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**“God Cannot Keep Silent”  
Strong Religious-Nationalism – Theory and Practice**

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## “God Cannot Keep Silent”

### Strong Religious-Nationalism – Theory and Practice

#### Summary

This article wishes to discuss the phenomenon of strong religious-nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a comparative approach, paving the road for further research to come. The term *strong religion-nationalism* occurs when a nation-state unites the nation, state and ethnicity with religion. This kind of cultural political phenomenon flourishes in areas of conflicts concerning contested central holy sites, in which politicians are likely to mobilize religious-nationalism. Societies and states containing significant strong religious-national elements are in greater risk of falling into radical nationalism, fascism and totalitarianism. The term “strong religious-nationalism” is a paraphrase on the title of the book by Almond, Appleby and Sivan: *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (2003). This does not mean that strong religious-nationalists are necessarily fundamentalists as depicted by the authors. It does correspond with the author’s choice of the term *Strong Religion*, relating to the movements they examined as “[...] militant and highly focused antagonists of secularization. They call a halt on the centuries-long retreat of religious establishments before the secular power. They follow the rule of offense being better than defence, and they often include the extreme option of violence and death.” The authors “intend the notion of ‘strength’ to suggest that these are movements to reckon with seriously” (Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2003: 2) Strong religious-nationalists merge successfully within the framework of the nation-state, making politics a part of religion, politicizing religion, transforming the nation-state into a “vehicle of the divine” (Friedland 2002: 381).

#### Résumé

Cet article entend débattre du phénomène du *strong religion-nationalism* dans le conflit israélo-palestinien par le biais d’une approche comparative, préparant ainsi le terrain pour de futures recherches. Le terme *strong religion-nationalism* s’emploie lorsqu’un Etat-nation conjugue nation, Etat, ethnicité et religion. Ce phénomène politico-culturel prospère dans les zones de conflit où se trouvent de hauts lieux saints disputés, au nom desquels les politiciens ont tendance à mobiliser le nationalisme religieux. Les sociétés et les Etats empreints de *strong religion-nationalism* présentent plus de risques de verser dans le nationalisme radical, le fascisme et le totalitarisme. Le terme *strong religion-nationalism* est une paraphrase du titre du livre de Almond, Appleby et Sivan : *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms around the World* (2003). Son usage ne signifie pas nécessairement que les *strong religion-nationalists* soient des fondamentalistes tels que décrits par les auteurs, mais renvoie plutôt au choix du terme *strong religion* : les mouvements qu’ils étudient se caractérisent comme étant « militants et opposés de manière ciblée à la sécularisation. Ils appellent à mettre un terme à l’effacement séculaire des institutions religieuses face au pouvoir laïque. Ils suivent le principe selon lequel la meilleure défense est l’attaque, et ne renâclent pas à faire usage de la violence et de la mort ». Les auteurs « utilisent la notion de “force” pour suggérer que ce sont des mouvements qui doivent être pris au sérieux » (Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2003: 2). Les *strong religion-nationalists* s’insèrent avec succès dans le cadre de l’Etat-nation, appréhendant la politique comme une composante de la religion, politisant la religion, et transformant l’Etat en un « vecteur du divin » (Friedland 2002: 381).

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## TABLE OF CONTENT

<b>RELIGION AND NATIONALISM.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>RELIGION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>NATIONALISM.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>RELIGIOUS-NATIONALISM.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>STRONG RELIGIOUS-NATIONALISM.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>STRONG RELIGIOUS-NATIONALISM IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>INDIRECT DIALOGUE AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>THE COMPARATIVE APPROACH.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>24</b>

Religion and the nation-state are two total systems that require great control over the individual. Both are “models of authority, imaginations of an ordering power, and understandings of how one should relate to those who control forces upon which one depends, but over which one does not exercise control.” Moreover, they both “partake a common symbolic order” (Friedland 2001: 127; 2002: 381.) Religious-nationalism is not an oxymoron, yet the two terms differ: while religion deals with the divine, one of nationalism’s most manifest embodiment – the modern nation-state – is usually perceived as a secular institution. Both religion and nationalism play an increasing role in the lives of individuals and societies around the world, yet when dealing with the connection between the two we face a constant difficulty assuming universal conclusions, due to the particularity of each phenomenon and the need for a deep acquaintance with the local political, historical and theological context. Borrowing from Clifford Geertz, we can argue that the universal aspect is that of creating collective symbols, but that the contents of those symbols are unique and changing and must be understood within their particular context (Geertz cited in Horowitz 2002: 13). American sociologist Peter Berger concludes that in assessing the role of religion in world affairs “there is no alternative to a nuanced, case-by-case approach” (Berger 1999: 359-361).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict involves a specifically strong kind of religious-nationalism, different from that which appears in other national religious conflicts in which religion mainly plays the role of a cultural marker in a political conflict. In the Israeli-Palestinian case, religion per se is at the heart of the conflict, in the sense that “winning” the national-political struggle would also entail a “theological” religious victory. The initial mainstream Zionist movement was based on a secular interpretation of a religious ethos and myth. The early Palestinian national movement did not undergo a similar process of secularization, and at some point in its early stages was actually led by a religious clerk. Therefore, from the outset, Palestinian nationalism reacted to the Zionist challenge with religious tools of its own – based on the sanctity of Jerusalem and of Palestine in Islam.

In this strong sense of religious-nationalism the religious concept of the holy becomes intertwined with the national concept of authenticity. National territory is sanctified, especially that of the Holy Land where the three Abrahamic religions were founded. In such a place, in such holy languages as Hebrew and Arabic, God cannot keep silent. He will inevitably find ways back into the reality of life. In a national ethos that imbibes from a religious myth, religionization is inevitable. In order to better understand the processes shaping the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the barriers to its solution, we must look beyond political processes and theories, into the realm of culture and identity embodied in religion, and examine the interaction between these elements in a comparative approach.

## **RELIGION AND NATIONALISM**

Understanding the centrality of the religious element in contemporary conflicts worldwide is crucial, yet it gets little or inadequate attention from scholars and decision makers, who tend to focus on historical, geographical and political aspects of conflicts. As a response to this “secular bias” which derives from the Western oriented understanding of modernity, a tendency of de-secularization has appeared in the research since the 1990s. Today, scholars who wish to keep up with contemporary world affairs cannot continue to ignore religious feelings and faiths. Religious-nationalists and fundamentalists around the world mobilize religion for political ends and vice-versa: such a phenomenon can be witnessed in mainstream politics in the United States and Europe, Latin America, South East Asia and in its purest and most powerful manifestation in the Middle East’s political Islam (and Arab Nationalisms). Zionism (and religious-Zionism within it) in contemporary Israel is another strong example of this trend. The religious-national sentiment in our case study – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – is rooted in and shaped by history and theology; it is only wise to give these elements the appropriate attention in order to lay solid foundations for future research. The study of religious-nationalism poses a multidimensional challenge, as described by American sociologist Roger Brubaker:

“Religion” and “nationalism” have long been contested terms. Both terms – on almost any understanding – designate large and multidimensional fields of phenomena [...] Because both “nationalism” and “religion” can designate a whole world of different things, few statements about nationalism per se, religion per se, or the relation between the two are likely to be tenable, interesting or even meaningful; a more differentiated analytical strategy is required (Brubaker 2012: 2).

In order to overcome this methodological difficulty concomitant to the study of religious-nationalism, we shall first try to produce a suitable working definition. As Anthony Smith noted “the questions of definitions has [...] proved to be one of the greatest stumbling block in the study of this subject” (Smith 2003:16). Smith does not try to define essence but rather provides a contextualized and limited working definition suitable for studying the relations between these two elements in society and politics; we shall follow Smith’s approach in that matter.

## THE SACRED AND THE PROFANE

Throughout most of the 20th century, religion was marginalized by scholars who were generally taken by the prevailing theory of secularization. Today, in a fluid and multipolar world-order, characterized by globalized markets, technological revolution and apparent transnational and secular reality of progress, both nationalism and religion are ideally regarded as something of the past. But in reality nationalism is still one of the most potent forces in the world today (Dieckhoff and Jaffrelot 2005: 1; Birnbaum 1997) and the same is true of religion. Peter Berger, once a leading proponent of the secularization hypothesis, asserts: “the world today, with some exceptions [...] is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever” (Berger 1999: Chapter 1, 84-85).

The relations between religion and nationalism in today’s world find their roots in the question of modernity. British sociologist Anthony Giddens defined modernity at its simplest, as “a shorthand term for modern society or industrial civilization” (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 94). Samuel Huntington defines modernization as a comprehensive process that includes industrialization, urbanization, rise in the levels of literacy, education, wealth, social mobilization and more complex and varied structures of occupation (Huntington 2003 [1996]: 68). According to Huntington this revolutionary change distinguishes modern societies from traditional one, and it first took place in the “West” – meaning in Central and Western Europe and in North America,<sup>1</sup> thus modernization has become synonym with the West and its culture. Modernization was also accompanied by the philosophical evolution of the enlightenment and the political evolution of the French Revolution, leading to both secularism and nationalism.

