, violence, broken families and weak community ties.

In Beit Sahour and Beit Jala, the combination of the financial crisis and several incidents of violent crime affecting their own emigrants was said to affect local interest in emigrating to the US. In 2007, I met several people who expressed a strong desire to go to the US. A year later, they were still searching for a way out of Palestine but, instead of going to the US, many of them were more eager to go to Sweden, Germany, or another country in Europe where friends and relatives had settled. Among those who remain on the West Bank, dreamy images of abundance and opportunities in Western countries co-exist with more sober assessments, in which the benefits associated with migration are weighed against potential risks and sacrifices.

While most migrants like Maher settle down and build new lives for themselves in their host countries, others, like Issa, stay abroad for only short periods before they return to their home community. At the same time, other migrants live their lives continuously strung between the home community and various host countries. Individual emigrants may come from families that are spread out in different parts of the world, and which enable them to stay connected with the home community and their diaspora networks at the same time. Transnational forms of living can allow individuals and families to suspend to some extent the choice between living abroad and maintaining a presence within their home communities in the West Bank.

A 'Transnational' Family

Hilal comes from a family with a history of emigration that has made this possible. His father left Palestine in the late 1950s to study mathematics in Egypt. As a left-wing activist, he got into trouble with Egyptian authorities, and after a few years in Egypt, he won a scholarship to study in the Sovjet Union. He was admitted to Moscow State University, where he gained an MSc and a PhD in mathematics, before getting a job as a lecturer at the same university. He also met and married a Russian woman and in 1973 they moved to Palestine and his hometown Beit Jala. Hilal's father was one of the founders of Bethlehem University, where he would work as lecturer and administrator until his early death in 1996.

His three children, Carol, Lisa and Hilal all grew up in Beit Jala before taking off in different directions. Carol, born in Moscow in 1966, was seven years old when the family moved to Palestine. After finishing high school in Beit Jala in 1984, she went back to Moscow in 1984, where she studied at Moscow State University. In 1988, she moved to London, where a few years later, she met and married a British novelist. Since the mid 1990s, they have lived in London, were she has worked with film production, making a name for herself as a documentary film maker.

Lisa was born in 1973 in Jerusalem, and spent the whole of her childhood in Beit Jala. In 1988, when schools were closed in Palestine due to the Intifada, she moved to England where she attended a private boarding school before moving to the US at the age of 18. In the US, she studied art at different colleges, and in 2000, she gained an M.A. in Fine Arts from New York University. In New York, she met a Danish writer whom she later married. Since 2000 they have been based in Copenhagen, where she works as a visual artist and a short-film producer.

Hilal who was born in 1976 also passed his childhood in Beit Jala, before moving to England at the age of 15 to attend a boarding school. After high school he stayed in London for a few years before moving to New York in 1997. In New York, Hilal obtained an MA in business and marketing at City University, before getting an internship at the UN headquarters. He stayed in New York until 2004, when he was recruited to work with the Election Commission in Palestine through a United Nations program designed to offer highly-qualified Palestinian expatriates short-term assignments in the Palestinian Territories. Since then he has worked in Ramallah, with the Presidential Office, and with the two Palestinian elections. While working in Ramallah, he has been living part time in Beit Jala, where he stays in the family home. In autumn 2008 he went to London to do an MSc in international relations at LSE, before returning to the West Bank for a temporary assignment with a private telecommunications company in Ramallah. In London, he has a network of friends from Bethlehem and he plans to stay in London for a few years, perhaps to find a job at an international development agency or consultancy firm, preferably one that allows him to keep working in Palestine.

His two sisters, Carol and Lisa, are based in London and Copenhagen but much of their professional activities as film-maker and visual artist revolve around Palestine – as their home community, as a source of identity, and as the scene of an ongoing conflict. For these reasons, they visit Palestine several times a year, sometimes for weeks or months at a time, producing film- and photo material for their work. In Beit Jala, they have a common base in their large family house where their mother lives.

Since 2005, Hilal and Carol have been involved in establishing and running an NGO where they combine tourism promotion and political advocacy, trying to raise international awareness about the Israeli occupation by focusing on its impact on the Bethlehem community. Along with two of their cousins who are based in the West Bank, they have organized guided tours of the Separation Wall around Bethlehem, made presentations and organized speaking tours in the United Kingdom, and they have organized public events in Bethlehem that have attracted a good deal of international attention and media coverage. With the help of relatives and friends in the US, they also organized a two-month speaking and fundraising tour, visiting activist and church-based networks throughout the United States. Carol, Lisa and Hilal all have foreign passports in addition to Palestinian ID. They speak fluent Arabic, English and Russian and, through extensive traveling, they make an effort to keep in touch with their maternal relatives in Russia as well as their paternal relatives spread throughout the Americas and the Middle East.

Carol, Lisa and Hilal all live what we might call transnational lives. Their professional and their personal networks are spread across several countries, and each has a strong social base of family and friends in different parts of the world in addition to a shared base in Bethlehem. Not least, they all move between their various bases with relative ease, balancing their presence in Bethlehem with personal or professional obligations elsewhere. In fact, Carol and Lisa have established careers for themselves in which they use their regular presence and social life in Bethlehem as source of artistic material.

However, this level of personal mobility and the ease of operating in different parts of the world is an experience not enjoyed by everyone. Hilal and his sisters have been far more privileged and resourceful than the average Palestinian. They grew up as the children of a man of great personal authority within the Bethlehem community who was able to provide his children with a secure childhood in Bethlehem, but also the opportunity to leave the area for studies in Europe and in the US. Coming from a resourceful family, they were able to attend prestigious universities in the UK and the US, where Carol and Lisa had the confidence and determination to pursue studies in creative arts. After completing their studies, they have been able to make a good living as independent artists in the UK and in Denmark, and Hilal has been able to work on short-term assignments for the Palestinian Authority and the UN, while living in Ramallah and Bethlehem.

Professional accomplishments, financial comfort, personal creativity, and an extensive family network have enabled Hilal and his sisters to retain a strong social base in Bethlehem while building professional careers for themselves, both in Palestine and abroad. Their situation is a prime example of a form of

transnational mobility that is enjoyed only by the most resourceful and privileged migrants. To some extent, this mobility allows them to defy the choice between staying and leaving. Their professional careers are not limited to the Palestinian territories, and their main sources of income come from outside the territories. When traveling to, and living in the West Bank, they have to adjust to the Israeli occupation like everyone else but, holding foreign passports, they can find ways of circumventing some of the constraints that the occupation imposes on less-privileged Palestinians.

The case of Hilal and his sister is not unique; other studies have identified the emergency of transnational forms of existence among Palestinian migrants (Isotalo 2005, Schulz and Hammer 2003). Some emigrants of Bethlehem origin may be able to live their lives strung between different parts of the world but most end up making a choice at some point – either to remain abroad and establish a main base for themselves in the West, or return to settle in the West Bank. Resourceful migrants can choose to return and at the same time stay engaged with transnational networks while living in the West Bank. One migrant who has done this with great success is Jilal.

Jilal – a Successful Returnee

Jilal grew up in Beit Sahour as a member of the largest family clan in the town. After finishing high school at the Lutheran School in Beit Sahour in 1976 he traveled to Jordan, where he obtained a bachelor's degree in Biology. In 1979, he went to the US to continue his studies. Within a few years he had obtained a Master's degree and, in 1986, he completed a PhD at a university in Texas. The same year, he married an American woman and had a son. After finishing his PhD, he worked as a researcher at different universities until 1999, when he obtained a position as a Research Director at Yale University. Alongside his academic career he has been a political activist, advocating human rights in relation to conflict areas all over the world, not only Palestine. In this respect, the First Intifada, and the Beit Sahour tax revolt in 1989 were turning points for him. Living in the US, Jilal observed how the tax revolt, a popular, non-violent campaign of civil resistance, was utterly ignored by American media. The absence of Palestinian perspectives and of Palestinian non-violent activism in the American public discourse made him extremely frustrated and served to focus his activism on Palestine. In the course of the next 20 years, he co-founded three activist organizations that focused on the Palestine issue, and wrote several books and media articles on the topic. In the summer 2008, after 28 years in the US, he returned to settle in Palestine along with his wife. When he returned, he had a newly-built house ready on his family land, a position as professor at Bethlehem University, and a part time job at Birzeit University.

He had also already established the necessary contacts in the US to start building a research center in Bethlehem that would focus on environmental research in the area.

Throughout his time in the US, he had remained in touch with key players in Palestinian civil society, and upon his return he also started working voluntarily for two local organizations that deal with human rights issues. Jilal is tireless in his activism and his advocacy for Palestinian rights, mainly aimed at American and European media, and he feels that the local civil-society sector allows him to use his energy in a useful way.

In many ways, Jilal's story is the fulfillment of the returnee ideal. He has traveled abroad, established a family and made a career for himself, before returning to Palestine, where he puts to good use the skills, money and connections he has acquired abroad, both as a professional academic and as a committed activist. However, his story is a rare one as there are few emigrants who are able to 'return' in economic terms and continue their professional careers without facing a dramatic reduction in their personal income. Those who can do so have either set aside a substantial amount of money, so that they no longer depend on generating a decent income by Western standards, or they have connections in the West that enable them to finance their own work in Palestine through foreign funding. Jilal appears to have both and, because of this, his friends and relatives in Beit Sahour have met his return with great expectations.

Jilal invests a lot of energy in revitalizing the local civil society and, at the same time, in connecting with an international activist community, and in disseminating information that he feels is ignored by the mainstream media in the West. While he has an extensive social base in his home community in Bethlehem and Beit Sahour, he also stays connected with an international network of activists through his electronic newsletter, his personal blog, and other channels of Internet communication. By making use of his professional skills and contacts, teaching at two universities and running a research center with international funding, while at the same time utilizing his contacts and experience as an activist in the US, he has been able to establish a presence in Bethlehem that reaches in different directions and that allows him to invest his energies in a professional career that generates some income, and also in forms of activism and advocacy to which he is personally committed. This has all been made possible by his almost thirty-years in the US and the skills, contacts and experience he acquired there. Jilal's story is one of great accomplishments and a happy return to his home community after fruitful years abroad. For others, the promise of wealth and personal success through emigration has been elusive.

Ihab – a Struggling Returnee

While some migrants have settled at home after failing to achieve wealth and success abroad, others have tried their luck abroad more than once. Ihab was born in the late 1950s and grew up in Beit Sahour. After finishing high school, he worked for a while in construction in Israel before leaving for the US in 1979. He entered the country on a student visa but never set foot in a university. Instead, he worked at service stations and liquor stores run by fellow Sahouri emigrants in Los Angeles, Las Vegas, and Flint, Michigan, where he married an American woman in 1981. They had two children, but their marriage did not work out and, after four years, his wife ran off with another man and took the children with her. Heartbroken and humiliated, Ihab returned to the West Bank in 1985, shortly after acquiring a US passport. In 1986, he married a girl from Beit Sahour and two years later, they had a son. In early 1998, during the First Intifada, he moved back to the US with his wife and son. They settled in St. Louis, Missouri, where Ihab worked at a convenience store run by his older brother who was already well settled there. In the US they had a daughter, but life was hard and it was difficult to set aside any money for the family. In 1994, after Oslo, the family returned to Palestine and Beit Sahour. For the next six years, Ihab worked in construction along with another brother, while he and his wife had two more children. In 2000, the Second Intifada broke out and settlers from the nearby Har Homa settlement started firing at his house. The family moved back to St. Louis, where he returned to working at his brother's convenience store.

In 2005, after five years in the US, things had calmed down in the West Bank, and Ihab and the family decided to return to the West Bank. Again, Ihab worked a bit in construction but found the work too heavy. In October 2006, he bought a small clothes shop on the main street in the old city of Beit Sahour. He paid 25,000 USD for the shop itself but, since then, he has been steadily losing money, and he bitterly regrets having bought the store. His wife runs the store most of the time while he drive around the Bethlehem area selling chips and juice and other products to local shops in the morning. He is very frustrated with the bad economy and the lack of business, and he is gradually running out of personal savings. Hoping business would get better, Ihab kept the store running for two years without bringing it into profit. After three years, he had lost faith in turning it into a source of income, and the family just wants to return to live in the US. In the meantime, Ihab has run out of savings and is dependent on someone else buying the store at a good price before he can afford to bring his family back to the US. His oldest daughter has just started studying there, and Ihab relies on financial support from his brother to pay for her studies. Ihab has not been able to establish a successful business on his own, or provide

his family with financial security, and this is something he is bitter and shameful about. He has worked hard all his life but, at the age of fifty, he has not been rewarded for his efforts. Ihab is thinking about selling a part of his family land, to provide his family with some financial security. This is a choice he is not happy about having to make and, if he ends up selling his land, he will experience this as a personal defeat.

Migration – Triumphs and Disappointments

The stories of Ihab, Jilal and that of Hilal and his sisters, show that emigration offers a range of different opportunities and can lead to widely differing outcomes for those who chose to leave the West Bank.

To Jilal as well as Hilal and his sisters, emigration has offered great opportunities, and has enabled them to establish interesting careers and pursue their personal ambitions in different areas. However, the opportunity to live and work in both the US and in Palestine did not enable Ihab to pursue a professional career or establish a business that could support his family financially. Due to a few flawed decisions and some bad luck, Ihab is barely able to support his own family after a lifetime of hard work. The contrast between their stories points to the fact that the opportunities associated with emigration depend on a mix of family and social networks both at home and in the diaspora, the personal resources that individual emigrants bring along, and the socio-economic circumstances in which people try to better their lives through emigration.