Prominent historian of religions Mircea Eliade reminds us that “the completely profane world, the wholly desacralized cosmos, is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit [...] desacralization pervades the entire experience of the nonreligious man of modern societies and [...] he finds it increasingly difficult to rediscover the existential dimensions of religious man in the archaic societies” (Eliade 1959: 13), but also, one may add, to understand the reality of contemporary religious man and woman. Max Weber described modern secularism as the “disenchantment of the world.” Weber’s understanding of the disenchantment embodies an element of liberalism and of the enlightenment philosophy, construing history as a unilinear process of progress (Gerth and Mills 2009: 1682-1683); secularism is thus a direct product of Western modernity and it culminates in a pluralistic public space and a democratic political arrangement that guarantees various individual freedoms. In line with these ideas many sociologists saw secularization as an almost inevitable result of modernization (Ben-Porat 2013). Calhoun, Juergensmeyer

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1. The use of the terms “West” and “East” is problematic. “North” and “South” relate to the poles and are fixed and acceptable. “East” and “West” do not have such point of reference, thus we must ask West or East of what? It depends where one stands. Huntington (1996) notes that originally these terms were probably related to eastern and western Eurasia. Yet from an American perspective the Far East is actually the Far West. Throughout most of Chinese history the West was India, and in Japan the West was generally China.

and VanAntwerpen, who rethink secularism altogether, note that “until quite recently, it was commonly assumed that public life was basically secular [...] scholars could write with authority about politics, economics, and social behavior as though religion did not exist at all” (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and VanAntwerpen 2011: 113-116). This Western view of modernization is facing growing criticism, not only when it is uncritically exported to other regions, but also within the modern West itself (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and VanAntwerpen 2011: 160). In the words of Robert Keohane, “the attacks of September 11 reveal that all mainstream theories of world politics are relentlessly secular with respect to motivation. They ignore the impact of religion, despite the fact that world-shaking political movements have so often been fueled by religious fervor” (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and VanAntwerpen 2011: 133-139). In other words, religion was marginalized only within the enclosed discourse of small Western-oriented intellectual elite, not in the minds of masses around the world. As Philosopher Charles Taylor points out in his book *A Secular Age*, the insights that “secularism [...] goes hand-in-hand with modern progress” are misleading “subtraction stories” (Taylor 2007: 22): religion has not declined as expected, it is impossible to simply “remove such a central dimension of culture and leave the rest intact” (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and VanAntwerpen 2011: 250).

Sociologist S. N. Eisenstadt also challenges the commonplace distinction between religion and modernity by depicting religious fundamentalism as a political-totalistic and even totalitarian modern phenomenon (Eisenstadt 1999). They sanctify tradition, yet they transform it into a modern ideology, moreover they contain elements that contradict different religious and social traditionalism. Despite their religious-conservative character, fundamentalist movements are modern according to Eisenstadt, not only because of their technological means, but also in their aims and ideologies. These movements struggle to implement God’s vision on earth through the political arena and activity; they fight to establish modernism without accepting Western hegemony (Ali 2013: 30). Mark Juergensmeyer sees the global rise in religious-nationalism and violence throughout the 1990s as a consequence of a current of thought aiming “to counter prevailing modernism: the ideology of individualism and skepticism that [...] emerged from post-Enlightenment Europe and spread throughout the world” (Juergensmeyer 1996: 1-20). If until quite recently scholars could write “as though religion did not exist at all” (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, VanAntwerpen 2011: 113-115) today, “those who neglect religion in their analyses of contemporary affairs do so at great peril” (Berger 1999: 360-361). To marginalize religion as secondary to nationalism and other so-called secular ideologies is to ignore reality as it is perceived by religious-nationalists and fundamentalists around the world. Roger Friedland writes, not without awe, that religious-nationalism was apparently a pre-modern spectre, yet “once again God walks in history” (Friedland 2001: 125).

## RELIGION

Seminal thinkers such as Weber, Tocqueville and Durkheim have all studied social, political and economical change through the study of religion (Levitt, Cage and Smilde 2011: 437-449). Weber’s landmark essay *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-1905) positioned the study of central sociological questions on the study of religion. In this work Weber goes against Marx’s historical materialism that focused mainly on economics by stressing the notion that it is not only the modes of production that matter, but also types of authority and that ideas, traditions and values embodied in religion also influence and matter. Weber argues for the existence of complex elective affinities between the material reality and the sphere of ideas and values, between economic arrangements and religious beliefs. Durkheim’s treatment of the relations between religion and other social institutions can be summarized by the description of religion as the proto-institution: at least in the early rate of societal development religion held the supremacy: “religion is not only the best avenue for the study of what all other institutions have in common; it is also the source from which all other institutions sprang at the very dawn of each society’s history” (Poggi 1973: 236). As William James already noted

it is difficult to define “religion” in general terms. James thus calls to admit at the outset “that we may very likely find no one essence, but many characters which may alternately be equally important to religion” (James 1902). James’ insight in mind, we shall start with the notion of religion as a human phenomenon founded on the experience of the “holy” or the “sacred” (Momen 2009: 21). According to Mircea Eliade “the first possible definition of the sacred is that it is the opposite of the profane” (Eliade 1959: 10). In such a dichotomy, as with the distinction between “religion” and “secularism,” one is defined in relation to the other. This takes us back to the emergence of the secular within the particular context of the European enlightenment project.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith traces the emergence of the term “religion” itself back to European enlightenment by noting that the word “religion” was not frequently used by Christians until the Enlightenment’s deployment of the distinction between the “secular” and the “religious.” Up until then the terms “faith” and “tradition” were more commonly used (Calhoun, Juergensmeyer and VanAntwerpen 2011: 212-214). According to Smith the concept of “religion” did not exist throughout history as a distinguished phenomenon, but rather “religion as a systematic entity, as it emerged in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is a concept of polemics and apologetics (Smith 1991 [1962]: 43). According to this attitude religion as a concept was born out of the western-Christian experience and the history of secularization.

Durkheim asserted that “religion is something eminently social” (Durkheim 1964: 10.), yet such a social approach to religion risks missing the very essence of the religious experience – the experience of the “holy.” William James, as a psychologist, concentrated on the private experience of faith and belief disconnected from religion and liturgy (James 1902: Lecture II). In his essay *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*, James argued that “the preoccupation with religion in all its manifold forms as a specific experience [...],” can shed light on human nature (Otto 1936 [1917]: X). These ideas were further developed in Rudolf Otto’s influential works *The Idea of the Holy. An inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relations to the rational* (Otto 1936: X). Instead of studying the ideas of God and religion, Otto undertook an analysis of the modalities of the religious experience (Eliade 1959: 8), and started a new path in the phenomenology of religion by allocating religion an independent existence in human culture, separate from other forms of human existence such as the rational, the ethical or the aesthetical. Thus, for Otto, the religious feeling – Holiness – is a mental state “perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other” (Otto 1936: 7). This distinction of religion as independent and *a priori* existent within human spirit constitutes a significant breakthrough. Following Otto we must take into account the assumption that there is an authentic religious experience, and that we will never be able to completely, rationally and verbally understand its essence (Persico: 2007). Otto’s own religiosity (he was a devoted protestant) singled him out from most scholars of his time: as a man who experiences Holiness a part of the world, he feels more at ease to designate it as driven from an independent and distinguished source in the spirit of man, an assertion that according to Persico, an Israeli researcher of new age spirituality and religions, “before him only Kierkegaard dared to make and after him only very few [...]” (Persico: 2014). At the other end of the scale, Weber spent a good part of his scholarly work “tracing the effects of religion upon human conduct and life,” yet he defined himself as “religiously unmusical” (Gerth and Mills 2009: 23). W. C. Smith, himself a secular professor of comparative religion, affirms that it is not obvious that people who see no point in religion are the most qualified to generalize about its essence (Smith 1962: 11). In his famous book *The meaning and End of Religion*, Smith uses an essentially comparative and generalizing approach and touches the problem of scientific scrutiny of the holy (Smith 1962: 11). How can we subject the holy, the transcendent and the infinite to rational analysis, empirical investigation, comparison and human interpretation? Thus it is argued that any study of religion is either inherently inadequate or inherently unscholarly. Smith stresses these difficulties only to teach us some modesty when approaching the topic at hand, paraphrasing Alexander Pope’s famous phrase: “where only angels tread, he would be a fool to rush in; though perhaps the wise may preserve their dignity if, aware of their presumption, they enter cautiously” (Smith 1962: 12-13).