In line with transnational studies on migration, family networks can be of great importance to individual migrants in pursuit of economic or professional advancement. Maher's story is the classic story of a migrant whose climb up the social ladder was made possible with the help of family and close relatives. Hilal's story shows a family network that can be helpful in specific circumstances, and that is of vital importance for maintaining strong social bases in different parts of the world. On the other hand, Ihab's story serves as a reminder that the opportunity to emigrate and the support of family networks in the diaspora does not always translate into social mobility and economic advancement. In the absence of opportunities at home, notions of wealth and opportunity made available through emigration has a powerful influence on prospective migrants, and can be a heavy burden on those who face a more difficult reality once they have left their home community.

A Thriving Diaspora

Within the Bethlehem community, stories of migrant success and wealth in the diaspora have been gathered over more than a hundred years of migration.

As mentioned above, the first big wave of emigrants settled in Chile, and in Central-American countries such as Honduras and El Salvador. According to local folklore, these first emigrants were mostly poor farmers who came to Latin American with empty hands. With hard work, entrepreneurial creativity, and effective co-operation within family networks, they managed to climb the socio-economic ladders of their new homelands and established themselves as resourceful, entrepreneurial communities. In Chile, Honduras and El Salvador they obtained a dominant position in banking, textile industries and other economic niches (González 1992:10). A former President of El Salvador, Antonio Saca, is of Bethlehem origin. In the 2004 presidential election, his main opponent, Shafik Handal was even born in Bethlehem. These are facts that local Christians take some pride in.

In Beit Jala, there is a popular anecdote that emphasizes the perceived prominence of its diaspora community in Chile. In 1973, when General Pinochet took power through a military coup, he was visited shortly after by a delegation of Arab diplomats. The ambassadors of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and other countries were there to congratulate the General on his newly-acquired power. When the Ambassadors entered his office, the general looked at them with surprise before asking: 'Are you *all* from Beit Jala?'

Though quite certainly a fictitious anecdote, the story points to an image of Beit Jala emigrants as people who are wealthy and respected, and who exert a great deal of influence in their host communities. This image contrasts starkly with the current realities of those who stayed behind, who find themselves economically paralyzed by an Israeli occupation, internally weakened and marginalized by a continuing stream of emigration, and by what appears to them to be an Islamic resurgence in Palestinian national politics.

The overall notion is that Bethlehem emigrants have been smart, industrious and very successful in their endeavors, wherever they have settled. Among individuals within the home community, the diaspora is a painful reminder of their own unfulfilled potential, of the great accomplishments that they themselves *could* have made if circumstances had allowed, if they themselves had not been held back by living under foreign rule, and under a crushing, long-term occupation.

Expectations of the Diaspora

Among those who stay behind, the emergence of new anecdotes and stories about emigrants making money fast may arouse certain expectations of their family members in the diaspora, as well as of the diaspora community as a whole. Strong family ties are highly valued in the Palestinian community, and when members of your family are in need, you are expected to help them out.

In times of financial hardship, emigrants in Europe and the US have paid to send their relatives in the West Bank to local private schools, and in times of crisis, when families have suffered long-term unemployment, economic depressions or Israeli military sieges over longer periods, they have received larger amounts of money to help them get through the hard times.

Since 2000, hundreds of families in the Bethlehem district have been dependent on regular remittances from family members abroad. In 2002, Jiries from Beit Sahour was one of many who received financial support from one of his richer relatives in the US. Maher is the son of Jiries's first cousin, and he gave 1500 USD to Jiries, while his closer relatives received much larger amounts. As mentioned earlier, Maher has enjoyed great success as a businessman in the US, and amassed a considerable personal fortune. His relatives were deeply grateful for his support and when he visited Beit Sahour in the summer of 2006, for the first time for many years, they threw a big party in his honor.

When they met Maher, the local members of his family expressed their gratitude and their admiration for his personal accomplishments. With considerable support from his family, he had built himself into a large-scale business man, and the director of his own law firm in the US. In the light of his accomplishments, and his great fortune, his relatives encouraged him to return to Palestine and establish some kind of business there, or at least to invest in some kind of enterprise that could be run by his relatives in Beit Sahour. They presented him with a number of business ideas that they strongly believed could be successful in the area. According to Jiries, Maher dismissed all of these proposals and stated that it was impossible to do business or make money in Palestine the way things had turned out. He complained about the checkpoints and the roadblocks in the area and said that he felt like a prisoner here. His relatives were clearly disappointed. They hoped that he could help them out, provide the necessary capital to start up a restaurant, a hotel, or one of the other enterprises they had in mind. He could certainly afford to. Because of his wealth, and his well-proven commitment to the home community, they hoped that he could offer some economic support, not as 'charity' to relatives in need, but to help them create something on their own by making a substantial business investment in their home community.

This is an expectation directed at the Bethlehem diaspora in general. In Chile, Honduras and the US, the diaspora includes some very wealthy businessmen. Nobody expects them to give large amounts of money in plain charity to their home community, but they do hope that some of them will be willing to invest some money in building a local industry and business sector. So far, the Bethlehem diaspora has failed to meet such expectations. A few

wealthy emigrants living in the US have invested in hotels and restaurants in the Bethlehem area but, in general, diaspora Bethlehemites tend to be reluctant to make any productive investments on the West Bank, seeing it as too much of a risk. The Bethlehem Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI) has put a great deal of effort into encouraging its diaspora community to make investments in the area, but the results have been poor.

Both officials in the Bethlehem City Council and civil society activists express disappointment with their diaspora community at this point. They acknowledge the significant support that many emigrants give to their own families in the community but emphasize that the community as a whole needs investment and financial support. There is a widespread belief that the contributions of the Bethlehem diaspora to its home community are particularly unimpressive when contrasted with the Ramallah diaspora. Maryam, who sits on the Bethlehem City Council, is quick to make the comparison:

> We would love to have a diaspora like the one Ramallah has! They have a really strong diaspora, and they have done so many great things for the city. They have built hospitals and roads, they have invested in the local economy, and many have moved back to start new businesses in Ramallah. The diaspora has done a lot of wonderful things for the city. In Bethlehem, they have done nothing![2]

Victor Batarsheh, the Mayor of Bethlehem, echoes Maryam's frustrations:

> The Ramallah diaspora has done much for the city, they have created a lot of jobs, and a lot of business in Ramallah, and they have really helped the local economy. But the Bethlehem diaspora, they have made small donations to some charities in town, but nothing more than that. None of them are interested in doing business here, of making investments here that could really help the community.[3]

When asked to explain the difference between the Ramallah and the Bethlehem diasporas, the Mayor claims that those who emigrated from Ramallah have stronger ties with their home community because they still own land here.

> Most Bethlehem families sold their land when they emigrated to Chile or to North America. Those who left Ramallah kept most of their land. If you

2 Interview 30.07.2007.

3 Interview with the Mayor of Bethlehem 24.07.2007.

> still have property, you will keep your connection with your home community. You will come here once every few years, take care of your land, and stay attached with the community. Then you will be more committed to your home community, and be more willing to invest here.[4]

In July 2007, the Bethlehem Association held its first annual convention in Bethlehem itself, attracting some 87 visitors from different parts of the world. The Association has 12,000 members world-wide, 300 of whom are active, and it is the only institution that represents Bethlehem migrants and their descendants in the West. However, leading members of the association are quick to concede that, so far, it has been unable to help their home city in any significant way. Hanna and Maher, both active members of the Association, agree that is it difficult to mobilize the Bethlehem diaspora for bigger community-oriented projects. As they see it, emigrants from Bethlehem have strong personal commitments to their own families and they are willing to go to great lengths in order to support their close relatives. However, there is not a strong sense of a wider Bethlehem community with which those in the diaspora feel connected. It is within family groups and clans that resources can be mobilized for the benefit of those members who still remain in Bethlehem rather that to Bethlehem as a wider community. Wealthy emigrants will be reluctant to start a business or make investments in Bethlehem that they do not regard as profitable merely in order to create jobs and help stimulate the local economy.

This, however, does not explain the difference between Bethlehem and Ramallah in terms of homeland-diaspora connections. Ramallah is a city that has faced even greater social and demographic changes than Bethlehem since 1967, with large waves of Christian emigration and internal immigration from other parts of the West Bank, causing a dramatic population increase (Taraki 2006). But above all, Ramallah has a history of migration and a dispersal of migrant networks that differs from that of Bethlehem.

Emigration from Bethlehem was first oriented toward Chile and towards Central-American countries such as Honduras and El Salvador. Only from the 1950s onwards was emigration from Bethlehem aimed more at North America, and later on to Northern Europe (González 1992). In Ramallah, by contrast, a larger number of emigrants have traveled to the US from the first emigrants in the late Ottoman period until today. While emigrants from Bethlehem were spread out all over the world, there appears to have been a much higher concentration of emigrants from Ramallah in the US. The Ramallah emigrants started organizing as a diaspora community early on, creating resourceful

4 Interview with the Mayor of Bethlehem 24.07.2007.

business networks and celebrating a shared identity based on common ties with the same home city. This diaspora community is organized into the American Federation of Ramallah, a resourceful organization consisting of a number of city-based Ramallah clubs all over the US (AFRP 2014). This association has managed to mobilize resources for the building of hospitals, schools, cultural centers and other amenities in the Ramallah area. In addition, successful emigrants from Ramallah have invested large sums of money in productive enterprises in their home community. Whether within the framework of the Ramallah association or simply as a diapora community whose members where more geographically concentrated, Ramallah emigrants appear to have been more willing and able to make substantial investments in their home community than has been the case among Bethlehem emigrants.

One important explanation for this is that Ramallah, as the administrative center of the Palestinian Authority and as the center of numerous international NGOs and development agencies, has become the commercial hub of the Palestinian Territories and, as such, is a far more promising place for many kinds of investments. Whereas Ramallah is seen as a place where money can be made, doing business in Bethlehem is perceived as more of a philanthropic exercise. Those who remain in Bethlehem cannot allow themselves to think in these terms, as they have to make the best of the opportunities available in their own communities. In general, they understand why foreigners are reluctant to invest in Bethlehem but there is some expectation that their own emigrants should do so.

Many resourceful Bethlehem emigrants pay close attention to the situation in their home community and they can commit themselves to make substantial investments in Bethlehem if they feel that this can make sense in economic terms. This was demonstrated in the early 1990s when, following the Oslo Agreements, many wealthy emigrants poured money into local family businesses, and some even returned to resettle in Bethlehem and build new enterprises for themselves. The collapse of Oslo and the breakout of the Second Intifada discouraged emigrants from making further investments in Bethlehem. Nonetheless, resourceful emigrants from Bethlehem are keeping an eye on developments in their home country in the hope that an improvement in conditions will permit investments to be made.

Among steadfast Bethlehem Christians, there is a certain hope that if a political settlement can be reached, bringing a degree of stability and predictability to the area, parts of the Bethlehem diaspora will rise to the occasion, help boost the Palestinian economy through productive investments, and resourceful, educated migrants will return and put their skills and experience to use in Bethlehem. As such, the home community is pinning a great deal of

hope on its diaspora, and on the idea that Bethlehem migrants can take part in revitalizing the Christian communities in the area. With such ideas in mind, many local Christians hold on to a belief that they may still have a future in Bethlehem and that, if there is peace, tourism and other industries will bloom again. Older Christians, like Ibrahim, try to hold on to a hope that there will be work, freedom, and the possibilities of a comfortable life for new generations of local Christians. Under such circumstances, Ibrahim might yet have someone to take care of his garden.

Conclusion

Since the late Ottoman period, a large number of Palestinians have left their home communities in response to warfare, political oppression and lack of economic opportunities. Due to historical circumstances, emigration has been especially high among Palestinian Christians.

With each generation, family networks both at home and in the diaspora have been instrumental in determining what opportunities are available to individuals through emigration, and how people evaluate these opportunities as compared to those offered by staying at home. Through a long history of migration to the Americas, strong family networks and patrimonial forms of business management have offered safety nets and a starting base for new generations of Palestinian Christian emigrants, widening the range of opportunities and minimizing the sense of risk and uncertainty associated with emigration. Family networks abroad also affect people's sense of attachment to their home communities, as the gradual emigration of entire family groups sometimes undermines their sense of commitment to, and sense of safety within their home community.

For the above reasons, transnational family networks have been instrumental in encouraging further emigration, informing people's decisions about where to emigrate, and leading emigrants in new directions, establishing new bases in the diaspora to be subsequently utilized by wider family networks. As Hilal's family story illustrates, transnational forms of migration have allowed individual migrants and families to live transnational lives that span different parts of the world. At the same time, many of the opportunities associated with transnational migration can be utilized only by migrants who possess certain personal resources. Social and economic class is important in determining who may have access to the relative ease of 'transnational living'. While migration is widely seen as a shortcut to financial advancement, the opportunities available to individuals in the diaspora depend on their family networks

abroad, as well as their personal skills and capacities. As such, the decision about whether to stay or to leave means different things to different people at different times.

These nuances can be lost within a home community where stories of migrants' wealth and success dominate, fueling expectations of diaspora support and investments in the home community. Such expectations can be a source of disappointment and mutual estrangement between steadfast Palestinians and emigrants who feel the weight of expectations that they struggle to deliver on. While many families receive substantial help from migrant family members in the form of remittances, those who constitute a Bethlehem diaspora are far less willing to provide substantial support for their home community beyond their own family groups. Nonetheless, in a situation marked with political uncertainty and economic stagnation, many Bethlehem Christians pin their hopes on Bethlehem migrants helping them out – as individuals, as families, and as a living Christian community in Palestine.