Yet the religious phenomenon goes beyond the manifestations of the *numinous* (a word used by Otto to define the feeling of terror before the sacred, from Latin *numen*, god) (Eliade 1959: 9; Otto 1936: 5-7). Anthony Smith distinguishes between a substantive and a functional approach to religion. In the former Smith relates to Weber's treatment of religion, defining it as: "a quest for individual and collective salvation in a supra-empirical cosmos that guides and controls our everyday world" (Smith 2003: 25). In the functional analysis Smith defines religion as a moral or social force, relating to Durkheim's famous definition of religion: "A unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, [...] which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (Durkheim 1964 [1915]: 47). Smith's substantial/functional distinction is adequate for our purpose – studying the relations between religion and nationalism – by examining the adaptation of these approaches to nationalism as a culture and ideology. Substantively speaking nationalism is mundane and secular, terrestrial and anthropocentric. Yet in this new political ideology "a worship of the secular nation replaces that of the deity, while the nationalist movement takes the place of the church and posterity becomes the new version of immortality in place of the after-life" (Smith 2003: 25). Durkheim describes the similarity between religious and national sentiment by asking: "What essential difference is there between an assembly of Christians celebrating the principal dates of the life of Christ, or of Jews remembering the exodus from Egypt or the promulgation of the decalogue, and a reunion of citizens commemorating the promulgation of a new moral or legal system or some great event in the national life?" (Durkheim 1964 [1915]: 427; Smith 2003: 27).

Moojan Momen defines religion thematically in a multilayered fashion, connecting the numinous and the social aspects by intertwining the individual, conceptual and social levels, with a substantial, symbolist and functional definition (respectively): 1) religion is the *individual* experience of the "holy"; *Substantively* "Religion is humanity's response to what is experienced as holy" (Momen 2009: 27-28). 2) On the *conceptual* (and *doctrinal*) level it is the universal idea that there is some "ultimate reality" and that humanity must establish and clarify its relationship with this reality; *symbolically* "a religion is a system of symbols that creates a universal order that is so cohesive [...] that it becomes "reality" for the social group [...]" 3) On the *social* level religions create social cohesion and integrate the individual into society. Religions create social and institutional order that is the source of their ethical and social aspect; *functionally* religion provides humanity with "a worldview which unifies society, which provides a moral code, and within which human beings can orient their lives" (Momen 2009: 27-28).

Throughout the last 200 years, European modernization and the philosophy of the enlightenment have been manifested in secularization and adoption of new ideologies such as liberalism, capitalism, socialism, and nationalism. Ernest Gellner described this process as if religion was transformed into culture, fused with ethnicity and over the years with the state (Gellner 1994: 100-101) thus with nationalism. Momen's social-functional definition of religion corresponds with the nation-state. The conceptualization of national ideology within the state or the national movement is done through symbols, in many cases the same old pre-national cultural and religious symbols. In some cases even the concept of the holy and the divine can be traced in national and ideological ideas – promising meaning, salvation, authenticity (which is for nationalism what "holy" is for religion) and eternity. German intellectual Carl Schmitt evoked these ideas in his 1922 essay "Political Theology": "All significant concepts of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts not only because of their historical development [...] but also because of their systematic structure, the recognition of which is necessary for a sociological consideration of these concepts" (Schmitt 1985: 36). Faced with the collapse of the faith in progress and the discourse of culture-crisis, Schmitt's understanding of "political theology" signifies the transformation of modernism to a stage of self-criticism and the end of the modernist-utopian tendency (Schmidt and Schonfelf 2009: 24). Modernism seemed to be the liberation of man from authority in general, and from religious authority in particular. As Schmitt points out, Kant defines the project of enlightenment and modernism as the "liberation of man from slavery in which he is to be blamed," yet he uses the theological narrative of the Exodus to liberate man from religious control and authority. This contradiction between content and rhetoric in Kant's words is not coincidental; it "exposes the double standards of enlightenment towards religion [...]" (Schmidt and Schonfelf 2009: 18).



## NATIONALISM

There is close affinity between the evolution of the national phenomenon and its conceptualization in the scholarly discourse. The modern historiography and nationalism were always connected in a Gordian knot. Historian Shlomo Sand mentions that “historical writing carries a national birthmark from its beginning, and nationalism began its long journey tenderly caressing in its bosom the profession of history” (Sand 2006: 7). Nation-states nurture historians, who in return provide the state with collective memory and identity. In the 19th century the national structures were stretched to the edge of historic time, tracing the roots of modern nations in ancient kingdoms, whether it was the Gauls, Franks or Romans, the ancient Egyptians or the Kingdoms of Israel and Judea. Sand demonstrates how historians radiated this national time into the entire education and culture systems of the modern era. Their stories were deposited to the hands of teachers and other cultural agents and became general knowledge, until the free market of symbols reacted accordingly and authors, poets and journalists accomplished the mission of constructing the national culture (Sand 2006: 8-9). During the 19th century European identities went through a process of unification and standardization, turning from a mixture of linguistic and cultural groups to nations that correspond to the forming modern market-economy. The little existing common denominators did not suffice for this project so the nation-state recruited the past, constructing shared memory and culture. This Gordian knot between history, culture, ethnicity and nationalism was tied up with the help of intellectuals; later on it was also untangled by them. Ernest Renan was maybe the first to “untangle” this knot in his famous Sorbonne lecture from 1882: “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” (“What is a nation?”) (Renan 1904). Renan’s idea that “a nation is a daily referendum” emphasizes the voluntary and political aspects of modern collective identity. Renan argues that the nation is a community of memory, giving the Jewish collective memory as an example. These ideas were greatly innovative in 1882 and they stayed so for another century (Sand 2009: 20). Only in the second half of the twentieth century, when nationalism itself was challenged, did scholars who doubted the historicity of the nation move from the margins to the centre of the academic discourse.

Early in the twentieth century non-academic Marxist thinkers such as Gramsci, and later on sociologists and historians evoked some hesitations about the historicity of nations and nationalism. The first and foremost were Carlton J. H. Hayes (1882-1964) and Hans Kohn (1891-1971), who wrote in the interwar period. Both scholars reflected, as Smith noted, “the growing importance of nationalism as a political ideology and movement, and as a subject of investigation in its own right” (Lawrence 2004: 83-86). Hayes, being both American and religious, was an external observer of European (so-called secular) nationalism, a fact that might have contributed to his depiction of nationalism as a competing religion. In his book *Essays on Nationalism* Hayes devotes a whole chapter to “nationalism as a religion,” arguing that nationalism mobilizes a “‘deep and compelling emotion’ that is ‘essentially religious’” (Hayes 1926). But Hayes’ primary concern was “to delineate his theory that nationalism (a belief in the desirability of a single state for each nation) was ‘a modern, almost a recent phenomenon’” (Lawrence 2004: 85). What tipped the balance in favour of modern nationalism according to Hayes was a combination of the French Revolution, the Industrial Revolution and the rise of romanticism (Hayes quoted in Lawrence 2004: 86), three elements that are crucial for the understanding of modernism as a whole. Hayes was also one of the first to criticize the correlation between nationalism and race (before the term “ethnicity” became common) and the elevation of nationalism above all other collective identities (Sand 2006: 10). Hans Kohn’s post war writings were eventually more influential than Hayes’. Born in Prague Kohn immigrated to British Mandatory Palestine as a Zionist, where he tried to mediate between his universal approach and his Zionist sentiment, but to no avail. A few years later he left the Holy Land and the Jewish national project altogether and became one of the most influential researchers of modern nationalism (Cohen 2013: 355; on Kohn’s retirement from the Zionist movement, see Gordon 2008: 67-92). In agreement with Hayes, Kohn argues that “nationalism is first and foremost a state of mind, an act of consciousness, which since the French Revolution has been more and more common to mankind” (Kohn 1944: 10-11). Kohn’s historical theory depicts a dichotomy between the political-civil nationalism that became hegemonic

around the North-Atlantic West (USA, Britain, France, Netherland); and the ethnic nationalism that prevailed East of the Rhine (Germany, Poland, Ukraine and Russia). In his dichotomy of East-West or political versus cultural nationalisms, Kohn laid the foundations for the more recent typology of civic versus ethnic forms of nationalism (Dieckhoff 2005: 63-65). In accordance with his theory, Kohn also made a clear personal political and moral choice.