Conclusion and Epilogue

In particular fields, and in relation to different structures of power, Bethlehem Christians find themselves in various social positions: as Palestinians; as Christians of different denominations; as Bethlehemites and city dwellers; as Palestinian leftists; as members of various family clans; and as male and female members of patriarchal families. These positions are sources of opportunities, privileges, constraints and oppression within the different institutional frameworks in which Bethlehem Christians live their lives. Through their everyday practices, they actualize identities and forms of belonging that sometimes conform to these positions and the constraints that accompany them. Under other circumstances, people engage in acts and practices that may produce new forms of belonging and challenge the positions imposed on them, or the constraints entailed in those positions. As such, through their engagement in particular acts and practices, individuals both reproduce and alter the social structures in which they are embedded.

A key structure within many of the fields in which Bethlehem Christians seek to shape their lives is that of patriarchy. Within the family and local community, patriarchy is both a vehicle through which individuals seek order, respect, social confirmation and support, and a reinforcement of personal authority.

However, it is also a structure, and a set of norms that individuals try to escape, challenge, and renegotiate in efforts to achieve greater personal autonomy, and expand the parameters of their own possible actions. In the field of marriage arrangements, the reproduction of patriarchal norms depends on the performance of acts and practices that affirm patriarchal authority and that correspond with a particular social script. The performance of transgressive acts, in the form of elopements, open rebellion to patriarchy, and premature forgiveness from figures of authority do not represent threats to patriarchy itself but contain the potential to shake up and challenge specific norms and social parameters that at a given time are seen as representative of a patriarchal order.

A weakening of patriarchal structures and ties of solidarity, both between close family members and within wider family clans, can involve a strengthening of individual autonomy in matters of marriage arrangements and other issues of personal importance. However, these changes may also involve a weakening of patriarchal family clans as a source of security, protection and influence in a society ruled by powerful family clans.

Bethlehem Christians find that, in the absence of a robust and functioning system of law enforcement, small and fragmented family clans are left in a

 | DOI 10.1163/9789004276390_008

protection gap, vulnerable to land theft and other forms of abuse at the hands of more powerful groups. As such, internal developments among Bethlehem Christians have contributed to experiences of collective insecurity and vulnerability within their community.

Patriarchy also plays a central role in shaping Christian practices of emigration. The relationship between patriarchy and emigration is complex. At various times, families have operated as the primary decision-making units, with male family heads deciding whether or not some of their junior family members should emigrate, where they should go, and how they should try to get there. Family networks have enabled emigration and determined employment opportunities in host countries, and informed migrants decisions of whether to settle in the diaspora or return to their home communities. In some cases, emigration might have heightened the role of family networks in shaping the lives and opportunities of individual migrants. While enabling and supporting prospective emigrants in their pursuit of new lives or quick money in other parts of the world, family networks also tie down individual emigrants with obligations to support their families at home through economic remittances. Among migrants who live abroad for longer periods, family is vital for retaining a social base at home and for informing personal decisions about whether to stay abroad or return to the West Bank. Existing family ties on the West Bank can also enable and motivate long-term migrants and their descendants in the diaspora to seek out spouses in the West Bank, thereby reinforcing the connections between the home community and the diaspora for new generations.

On the other hand, when emigrants are spread out to different parts of the world, the everyday impact of family ties are weakened and the family's social control and monitoring capacity in relation to individual migrants is dramatically diminished. The rapid development of new means of communication has to some extent altered this. However, a weakening of family ties, and a dismantling of patriarchal authorities within migrating families is widely feared as the primary cost of emigration.

While family is the primary unit around which individuals orient their lives, they also hold other, wider forms of belonging, based on region or community of origin, religion, and, in modern times, national identity. Throughout the Levant, local Christians were among the first to articulate sentiments of Arab nationalism in opposition to Ottoman and later European rule. With the emergence of more particular national identities, Christian communities felt a sense of ownership and inclusion within Syrian, Iraqi and Lebanese national projects. However, while these new nations eventually won full sovereignty within their own demarcated territories, the Palestinians saw their own national aspirations negated with the establishment of Israel, and the War of 1948.

Deprived of their own sovereign state within a demarcated territory and of international recognition as a nation, Palestinians have experienced the urgency of self-ascription, of internal validation of their national narratives, and of establishing a united national front against external negation of their nationhood. Israel's military powers, political backing and, until the last two decades, narrative hold on the Western world, made the need for national unity seem all the more urgent. At the same time, Palestinian nationalism has, since its first manifestations in the late 1800s, contained both Islamic and more secular elements, and the relationship between nationalist belonging and Islam remains unsettled. The case of Palestinian Christians teaches us about the evolution of modern Palestinian nationalism as seen from the margins. It teaches us how the continued denial of a community's national integrity through ongoing warfare and occupation, can place a minority community under great pressure, but also strengthen their influence within a national project.

Their contacts with Western traders, churches and diplomatic representatives have been a source of envy and suspicion, but have also been a great asset for their community. National leaders have appreciated their function as mediators in relation to Western power, and seen the importance of nurturing good Christian-Muslim relations among Palestinians. At the same time, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict still unresolved, there is little room for public expressions of internal tensions and discontent.

Throughout the Arab world, local Christians are trying to orient themselves, and find ways of responding to political upheavals that may secure their social freedoms as individuals, their cultural autonomy as minority communities, and their equal status as citizens of various states. The experience of Palestinian Christians shows us that a central role in the formation of a national identity serves the inclusion of minorities in ongoing processes of nation-building. At the same time, having played an important historical role is no guarantee against being sidelined by socio-political developments at a later stage. Since the late 1970s, Christians in Palestine, as in other Arab countries such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan and Lebanon, have observed with unease the emergence of social and political forces promoting a social order based on Islam. In the West Bank, these forces may not represent a direct threat to their religious freedoms, and their rights to organize and worship in accordance with their own teachings. However, many Christians see these forces as a threat to their social freedoms and to their way of life, and as a denigration of their own position to that of a 'tolerated presence' in Palestine. This sense of vulnerability is further fueled by a culture of migration that depletes their communities of young and resourceful members.

What is at stake among those who remain in Palestine is not so much their right to live as 'Christians' but the social space to live as 'Palestinians' on their

own terms. Among some Palestinian Christians, this kind of minority vulnerability encourages a 'conservative' emphasis on patriarchy and family ties as means of internal cohesion and boundary maintenance. At the same time, their concerns about a loss of social freedoms are shared by thousands of Muslim Palestinians, and may be most effectively addressed in alliance with other Palestinians who find little appeal in the vision of an Islamic order.

In neighboring countries, local Christians are facing similar long-term challenges.[1] As in Palestine, their numbers are weakened through high rates of emigration, undermining their social and political position in their home countries. As in Palestine, they may seek refuge and internal cohesion within their own patriarchal structures. And in some countries, they may also find that threats associated with an Islamic agenda are best countered in non-sectarian terms, in cooperation with other members of their national communities, and with an emphasis on forms of belonging that do not rely on sectarian ties.