The most important successors of Hayes and Kohn after the Second World War were Elie Kedourie (1926-1992) and Karl Deutsch (1912-1992) (Sand 2006: 7-19; Birnbaum 1997: 1-33). In his 1960 essay *Nationalism* Kedourie accused the “prophets” of nineteenth-century nationalism, especially the Germans, of spreading this new and contagious “disease” of identity. For Kedourie politics replaced religion in the same way as for to Michel Aflaq the revival of the Arab nation supposedly preceded the commandments of faith and even of Islam (but unlike George Antonius) (Smith 2003: 10). But later on Kedourie’s early assumption regarding the role of religion in nationalist ideology both in the West and beyond evolved into a more complex approach. In his second book, *Nationalism In Asia And Africa* (1971), Kedourie argues that African and Asian nationalists imported the Western ideas of nationalism and secularism to their homelands, adapting them to their needs and eventually turning them against European imperialism itself. These new non-Western nationalists discovered that they could fuel mass emotions if they turned traditional prophets into national heroes and religious holidays into national festivities, thus enabling them to exploit the atavistic emotions of the masses. In this way, Smith notes, “Kedourie brought religion back onto the analysis of nationalism: nationalism often became an ally, albeit a false one, of religion” (Smith 2003: 12; Kedourie 1971: 92-103). In yet a third stage of his writings Kedourie traces the origins of nationalism in distant medieval sources arguing that nationalism is the “secular heir of Christian millennialism and proclaims the same apocalyptic message.” In this way nationalism is exposed as “the secular, political version of heterodox religion, with the same consuming desire for purity and an all-embracing brotherly love, the same concern for the elect of faithful believers, and the same belief in the imminent advent of a new age of absolute love and justice” (Smith 2003: 12; Kedourie 1971: 92-103). Here nationalism is a substitute, a kind of heterodox religion that opposes traditionalism yet inherits traditional symbols, liturgies, rituals, and messianic fervour – politicized and charged with national meanings. According to Smith this last point “may help to account for the predominant secular content but religious forms of so many nationalisms, as well as for their ability to transmute the values of traditional religion into secular political ends” (Smith 2003: 14). Thus religion is seen as vital for the sources of nationalism and for its persistence and appeal, without which it is difficult to explain the depth and strength of emotion that nations and nationalism provoke. Smith however objects to Kedourie’s focus on heterodoxy and millennialism. While eschatology and messianism take an important place in medieval and contemporary monotheistic religions, Smith sees nationalism as mundane and does not wait for a supernatural – divine – intervention, but rather for a human auto-emancipation, which is necessary for national fulfilment. This assertion is true of some religious-nationalisms, but is not valid in the case of strong religious-nationalism, which unites the mundane with the divine.

Kedourie’s reflections on the nature of the relations between nationalism and religion were reinforced by the political reality of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, which saw a revival of religious-nationalisms around the world – “nationalisms that are specifically religious in form and content,” not only in an Islamic context (Smith 2003: 14). One of the early proponents of this trend is Conor Cruise O’Brien who wrote in 1988 a short book titled *God Land – Reflections on Religion and Nationalism*, analyzing types of sacred nationalisms starting with the bible and up to contemporary United States. O’Brien argues that “nationalism, as a collective emotional force in our culture, makes its first appearance, with explosive impact, in the Hebrew Bible. And nationalism, at this stage, is altogether indistinguishable from religion; the two are one and the same thing. God chooses a particular people and promises them a particular land” (O’Brien 1988: 2-3). This fusion of religious features into nationalism was also demonstrated by George Mosse, who examined nationalism, especially in Germany, focusing on “the background, genesis and effects of national festivals, monuments, and remembrance rituals [...] as vital components of the liturgy and choreography of nationalist movements and of fascism”

(Smith 2003: 264). Jules Monnerot and Raymond Aron introduced the idea of “secular religion” through communism (Monnerot 1953: 224; Aron 1957: 265-294).

Hayes, Kohn and Kedourie were all historians who worked with texts, thus their research was restricted to the ideological-political aspects of the rise of nationalism. The first who diverted the look from words-manufacturing elites towards a wider social and cultural direction was the social scientist Karl Deutsch. His 1953 book *Nationalism and Social Communication* was an early attempt to understand nationalism from below (Deutsch 1966: v). Deutsch tried to tackle the lacuna in the literature of his time and developed a methodology for the social sciences to study nationalism, focusing on socio-economic modernization processes that are the base of this new and shared consciousness which is nationalism (Sand 2006: 12). Focusing on mass communications, Deutsch “considers that modernization, and the explosion of communications encourage ethnicity more than national integration. The ethnic form of nationalism thus benefits from modernization, and generates the failure of the national form of nationalism which is turned towards progress and assimilation” (Birnbaum 2005: 91; This Weberian primordialist approach is dealt with by Connor 1994). This analysis of Deutsch converges with Eisenstadt’s understandings on the modernity of fundamentalists, and brings us to the realization that fundamental religious-nationalists – who see the state as a vessel of the divine, though they may well root their consciousness in some golden age taken from the past – are actually a political-totalistic and even totalitarian modern phenomenon. The most striking example of this phenomenon today is the Islamic State that emerged during the summer of 2014 in Iraq and Syria, and its wide use of mass and social media.

In 1983 two landmark essays on nationalism appeared: Ernest Gellner’s *Nations and Nationalism* and Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*. These two short essays had an immense and long term influence on the study of nationalism (Anderson 1991; Gellner 1983). Gellner focuses on industrialization processes, centralization, and bureaucracy as aspects of modernization which cause social cohesion and form the unified mass culture of the nation (Gellner 1983: 52-56). Anderson argues that neither “economic interest, Liberalism, nor Enlightenment could, or did, create *in themselves* the *kind*, or shape, of imagined community [...]” (Anderson 1991: 65). It was rather the construction of culture and the role of “print capitalism” that developed the new consciousness of the nations. He argues that national identity is based on imagined rather than on actual acquaintance between members of the nation, made possible by new means of communication, most notably the simultaneous availability of printed books and newspapers in a well defined territory: this process was coined by Anderson as “print capitalism.” In 1990 Eric Hobsbawm, a prominent English historian, published his book *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780, Programme, Myth, Reality*, which explicitly launched the post-nationalist current. Holding a Marxist view of nationalism as “a temporary and irrational relic” (Dieckhoff and Jaffrelot 2005: 1), Hobsbawm asserts that “no serious historian of nations and nationalism can be a committed political nationalist [...]” since “nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so, as Renan said: getting its history wrong is part of being a nation” (Hobsbawm 1990: 12). From this moment onward, critical discussion of nationalism became common in academia. An increase in the numbers of studies holding supra-national and post-national theories from various disciplines collapsed the dogma of the antiquity and continuousness of nations (Sand 2006: 15). Accordingly, this tendency also deepened the secular bias: if in 1926 Carlton Hayes depicts “nationalism as a religion,” in 1996 Liah Greenfeld argues that “nationalism is an essentially secular form of consciousness” and that “religion now exists [...] mainly as a tool for the promotion of nationalist ends” (Greenfeld 1996: 169).

Reality, so it seems, opposed the scholarly discourse: while the intellectual deconstruction of nationalism occurred, nationalism itself spread during the second half of the twentieth century, both within the communist bloc as well as the Non-Aligned and post-colonial states and the third world in general. This invited an intellectual response to the deconstructionist trend. The most manifest scholars of this counter-reaction are Walker Connor and Anthony D. Smith, who tackled the most significant flaw in the work of Hobsbawm: the portraying of pre-modern masses as lacking any identity or popular cultures and deprived of traditions and memories. Connor emphasizes the emotional and

non-rational aspects of nationalism, establishing a conceptual grounding for the study of nationalism (Conversi 2004: 1). People do not need factual and scientific basis for their nationalist feelings: ignoring this is similar to ignoring the holy when dealing with religion.

Today most scholars refer to nationalism as a distinctively modern way of constructing collective identities, most widely connected to state-power (Calhoun 1977: 29). This goes back to Weber who linked national solidarity to language, but also to other great “culture value of the masses,” namely a religious creed and ethnic elements, yet above all to memories of a common political destiny (Weber 2009: 168). Weber wrote that “insofar as there is at all a common object lying behind the obviously ambiguous term ‘nation,’ it is apparently located in the field of politics,” offering a possible definition to the concept: “a nation is a community of sentiment which would adequately manifest itself in a state of its own” (Weber 2009: 171-172). Connor argues that due to the terminological chaos most researchers confuse the nation with the formal representation of it – the state – thus missing out the range of competing allegiances within a society, in which the informal is actually stronger than the formal. Indeed nationalism was identified with the state, in its various expressions and forms, since the middle of the 19th century. In this respect, based on Kohn’s theoretical dichotomy and the more recent civil versus ethnic typology of nationalism, Connor notes that nation based states (that is “real” nation-states like Japan and Germany) can go as far as radical nationalism, fascism and totalitarianism, in contrast with “weaker” or more political expression of nationalism elsewhere. For this reason strong religious-nationalism, uniting nation, state, ethnicity and religion, are more likely to fall into radical nationalism, fascism and totalitarianism.