While Christian communities throughout the region share important commonalities, the distinctive aspects of the Palestinian Christian experience should be kept in mind. In other Arab countries, state authorities and majority populations with other religious affiliations represent the primary sources of constraint on the lives of local Christians. In the West Bank, the Israeli occupation represents the primary source of constraint on the lives of Palestinians at large. The Israeli–Palestinian conflict, with a history of Palestinian defeats, and the humiliations, uncertainties, and sense of injustice that is associated with Israel's ongoing occupation, is part of a collective experience that is shared by all Palestinians, one that structures their internal relationships, and constrains their agency in various ways. We can only speculate about how the position of Christians in Palestine would have evolved outside the shadow of the Israeli occupation.

Facing an Uncertain Future

The movements of people have a central place in the history of Palestine. For millennia, the area known today as Israel and Palestine has been a meeting

1 At the time of writing, several countries in the region are facing dramatic upheavals. Egypt is marred by a bitter power struggle between the Muslim Brotherhood and a government backed and dominated by the Egyptian army. In Iraq, a Shia-dominated government is strengthening its control of the country at the cost of other sectarian groups, and Syria is ravaged by a brutal civil war – with devastating consequences for the country's Christian communities. While these situations represent particular and acute challenges for local Christians, they also face some long-term structural challenges that resemble those found among Christians in Palestine.

ground of civilizations and cultural traditions and a battleground for rival empires. Since biblical times, there are numerous stories of people that have entered and later disappeared from the area. Throughout history, new groups have arrived and settled down in the area, sometimes integrating peacefully with other groups, sometimes driving them out through warfare. As such, the expulsion of Palestinians from ever-larger parts of historical Palestine and the gradual disappearance of indigenous Christians are not unique events in the history of the region.

Nonetheless, to the community itself, the processes through which this takes place constitutes a tragedy and a traumatic event. Bethlehem Christians claim a history in the area that predates the emergence of Islam, and a Christian history that predates Western Christianity. As a community, they regard themselves as descendants of the oldest Christian communities in the World and, on the basis of Bethlehem's biblical heritage they ascribe to themselves a heavy responsibility of upholding a living Christian heritage in what is widely regarded as the cradle of Christianity.

While local churches and community leaders struggle to keep Christians in Palestine and to keep their communities alive, there is also a struggle over how to interpret these events, and how to tell the story of Christians within the Palestinian community and to the outside world. The proposed congressional resolution mentioned at the start of this book and the local responses it provoked represent two different sides to their story. While the McCaul and Crowley resolution ignored the devastating effects of Israel's occupation and explained Christian sufferings solely in terms of Muslim hostility and oppression, local organizations often paint a picture of national unity and harmonious relations across sectarian lines. This battle over narratives is fought again and again. The dispute over who is to blame for Christian emigration is part of an Israeli–Palestinian battle for international sympathy, one that also challenges Israel's traditional support among Christian communities in the West.

More recently, this was highlighted with the controversy over a report aired on the CBS news program 60 minutes in April 2012. In the months ahead, 60 minutes had prepared a report on the flight of local Christians from the West Bank. Fearing a story that would blame Israel for the hardships of Palestinian Christians, Michael Oren, Israel's Ambassador to the US, contacted the head of CBS News in an attempt to kill the story. In a bold move, 60 minutes correspondent Bob Simon responded by confronting the Ambassador on air. The report itself contained interviews with several prominent Palestinian Christians, who all related their hardships to the Israeli occupation (Wright 2012). After it was aired, the program ignited protest from political pressure groups and individuals in the US, who accused CBS of inciting hatred against Israel. Not

surprisingly, the report was well received in the West Bank, where the interviewees were praised for 'setting the record straight', and identifying Israeli policies as the primary source of their hardships.

The Christians of Palestine are socially and politically diverse, and their positions within a Palestinian community and relationships with other Palestinians are filled with ambiguities and contradictions. This is reflected in Christian responses to the Palestinian security reforms that have been implemented throughout the West Bank since autumn 2008. As a part of these reforms, police authority and control over larger urban areas of the West Bank, including Palestinian roads that connect them, have been transferred from Israeli to Palestinian security forces. For many Palestinians, this both lifted a psychological barrier and eased the practical process of traveling from Bethlehem to Ramallah or other places within the West Bank as Israeli checkpoints have been dismantled or replaced by Palestinian checkpoints. The Israeli authorities have allowed this on condition that Palestinian security forces take over some of the security functions held by Israeli forces, such as preventing Palestinian militants from attacking Israeli targets. At the same time some of the older, clan-based security forces have been replaced by other forces that have shown the will and capacity to confront the rule of powerful family clans and to hold clan members accountable for criminal acts. These security reforms have introduced a degree of rule of law that has previously been lacking in the area, and have relieved Palestinians of some of the everyday burdens of the Israeli occupation. After one year, in late 2009, reactions to these reforms were mixed among the Christians of Bethlehem. Issa, a young man from Beit Sahour, described the ambiguous feelings that these reforms created. As a young Christian from a small family clan, he was grateful and happy to see a functioning rule of law and at least a temporary weakening of clan rule in Bethlehem. As a Palestinian, he was saddened by the fact that the Palestinian Authority had committed itself to combat Palestinian resistance on behalf of the Israeli authorities. He felt that this represented a blow to Palestinian unity and a total surrender of Palestinian autonomy to Israeli interests. In Issa's view, these security reforms had improved his sense of personal security as a local Christian but they had also damaged his national interests and aspirations as a Palestinian. Others viewed these reforms with much less ambiguity, either praising them as an improvement of their security or condemning them as a betrayal of Palestinian resistance.[2] These reactions reflect

2 Overall, these security reforms are not undisputed. They have been associated with severe human rights violations, attempts to co-opt and mute civil society activists in the West Bank, and the unlawful incarceration and torture of opponents of the West Bank government.

the multiplicity of identities, positions and cross-cutting attachments that characterize the situation of Palestinian Christians in the West Bank. In all this diversity, they face the same hardships and challenges in the form of a crippling occupation as well as internal turmoil within the Palestinian community.

Since the 2007 clash between Fatah and Hamas, the Palestinian territories have been split into two political entities, with a Fatah-dominated government in the West Bank, and a self-appointed Hamas government in Gaza. In a community marred by bitter polarization, Palestinian Christians have largely thrown their weight behind President Mahmoud Abbas and the West Bank government. Though widely disillusioned with the performance of its leaders, they have seen the West Bank government as a bulwark against radical Islam. In November 2012, a group of one hundred Palestinian church leaders and Christian community leaders signed a statement calling on European countries to support President Abbas's bid for Palestinian statehood at the UN General Assembly (ICN 2012). On the West Bank, this was read not only as an attempt to influence international opinion, but as a clear show of support for President Abbas in his power struggle against Hamas. In recent years, the Hamas government has enforced a series of conservative religious laws, imposing Islamic dress on female lawyers and school girls, and most recently mandating separate schools for boys and girls from the age of nine. This has nurtured Christian fears that Hamas is determined to impose its own values on Palestinian society.