Anthony D. Smith, who studies the complex relationships between ethnicity, nationalism, and religion, argues that, in a similar way to our above treatment of religion, whoever searches the foundations of nationalism in external factors will never understand its force and that this is the mistake of both classical Marxism and individualist liberalism. This understanding of nationalism calls for a “different kind of analysis of its forms and contents, one that focuses on the cultural resources of ethnic symbols, memory, myth, value, and tradition, and their expression in texts and artifacts – scriptures, chronicles, epics, music, architecture, painting, sculpture, crafts, and other media [...] in the hope of uncovering some of the fundamental sacred sources of national identity and nationalism” (Smith 2003: 18). It is indeed a tricky road for the researcher to take, but it is more dangerous to ignore. Smith cautiously and critically discusses issues like the covenant, the sanctity of the homeland and the status of mythic and national heroes, in his quest to discover “some of the reasons for the widespread persistence of national identity in the modern world [...]” despite the common feeling that we live today in “a post national epoch” (Smith 2003: 1). Smith provides a functional working definition of nationalism suitable for examining its relations with religion: “[...] an ideological movement for the attainment and maintenance of autonomy, unity, and identity on behalf of a population some of whose members deem it to constitute an actual or potential ‘nation’” (Smith 2003: 24). The main ideals rising from such a definition are national autonomy, unity and identity, which together with *authenticity* furnish the main concept of nationalism. Smith then defines the “nation” as “[...] a named human population occupying a historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members” (Smith 2003: 24). The elusive and more dynamic “national identity” is defined by Smith as “the maintenance and continual reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern” (Smith 2003: 24-25). Despite the variety in which different nationalisms are manifested, nations are confined by interior and exterior boundaries: externally it is territory and politics, meaning the geopolitical location of the community and its political and economic resources that limit its scope for action and change; Internally, the “aspirations, cultural resources, and traditions that help to create and sustain it as a nation set limits to the development of its members’ national identity.” (Smith 2003: 25).

## RELIGIOUS-NATIONALISM

In some cases, as in the catholic-protestant conflict in Ireland or the Catholic-Orthodox-Muslim conflicts in the Balkans, religion is used more as a cultural mark and manipulated for the service of national ends. However, in the religiously strong form of religious-nationalism, like in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the essence of the conflict is theologically charged and its religious aspects are inseparable from its national one. Juergensmeyer divides religious-nationalism into three types: 1) Ethnic religious-nationalism – linking people and land and politicizing religion by employing religious identities for political ends (Both Catholics and protestants in Ireland; Muslims in Chechnya and Tajikistan; Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats and Muslim Bosnians in the former Yugoslavia; Tamil Hindus in Sri Lanka; Muslims in Kashmir etc.); 2) Ideological religious-nationalism – this approach *religionizes* politics by putting political issues and struggles within a sacred context (as in the Islamic revolution in Iran); (3) Ethno-ideological religious-nationalism – this type combines the first two and is both ethnic and ideological. This last type seems the most suitable for the Israeli-Palestinian case study since religious violence issued by fundamentalists from both sides is directed both against ideological foes from within their ethnic group and against their ethnic enemy. This approach also demands a more thorough study of the connections between religious-nationalism and ethnicity.<sup>2</sup> Brubaker also identified four distinct approaches to study the connection between religion and nationalism (Brubaker 2012: 2-20): 1) treating religion and nationalism, along with ethnicity and race, as analogous phenomena; 2) specifying ways in which religion helps explain things about nationalism – its origin, its power or its distinctive character in particular cases; 3) treating religion as part of nationalism, and specifying modes of interpenetration and intertwining; 4) positing a distinctively religious form of nationalism. The first of these approaches indicates that like religion, nationalism involves faith in some external power, feelings of awe and reverence, and ceremonial rites. This brings us back to Smith's description of nationalism as a "new religion of the people" both in a substantive sense as it entails a quest for a kind of worldly collective salvation, and in a functional sense (Smith 2003: 26; Brubaker 2012: 3). This new religion both "parallels and competes with traditional religions" (Smith 2003: 41-42; Brubaker 2012: 3). The heroes of the nation embody and exemplify such authenticity and sacrifice themselves for the community, they are the equivalent of prophets and messiah-saviors. Posterity, in which the legendary deeds of the fallen live on, is the national version of the afterlife (through rituals of memorialization) (Smith 2003: 41-42; Brubaker 2012: 3). Brubaker also discusses three ways of considering religion and nationalism alongside ethnicity, under more encompassing conceptual rubrics: as a mode of identification; as a mode of social organization; and as a way of framing political claims. In this regard ethnicity and nationalism, just like religion, can be understood as "perspectives on the world rather than things in the world" (Brubaker 2012: 3-4). Yet religion is an order that goes beyond this world, for this reason many religious-nationalists consider the religious element to be more important than nationalism and politics, the last two becoming a tool in the service of religious ends.

According to Brubaker it is clear that religion influences the origin and development of nationalism through the appropriation of religious symbols and narratives. But it does so in more indirect ways, for example the Protestant reformation contributed to the development of nationalism through the process of confessionalisation. Seeing religion as deeply imbricated or intertwined with nationalism rather than as something external to it, transform the former into a part of the national phenomenon. This happens in two main ways, the first of which being the coincidence of religious and national boundaries. In its stronger variant the nation is imagined as composed of all and only those who belong to a particular religion (Sikh and Jewish nationalisms), while in weaker forms religion serves to mark

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2. This connection is usually studied in the context of conflicts. Jonathan Fox analyzes the theories dealing with ethnic and national conflicts in which religion is a central factor: Fox (1999: 431-463); Coakley (2002: 206-226). Paul Zawadzki, whose conclusions are opposite to those of most scholars cited in this paper, uses the term "ethnolatry" to convey the notion of the sacralization of the nation and the absolutization of identity (Zawadzki 2005: 180).

ethnicity or nationality, yet the religious community extends beyond the nation. For this reason, in our view, empirically testing the robustness of these assumptions by applying them to Israeli-Palestinian conflict will prove the boundaries of this theory and the specificity of the Israel-Palestinian case study.

Religion does not only serve to define the boundaries of the nation; it supplies myths, metaphors and symbols, central elements in the discursive or iconic representation of the nation (in a way that relates to the study of discourse) (Brubaker 2012: 9). Yet focusing on language and discourse in our regard entails some methodological difficulties as noted by Brubaker: it is hard to assert that every use of “religious” language and rhetoric in political context is indeed religious and not merely a metaphor, or to judge the degree of religiosity within the religious language being put to political use, for example with the term “sacred values.” To properly judge and measure this use, Brubaker suggest to conduct a systematic discourse-analytic study of the field of nation-talk as a whole, so as to avoid sampling on the phenomenon of interest (Brubaker 2012: 11).

Friedland conceptualizes religious-nationalism as a particular type of nationalism bounding together state, territory, and culture. According to Friedland the power of religion is in that it provides “models of authority,” “imaginings of an ordering power” and that it is a “totalizing order capable of regulating every aspect of life.” Simply put, religious-nationalism joins state, territory and culture by managing, beyond national politics, private life, focusing to a great extent on family, gender and sexuality (Friedland 2002: 390; Brubaker 2012: 12-13). When religion is the key diacritical marker that defines the parties to a given conflict, like in Northern Ireland, the conflict itself is not necessarily about which religion is the true religion. Political rhetoric will use religious motifs, images and symbols to appeal to people’s religious affiliation (the cultural group), not necessarily to their religious faith. Thus, religious-nationalism has a recruitment potential that goes beyond the limits of its religious dogma. Even in the strong sense of religious nationalism, the popular resentment against the secular political and cultural elites is used by religious-nationalists as a mean of recruitment, demonstrating once again that religious movements with a strong anti-secular bent can appeal to people with resentments that sometimes have quite non-religious sources (Berger 1999: 246-247). Strong religious-nationalism exists in the USA, India and Pakistan and throughout the Middle East, obviously in Iran but also in Turkey, Algeria, Egypt, Syria, Iraq (in a new form within the “Islamic State”) and in Israel and Palestine. Brubaker and Friedland argue that religious movements cannot ignore the state and are obliged to act within its framework if they seek power, but this does not necessarily mean that they are nationalists. Brubaker warns us from overstressing the concept of nationalism: “it must be limited to forms of politics, ideology or discourse that involve a central orientation to ‘the nation’; it cannot be extended to encompass all forms of politics that work in and through nation-states.” According to Brubaker the Palestinian Islamic resistance movement Hamas is an example for combining “a classical state-seeking nationalist agenda with a distinctively religious programme of Islamisation, although not without considerable tension” (Brubaker 2012: 14).

Bearing this in mind, religious-nationalism in its most manifest expression is a complex set of identification in which both components of the combination are inseparable, when one’s nationality is “religious” and when one’s religion is “national.” In the less strong manifestations of religious nationalism, one can belong to a nationality and in addition to be religious; one might even connect the two, in some way left open for interpretations. But in its strong manifestations, a symbolic hyphen connects between the two components of the phrase, demonstrating the inseparability and interdependence of both parts of a national-religious identity. Both adjectives, though not identical, are equal in importance. Strong religious-nationalism plays an important role in ethnic, religious and national conflicts throughout the world. It seems particularly striking in the contemporary Middle East, where it can be argued to be exhibited not only by fundamentalists and dissident groups but also by states and political parties, and appears in mainstream social norms. To better understand this, we need to be able to assert what the place of religion is in a national movement: this interesting and important question is hard to answer, both on the individual and the collective level. How can an observer of the

Israeli or Palestinian society evaluate the extent to which it is religion that motivates national activists? When discussing the creation of national consciousness, can we separate feelings of rage, deprivation, insult, and fear, from economic, religious, cultural, and ideological motives? Moreover, can we even separate between religion and nationalism in the Muslim-Arab-Palestinian and the Jewish-Zionist-Israeli national movements and oppose them as if they were two separate systems? (Cohen 2013)

## **STRONG RELIGIOUS-NATIONALISM**

Religion and nationalism are both independent phenomena that stand for themselves, completely *sui generis* and irreducible to any other in the human experience. Nevertheless in the study of religious-nationalism, political and “national” aspects usually treated as superior to religion. This imbalance is all the more astounding when realizing that religion stands on its own as the ultimate proto-institution and the “source from which all other institutions sprang at the very dawn of each society’s history” (Poggi 1973: 236) but any definition of nationalism that ignores religion will be incomplete. Smith defined the different religious-nationalisms around the world as “nationalisms that are specifically religious in form and content” (Smith 2003: 14), yet this definition is not true to all manifestations of religious-nationalism, only to a specific type characterized by especially strong religiosity, in which the two adjectives are fused together into one conceptual unit, creating a hyphenated identity which produces a specifically strong kind of religious-nationalism. When religion and nationalism merge successfully within the framework of the nation-state, politics becomes a religion, religion is politicized, and the nation-state is transformed into a “vehicle of the divine” (Friedland 2002: 381). Such a religious state is called a “theocracy,” a term coined by the first century Jewish-Roman historian Josephus Flavius to describe the Jewish political-religious form of governance throughout antiquity, “by ascribing the authority and the power to God” rather than man (Josephus 1814). The most manifest modern theocracy of our time is the Islamic republic of Iran, founded following the 1979 Islamic revolution.

The relation between religion and nationalism is complex and multilayered. Certain nationalisms are related to the reinforcement of pre-modern religious tradition of some ethnic communities: such is the case of Gush Emunim (Block of the faithful) in Israel and of the Hamas. In other cases we see that religion goes against nationalism, as with some pan-Islamic Salafi movements and Jewish Ultraorthodox fundamentalist ideologies. On the other hand, some nationalisms negate religion, as can be seen in the French concept of *laïcité*, in Turkish Kemalism and in a variety of socialist nationalisms, while others rely on it, such as in Poland, Russia, Greece and Israel. Juergensmeyer points out those religious-nationalisms which, in their strong manifestation, aspire to force the nation to abandon “the corruption and alienation of such secular and often atheist nationalisms to what they consider the true and holy path of the community” (Juergensmeyer 1993; Smith 2003: 14). While western scholars tend to focus on the secular aspects of nationalism and to subject religion as a tool in the service of national ends, from the perspective of strong religious-nationalists “it is secular nationalism, and not religion, that has gone wrong. They see the Western models of nationhood – both democratic and socialist – as having failed, and they view religion as a hopeful alternative, a base for criticism and change” (Juergensmeyer 1993: 2). Religious-nationalists are seen by many in the West as religious fanatics, but they are political activists seriously attempting to reformulate the modern language of politics and provide a new basis for the nation-state (Juergensmeyer 1993: xiii). As nationalism and religion meet and mold, religious-nationalism emerges as a new phenomenon, inspired by a historic golden age while rooted in modernism and influenced by the enlightenment, the study of which requires a new and separate approach.

## STRONG RELIGIOUS-NATIONALISM IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

On risque de ne rien comprendre au conflit du Proche-Orient si l'on refuse d'envisager, à côté des autres aspects d'un problème entre tous complexe, la composante religieuse, ou, pour mieux dire, le coefficient religieux (Stétié 2010: 23).

In a book from 2015 titled *The Paradox of Liberation: Secular Revolutions and Religious Counterrevolutions*, Michael Walzer examines three non-Christian and non-Western new secular democracies that experience the return of religion and deals with constant national-religious conflicts: Israel, India and Algeria (Waltzer 2015). These newly liberated countries were led to independence by secular elites. But the masses, although rejoiced by their liberation, were not ready to separate from their tradition. That was the background for the appearance of new religious-nationalists, who came to reclaim their place. This is, in large, Walzer's "paradox of liberation," which is today the fate of Israelis and Palestinians in the Holy Land.

Our case study – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – is a political, national and territorial dispute, yet it is painted with strong religious shades from the outset. A territorial conflict cannot be completely secular when the land itself is holy. Nation-talk, as referred to by Brubaker, cannot be completely secular if the language is holy. We should take here into account the words, written in 1926, of the Jewish scholar Gershom Scholem on the secularization of the newly revived Hebrew language, which had persevered up to that point as a holy language used for liturgy: "They think they have secularized the Hebrew language, have done away with its apocalyptic point. But that, of course, is not true: the secularization of the language is no more than a manner of speaking [...] Because at the heart of such a language, in which we ceaselessly evoke God in a thousand ways, thus calling him back into the reality of our life, he cannot keep silent" (Scholem quoted in Ben-Porat 2013). Reflecting on Scholem's remark, Hillel Cohen asks whether the same argument cannot be applied to the Palestinian discourse: will Allah keep silent in a language with which he was evoked in a thousand ways to return into the reality of life? (Cohen 2013: 351). The Palestinian and the Zionist movements (like other national movements) are created and shaped by their own discourse no less than they control it. This discourse flows from the deep currents of a people's social existence, necessarily from its language and the political terminology at its disposal.

What is true for holy languages is even stronger for holy sites. One place embodies this process more than any other: a hilltop in Jerusalem, flattened and defined by men more than two millennia ago, referred to by Jews as the Temple Mount and by the Muslims as *al-Haram al-Qudsi al-Sharif* (the Jerusalem noble sanctuary) also known to Palestinian Muslim as *al-Masjid al-Aqsa* (hereafter "the Holy Esplanade"). Mircea Eliade explains that "for religious man, space is not homogeneous; he experiences interruptions, breaks in it; [...] the religious experience of the nonhomogeneity of space is a primordial experience, homologizable to a founding of the world. It is not a matter of theoretical speculation, but of a primary religious experience that precedes all reflection on the world. For it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation" (Eliade 1959: 20-21). Eliade describes this central axis as connecting between heaven and earth, "this communication is sometimes expressed through the image of a universal pillar, *axis mundi*, which at once connects and supports heaven and earth [...]" (Eliade 1959: 36). The Holy Esplanade is the most manifest example of such a central axis, described by both religions as the centre of the earth and the place of divine ascensions and descent.

The definition of a space as sacred is a political act meant to "occupy the space." From the moment it is defined as holy, it is expropriated and changes hands: it is a political symbol recruited for political ends. A holy space also relates to diaspora – losing a sacred space or feeling nostalgia towards it (Reiter 2005: 13). Exile, diaspora, and nostalgia to Jerusalem are founding experiences of both the Jewish and the Palestinian collectivities. In the strong sense of religious-nationalism the territory is holy, especially if it is the holy land itself, where religions were created and formulated. In such a space God cannot keep silent, and He will find his way back into the reality of life.