The readiness among Christian leaders to take a clear stand in the conflict between rival political factions reflects a strong faith that they have a voice in Palestinian national politics and a clear stake in its future development. To many Christians, this was confirmed by the diplomatic efforts of the Palestinian Authority to have the Church of Nativity in Bethlehem listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in June 2012. A rare triumph of Palestinian diplomacy, this campaign originated in the efforts of Christian politicians and community activists in Bethlehem, who for many years tried to convince the Palestinian Authority to make this a political priority.[3] The awarding of World

In their efforts to clamp down on internal dissent, the Palestinian Authorities have targeted primarily, but not only, activists associated with Hamas and Islamic Jihad (ICG 2010: 31–32).

3 In the summer of 2006, I first heard local Christians engaged in factional politics and, in Bethlehem, talk about the potential benefits to tourism and Palestinian advocacy if Bethlehem was granted World Heritage Status. At the time, local activists expressed frustration with the lack of enthusiasm within the PA, but expressed their commitment to keep pushing the 'UNESCO track'.

Heritage Status to Bethlehem's oldest church also revealed the complex relationship between clerical authorities, local Christians and the Palestinian Authority.

Representatives of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Armenian Church and the Franciscan order, who are joint custodians of the Church of Nativity, expressed concerns about its World Heritage Status, arguing that it complicates the issue of ownership, by partly placing responsibility for protection and maintenance of the Church buildings with the Palestinian Authority. Bethlehem Christians dismiss this as a minor concern, and, in some cases, even an added bonus, as some of them place less trust in the largely-foreign clerics in charge of church custodianship than in the Palestinian Authority.

In November 2012, after months of diplomatic mobilization, and against fierce opposition from Israel and the US, the Palestinian Authority was awarded the status of 'non-member state' by the United Nations General Assembly. This upgrade from its previous status as 'non-member entity' grants the Palestinian Authority the same diplomatic status as the Vatican State, and allows them to present complaints and enquiries before the International Criminal Court and other UN bodies. This UN vote represented an important symbolic victory for President Abbas and the Palestinian Authority, and demonstrated the broad support for Palestinian national aspirations world-wide. However, judging from ongoing developments on the ground, the Palestinian State is likely to remain a state in name only, with little territorial, economic and political autonomy in relation to Israel.

The dynamics of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict point towards a continuation of an Israeli colonizing project on the West Bank, with more Palestinian land being confiscated and a continued crippling of mobility, economic activities and social relations within the Palestinian community. In the eyes of many Palestinians, Israeli actions on the ground are increasingly disconnected from a political process in which a workable two-state solution is still referred to as a stated goal. If Israel's territorial policies, including its construction of settlements in the West Bank, keep following their current tracks, Palestinian dreams of a viable, independent, contiguous state along the 1967 border may be reduced to a constellation of three separate enclaves within the West Bank, where Palestinians enjoy limited autonomy, and with Israel monitoring all transfer of people and goods between those enclaves and across the border to Jordan. Such a territorial constellation may be formally defined as a 'state' or it may be part of an undeclared and highly asymmetrical one-state arrangement with Israel. However, such a development would fall dismally short of meeting Palestinian needs and aspirations. As such, the near future appears to offer

only a further deterioration of Israeli–Palestinian relations, further political turmoil and disillusion among Palestinians, and a worsening of social and economic conditions in the Palestinian Territories. If social and political developments in Palestine follow such a bleak trajectory, this is likely to encourage further emigration, especially among Palestinian Christians.

Families and individuals who have close family members living in Western countries and individuals with high financial and educational aspirations, are the ones most likely to leave the West Bank, draining the Christian communities of Bethlehem of some of their most resourceful members. With time, the demographic weakening of local Christians may well undermine the very quality of life for those who stay behind as they become too few to sustain the sort of communities they desire and lifestyles of their own choosing. Among the Christians of Bethlehem, some feel that this battle is already lost. However, there are others who are determined to make sure that they never reach this threshold, and that they continue to make their mark in a community where they once held a dominant presence. For those committed to sustaining a Christian presence, this is a long-term struggle, and the outcome of this struggle will depend on circumstances beyond their control.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Map of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories

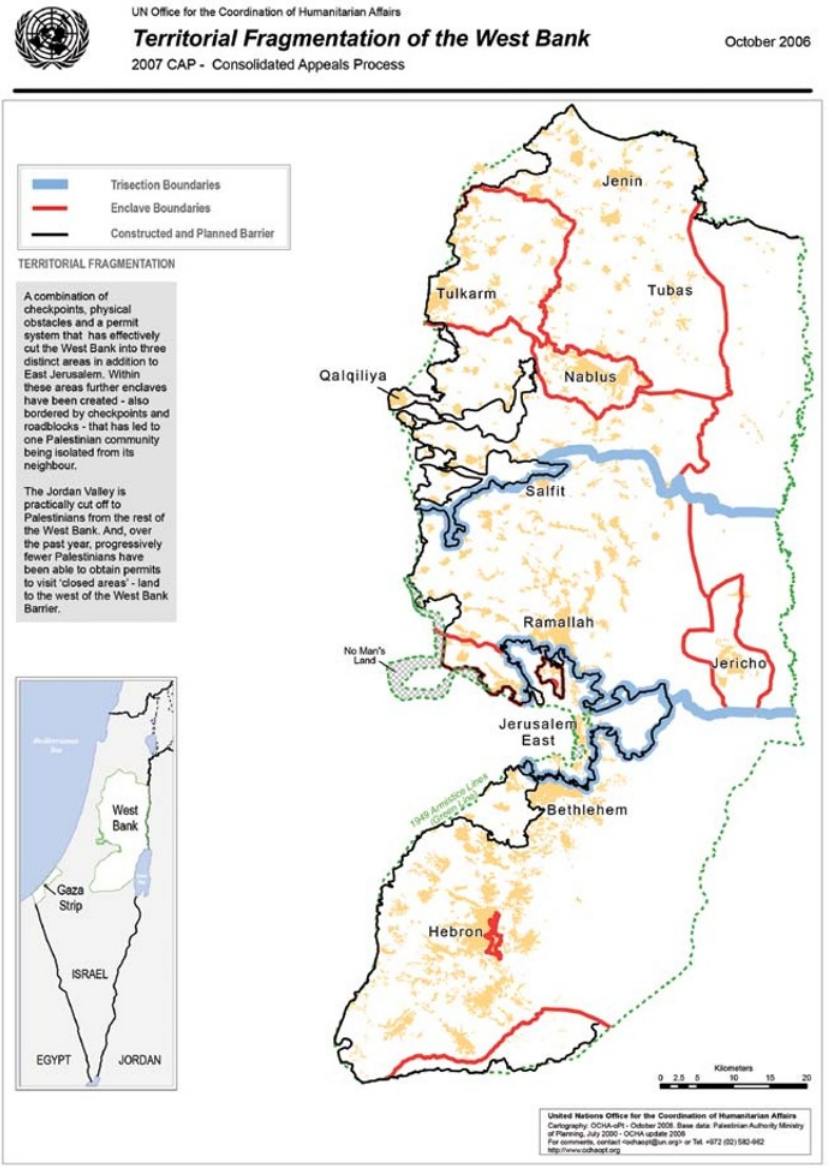
Map No. 3584 Rev. 2 UNITED NATIONS
January 2004