In a national ethos that imbibes from a religious myth, maybe religionization is inevitable. When a national-religious conflict is involved, different groups can mobilize religious symbols and sites in order to serve nationalist or political ends. Beyond mobilization, however, the sanctity of sacred space stands on its own, *sui generis*. It will therefore eventually better serve the cause of religiously driven zealots than that of cynical politicians (Hassner 2009: 10-12). A prime example of this phenomenon and a demonstration of the centrality of the Holy Esplanade can be found in a letter sent to the British High Commissioner for Palestine by the Grand *Mufti* Hajj Amin al-Husayni, the first Palestinian national-religious leader, following the violent events of 1929. In his letter, the Mufti explains that Jewish control over the Holy Esplanade and the reconstruction of the third Temple – replacing the mosques – is part of the very essence of Zionism. He further explains that this forces him to utilize religious feelings in his struggle with Zionism since the latter is religiously driven: the primary driving force of the Jews and the basis for their national claim over the land was the Bible. For this reason, argued the Mufti, he had to pose religious argumentations himself to counter those of the Jews (Porath 1977: 232; Cohen 2013: 144). There is place to question if the Mufti really needed the Zionist threat in order to mobilize religious feelings and holy sites to promote his political and national aspirations, this letter demonstrates that the Zionist challenge, embodied through a contested holy site in Jerusalem, justified if not obliged the Palestinian National Movement to fuse together so bluntly religious and national feelings. This dynamics did not fade all throughout the twentieth century and burst out once more with full force at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

## INDIRECT DIALOGUE AT THE TURN OF THE MILLENNIUM

According to Imad Faluji, a former senior in the political wing of Hamas who left the movement around the mid 1990s to join the Fatah, “Palestine is not completely free until it is an Islamic state” (Juergensmeyer 1996: 1). Bezalel Smotritz, a member of the Israeli religious Zionist political party the Jewish Home, refers to the same piece of land when he says: “I see the state of Israel as the beginning of our salvation and an important step towards complete redemption” (*hakol hayehudi* [the Jewish Voice], [www.hakolhayehudi.co.il/](http://www.hakolhayehudi.co.il/), July 31 2012). Despite the obvious collision between these two currents of thought, they actually consist of a similar national-religious response to one another and to the challenges of modernity. As Juergensmeyer explains, these “politicized religious movements are the response of those who feel desperate and desolate in the current geo-political crisis” (Juergensmeyer 1996). Israeli and Palestinian religious-nationalism are contradictory but similar currents of thought that constantly influence and enhance each other in an auto-catalytic process through the indirect dialogue they conduct both externally with one another, and internally within each side, between the political and religious spheres. If Palestinian religious-nationalists stress is a consequence of occupation, discrimination, poverty, etc., the religious-Zionist distress is caused by the difficulty to settle faith and politics, spirituality with secularism. This process can be studied through the dynamics around the Holy Esplanade from the early 1990s until today. The Israeli-Palestinian peace process started, creating a political watershed line, but also a juncture in the indirect dialogue in the Holy Land between Jewish and Muslim religious-nationalists. Moreover, this timeframe also corresponds to a void in the literature on religious-nationalism, which is scarce for the last two decades.

Contested holy sites provide the outmost expression of the relation between religious-nationalism and geopolitics, and constitute an arena where the Zionist-religious movement and the Palestinian national-religious meet not only on the ideological and doctrinal levels, but also physically interact on the ground. The central role of holy sites, their potential to generate violence and the belief that they require the sacrifice of lives, is characteristic to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Holy national sites and spaces throughout the country, especially when they are shared, are the main channel through which religion, nationalism, politics and violence mix and influence one another. This is why we chose to focus our study on the holiest of these shared spaces: the Holy Esplanade in Jerusalem.

A harbinger of the new dynamics between Muslim-Palestinian and Jewish religious-nationalists around holy sites was given on October 8 1990, when violent clashes broke out on the Holy Esplanade. The Temple Mount Faithfuls, a Jewish fundamentalist movement dedicated to the construction of the Third Temple on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem on the spot where today stands the Islamic Dome of the Rock (Inbari 2009: 81), conducted a symbolic ceremony pretending to lay down the corner stone of the Third Temple (Tzidkiyahu 2012: 101-103). The ceremony took place south of the Old City due to police restrictions. At the same time thousands of Palestinian Muslims rushed to the Holy Esplanade, responding to the *mūედin's* call in the mosque's loudspeakers system to come and protect al-Aqsa. It was the Jewish holiday of *Sukkot* (Feast of Tabernacles) and tens of thousands of Jews were present at the Wailing Wall, adjacent to the Holy Esplanade of the mosques, for the traditional *birkat kohanim* (the priestly blessing) of the Jewish holiday. Over a thousand police officers secured the event. As tension soared violent clashes erupted, in which 21 Palestinians were killed by the police and hundreds were injured. About 20 Israeli police officers were also injured. It was a dramatic event that claimed the highest number of Palestinian casualties throughout the first intifada (Reiter 2005: 87-95; Meir Litvak 1990: 265; Abdul Hadi 2007: 228-238; Sabri 2007; Resolution 673: Territories occupied by Israel 24 October 1990; Resolution 672: Territories occupied by Israel 12 October 1990). This was the beginning of a bloody "dialogue" between Israeli-Jewish and Palestinian-Muslim religious-nationalists. One of the members of the Temple Mount Faithful concluded the event saying: "with all the sorrow and pain, this was an awakening catalyst; the Temple Mount entered the public and international agenda" (quoted in Tzidkiyahu 2012: 102). Palestinians collective memory labelled this as the (first) al-Aqsa massacre (*majzarat al-'aqsa*). The religious seat of the event strengthened Hamas' opposition, which openly called for an escalation of violence (Tzidkiyahu 2012: 102), forcing the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to radicalize its reaction as well. On both sides, the encounter around the disputed Holy Esplanade helped marginal groups to influence and radicalize the central stream discourse. This event also exposed the cleavage between the American interests in the Middle East in the new world order that was forming and the Israeli policies in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) and East Jerusalem.

The new world order of the 1990s of American hegemony started in the Middle East. The gulf war in Iraq ended in February 1991 and in March the USA Secretary of State James Baker came to the region to launch the international peace conference in Madrid in October (Tzidkiyahu 2012: 105-119). The Oslo Accord, in which Israel and the PLO mutually recognized each other in September 1993, marked a strategic change on both sides and the dawn of a new era. It covered an interim period of five years, in which a Palestinian autonomy would be administering in the West Bank and Gaza, and by 1999 the final agreements were to be signed, putting a final end to the conflict. The accord was full of loopholes that were used by its opponents with religious zeal. A territorial compromise and a process of reconciliation completely contradicted the worldview of religious-nationalists on both sides, threatening the integrity of their most basic religious beliefs, an issue that got no attention in the agreements. Both Hamas and the radical wing of the religious-Zionist settler movement decided to bear arms and violently fight what they saw as a disastrous agreement signed by illegitimate governments that would cause irreversible damage. The radical wings on both sides were not isolated but won wide support from the moderate centre-right public on both sides, demonstrating how national-religious talk around holy sites strike a specifically emotional note in territorial disputes, thus constantly radicalizing the national (not necessarily religious) centre. The Hamas political wing and the right-markers of the Likud party in Israel had a mutual cause – to stop history and to reverse the "damages" already made by the "reckless" "overenthusiastic" and "opportunist" leaders who betrayed their nation and their faith. Desperate and frustrated they took extreme actions to reverse the process that had already been set in motion by the forming a Palestinian National Authority (PA). An extremist Jew from Hebron, Baruch Goldstein, a follower of the ultranationalist Rabbi Meir Kahane, entered on February 25 1994 the Grave of the Patriarchs in the West Bank city of Hebron, a holy site revered and shared by Muslims and Jews, and opened fire towards a crowd of Muslim men while they bowed in prayer, killing 29 and wounding about 125 before he was killed by the crowd. The brutal massacre was pouring with religious significance (Juergensmeyer 1996: 2). It was not only

the beginning of the Month of Ramadan, it was also the beginning of *Purim*, the Jewish feast of “lots.” For the believers Purim also carries a violent message as it commemorates the events described in the Biblical Book of Esther, in which the Jews were not only saved from their enemies but were also allowed to butcher them. The symbolism of the act is difficult to overlook: shooting men in their back while they pray to God, in the second most important Mosque and synagogue in the Holy land, where Jews and Muslim compete not only over the present and future but also over the past, not only over the ground but also over the divine.