Department of Peacekeeping Operations
Cartographic Section

COURTESY OF THE UNITED NATIONS, DEPARTMENT OF PEACEKEEPING OPERATIONS (UN 2004).

 | DOI 10.1163/9789004276390_009

Appendix 2 Map of the Territorial Fragmentation of the West Bank



Map showing the enclavization of the West Bank. The map is dated May 2006, but the fragmentations indicated are still operational.
The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on this map do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.
MAP PROVIDED COURTESY OF THE UN OFFICE FOR THE COORDINATION OF HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS (OCHA-OPT 2007)

Appendix 3 Statistical Material

TABLE A1 *Population growth in Bethlehem since the late sixteenth century*

Year	Christians	Total
1596[a]	1390	1435
1800[b]	1450	1500
1880[b]	4165	4750
1922[b]	5838	6658
1931[b]	5588	7320
1946[b]	6490	9140
1952[b]	5785	19,155
1961[b]	6779	22,489
1966[b]	7484	24,789
1967[b]	6405	20,462
1997[b]	9595	31,984
2007[c]	7140	25,266

Sources: [a]Kamal Abdulfattah and Wolf Dieter Hutteroth (Abdulfattah and Hütteroth 1977). *Historical Geography of Palestine, Transjordan and Southern Syria in the late 16th Century*. Erlanger, p. 21, 36
[b]Walid Mustafa (Mustafa 1999). The Population of Bethlehem on the eve of year 2000. p. 28. *Al-Liqa Journal*. Al-Liqa The Centre for Religious and Heritage Studies in the Holy Land Bethlehem
[c]Mitri Raheb, Rifat Odeh Kassis and Rania A-Qass Collins (Raheb, Kassis, and Collings 2008). *Palestinian Christians in the West Bank: Facts, Figures and Trends 2008.* Bethlehem, Diyar Publisher, p. 7.

TABLE A2 *Population of Palestine by religion mid-sixteenth century to mid-twentieth century*

Year	Muslims (%)	Christians (%)	Jews (%)	Total population
1533–1539	92.4	3.8	3.1	157,000
1690–1691	94.4	4.7	1.0	232,000
1890	81.2	10.7	8.1	532,000
1914	76.2	10.2	13.6	689,000
1922	78.3	9.4	11.2	752,000
1931	73.4	8.6	16.9	1,033,000
1947	59.9	7.3	32.0	1,970,000

Source: Sabeel Survey (Sabella 2006:41)

TABLE A3 *Palestinian Christian population*

Locality	Jordanian Census 1961	Israeli Census 1967	Estimates 2006
Bethlehem	7246	6405	7000
Beit Jala	4530	4271	7000
Beit Sahour	3458	3730	8000
Jericho	1212	539	450
Jerusalem	1795	10,813	8000
'Abud	716	500	1200
'Ain Arik	260	86	400
Ramallah	8745	6966	6000
Jifna	–	538	1100
Bir Zeit	–	1351	2200
Taiyiba	–	1156	1600
Nablus & Rafidiya	–	688	700
Tulkarm	–	100	50
Jenin Birquin	–	123	300
Zababdeh	–	922	1800
Gaza Strip	–	2478	3000
Total	45,855	42,494	48,800

Source: Sabeel Survey 2006 (Sabella 2006: 49)

TABLE A4 *Christians of the West Bank and Gaza by denomination*

	Number	Percentage (%)
Greek Orthodox	25,835	51.6
Latins	15,168	30.3
Greek Catholics	2848	5.7
Anglicans and Lutherans	2443	4.9
Syriacs Orthodox	1498	3.0
Syriacs Catholics	250	0.5
Armenians Orthodox	1500	3.0
Armenians Catholics	100	0.2
Copts Orthodox	250	0.5

	Number	Percentage (%)
Ethiopians Orthodox	60	0.1
Maronites	100	0.2
Total	50,052	100

Source: Sabella 1994: 34–35.
Bernard Sabella compiled these figures from estimates given by various Church officials and by available statistics. I have been unable to find more recent figures on Palestinian Christians by denomination, but since the total number of Christians has not changed much, one might assume – with a few reservations – that the numbers for the different denominations have also remained much the same.

TABLE A5 *Christian emigration from urban Bethlehem to other countries between Sept. 2000 and Nov. 2004*

	People	Families
Beit Jala	580	107
Beit Sahour	621	100
Bethlehem	870	150
Total number	2071	357

The total number of emigrants in this period represented approximately 9.3% of the total Christian population in Bethlehem.
Source: OCHA/UNSCO 2004: 18

TABLE A6 *Businesses located in Rachel Tomb area in the north of Bethlehem*

Type of shops and services	June 2002	October 2004
Restaurants	11	0
Pharmacies	2	1
Butchers, confectioners, clothes, tobacconists etc.	21	0
Vehicle maintenance	22	2
Factories and workshops	13	1
Grocery shops	6	1

TABLE A6 *Businesses located in Rachel Tomb area in the north of Bethlehem* (cont.)

Type of shops and services	June 2002	October 2004
Souvenir shops	3	1
Gas stations	2	2
Total	80	8

Source: OCHA/UNSCO 2004: 12

TABLE A7 *Tourism indicators*

	2000		2003		2004	
Number of tourists visiting Bethlehem (monthly avg.)	91,726	All year	5266	Sep.–Dec.	7249	All year
Number of tourist buses entering Bethlehem (monthly avg.)	2742	Jan.–Sep.	50	All year	138	All year
Number of hotel workers	393	All year	107	All year	95	All year
Percentage of hotel rooms occupied	22.1	All year	1.2	All year	2.4	All year

Source: OCHA/UNSCO 2004: 15

Appendix 4 Wedding in Beit Sahour

Pictures from wedding in Beit Sahour. Local wedding celebrations are characterized by a mix of traditional and modern elements, and often with 500–800 guests attending the main wedding party: An important family event and a source of great expenses (ALL PICTURES BY AUTHOR).

Appendix 5 Demonstration in Beit Sahour

Demonstration in Beit Sahour against Israel's war on Lebanon, summer of 2006. The top picture shows the crowd carrying coffins to their burial site. Behind the coffins, the Orthodox and the Catholic Priest can be seen waiting to recite their funeral liturgies, before putting the United Nations, the Arab League and the International Conscience to their 'final rest' (*bottom picture*).

Appendix 6 The Wall in Bethlehem

The top picture shows Palestinian workers in Bethlehem queuing up along the Wall towards the gate that leads to Jerusalem. For those who still have permits to work in Jerusalem, getting to Jerusalem in the morning can involve 2–4 hours of waiting at the border. The bottom picture shows a family house on a once-busy street in northern Bethlehem that is now encircled by the Separation wall on three sides.

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