Matti Steinberg, an Israeli academic who served as special consultant to the head of the Israeli general intelligence service (shabak) at the time of the event, argues that the Goldstein massacre took place at a critical moment – when Hamas leaders were considering to broaden their targets beyond military and settlers in the West Bank to include Israeli citizens and suicide attacks in Israel (Steinberg 2008: 279-280; Schweitzer 2010: 34). The massacre determined the outcome of the debate within Hamas. A short while after the traditional forty days of grief, the first suicide bombing in Israel took place.<sup>3</sup> The Goldstein massacre also influenced the mind of a young man called Yigal Amir, from the central stream of religious Zionism, who on the evening of November 4 1995, shot and killed the Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in order to stop the Oslo process. Amir was later quoted as saying “everything I did, I did in the glory of God” (Juergensmeyer 1996: 2). In his investigation Amir confessed that he was inspired to commit the murder in Dr. Goldstein’s funeral in Qiryat Arba next to Hebron (Eldar 2008). His motive, said the murderer, was given to him by the politicians opposing the peace process, Ariel Sharon, Rehavam Ze’evi and Rafael Eitan (Eldar 2008) three Major-Generals and hawkish politicians who, together with Binyamin Netanyahu, ran a rigorous campaign, unprecedented in its severity, against the peace process. The murder led to elections during 1996. During the interim period before the elections Hamas executed four suicide attacks killing 59 Israelis, shifting the public opinion and causing a political turnover in Israel, and the first term of Benjamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister began in May 1996. The terrorists, the radical religious-nationalists and the opposition to the peace process had achieved their goal. Hamas did not run in the elections that took place that year in the PA, but when it did, a decade later after the death of Arafat, it won a majority in parliament and a year later took the Gaza Strip by a violent coup. Thus, ten years later, the two most outspoken opponents of the peace process were in power. This sequence of events demonstrates how these inter/intra dynamics around holy sites can influence political processes.

On February 8 1996, faced with the Oslo Process that threatened the integrity of the land of Israel, the committee of (religious-Zionist) Rabbis from Judea, Samaria and Gaza (*vaad rabaney yesha*), published a revolutionary decision in Orthodox Judaism: they issued a religious decree calling on Jews to go and visit the Temple Mount (Inbari 2009: introduction). A week later, February 16, was the last Friday prayer of Ramadan and over 250 thousand Muslim worshipers attended prayers on the Holy Esplanade, demonstrating the importance of the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem (Klein 1999: 195-210). The striking proximity in time and space of these two national-religious demonstrations of allegiance to the holy site seems to have been overlooked in the literature so far.

Netanyahu was an outspoken opponent of the Oslo Accord. His policy in Jerusalem generated crises that provided him with a way out of the process by exploiting existing loopholes in the Oslo Accord – especially the fact that the PA was banned from Jerusalem during the interim period without any Israeli guarantees to restraint from unilateral steps (Klein 1999: 24). On September 24 1996 the Israeli government carved 17 meters of the Western Wall tunnel, an ancient draining system used for tourism, to enable visitors to exit the tunnel in the Via Dolorosa in the Muslim Quarter. Netanyahu justified the act by saying that “we are touching the rock of our existence,” adding that it was a question of sovereignty (Klein 1999: 211). Netanyahu knew the long and violent history as well as the sensitivity of the Waqf authorities to every dig and excavation around the Holy Esplanade (Klein 1999: 211). The Waqf responded in a letter clarifying its reservations (Klein 1999: 212), yet Israel opened the tunnel unilaterally two days

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3. April 6, in the town of Afula, killing 8 Israeli citizens.

after the government renewed contacts with Arafat for the first time since the elections. The proximity between the meeting and the opening of the tunnel embarrassed Arafat since it made it seem like he had agreed to it. King Hussein of Jordan, who according to the peace agreement has a special status as guardian of al-Aqsa, was put in a similarly awkward position (Klein 1999: 213). Both leaders reacted with anger and personal insult. The Palestinian responded harshly and a general strike was announced in East Jerusalem. Hawkish announcements were made and Palestinian factions swore to protect al-Aqsa against the Jewish plot to dig under the mosque and destroy it (Klein 1999: 213-214). The Arab league condemned Israel for planning to build the Third Temple over al-Aqsa. Palestinians took to the streets all throughout the OPT and confronted the Israeli soldiers, only this time between the people and the army stood the Palestinian police. When the soldiers opened fire, the Palestinian police fired back. After four days of riots 74 Palestinians and 16 Israeli soldiers were killed, 58 Israelis and over a thousand Palestinians were injured. This event marked the end of the peace process. One of the major reasons for its failure is strong religious-nationalism prevailing on both sides and the inter-dynamics around contested holy-sites.

In order to calm the atmosphere Netanyahu was forced to complete the Hebron agreement in January 1997, transferring most of the city from Israeli military control onto the PA controlled by Arafat. In reaction to the opening of the tunnel, the Islamic Waqf, backed by the PA and Jordan, unilaterally renovated the underground halls below the southern area of the Holy Esplanade, without permission from or supervision by the Israeli Antiquity Authorities – signalling the collapse of the tacit understandings that had existed for decades. Following the events the Islamic Movement in Israel, the Israeli branch of the Muslim Brothers, showed increased interest in Jerusalem and the al-Aqsa mosque (Klein 1999: 215; Reiter 2005: 91-95). Sheikh Raed Salah, the leader of the northern and more radical wing of the movement rallied the first mass rally under the banner “al-Aqsa is in Danger,” a tradition that continues annually ever since, attended by tens of thousands of Palestinians citizens of Israel. Netanyahu’s use of national-religious symbolism eventually forced him to an unwanted political move (withdrawal from Hebron), and radicalized the entire system – playing into the hands of national-religious zealots of the other side. The next example further demonstrates this pattern.

In July 2000 Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak and Arafat met for a peace conference in Camp David hosted by US President Bill Clinton. According to some of the participants, when Barak offered Arafat shared sovereignty over the Holy Esplanade the latter refused, denying the Jewish affiliation to Jerusalem and the existence of the Jewish Temple in the city (Reiter 2005: 31). On both sides a trend of negation evolved, undermining the religious connection of the other side to Jerusalem, as a consequence undermining its authenticity as a nation. This kind of polemics is not meant to convince the other side but rather to ratify one’s own national-religious ethos and myths. This is what Anthony Smith called “the cult of authenticity,” standing at the centre of the nationalist belief-system: “At the heart of this cult is the quest for true self. Authenticity functions as the nationalist equivalent of the idea of the holiness in so many religions; the distinction between the authentic and the false or inauthentic carries much the same emotional freight as the sacred and the profane” (Smith 2003: 37-38). In the Israeli-Palestinian case where strong religious-nationalism is at play, there is no distinction between the sacred and the authentic, nor between the inauthentic and the profane. The negation of one side’s spiritual, religious and historical connection to Jerusalem goes hand in hand with the negation of its nationhood altogether (Tzidkiyah 2014: 83-87).

The very day that the Camp David II summit failed, on July 22 2000, an official PA *fatwā* was issued by the Chief *Muftī* of Jerusalem and the Palestinian Territories, Sheikh ‘Ikrima Şabrī, asserting that all of Palestine is Holy Muslim *Waqf* land and that it is therefore forbidden (*harām*) to give up any part of it.<sup>4</sup> This, together with Arafat’s refusal to acknowledge Jewish connection to Jerusalem (*i.e.* the Temple Mount) was the Palestinian response to the proposal of shared sovereignty over the Holy Esplanade. Şabrī’s *fatwā* actually ratified the Hamas’ covenant from 1988, in which article 11 asserts: [...] the land of Palestine is an Islamic *waqf* for the benefit of Muslims throughout the generations and

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4. This *fatwā* is extensively dealt with, partly translated and interpreted in Reiter 2006: 173-198.

until the Day of Resurrection. It is forbidden to abandon it or part of it or to renounce it or part of it [...]” (*Al-Mithāq* 1988). Arafat’s attempt to deal with the Islamic opposition by competing with it on Islamic grounds actually ratified their position, proving that they were right and that Fatah was wrong all along. As a consequence any attempt to compromise was restrained by this religious prohibition and Hamas’ positions won legitimacy from the PLO’s top religious cleric. Hamas moved from the margins to the centre of the national-religious discourse, demonstrating that the use of religious symbols by mainstream politician can only strengthen the national-religious groups.

On the Israeli side Barak’s proposal to divide the sovereignty on the Holy Esplanade was perceived as undermining the sanctity of Jerusalem for the Jews and of Zion for Zionism. In response, Ariel Sharon, then the head of the Israeli opposition, decided to demonstrate the Israeli sovereignty on the Holy Esplanade by conducting an official visit to the site. Sharon, who was well-known as a completely secular man, understood the potential in mobilizing fundamental national-religious symbols. Sharon’s visit was perceived by the Palestinians as a provocation which provided the trigger for the eruption of the second Intifada. The actual forces behind this eruption may very well have been deeper, driven from the frustration and despair from the political deadlock, but it was Sharon’s visit to al-Aqsa that set off the actual clashes (Tzidkiyahu 2012: 126). The second intifada that erupted following Sharon’s visit, called by both Palestinians and Israelis *Intifādat al-’Aqṣā*, caused thousands of casualties on both sides between October 2000 and October 2005, and changed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the geopolitical reality in Israel and Palestine. Five months after the intifada started, Sharon won the elections and became the Prime Minister. During the 1990s Sharon was considered to be a political lame duck approaching the end of his career in the hawkish right-wing margins of the Likud party, but following Netanyahu’s temporary retirement from politics and Barak’s failure to prevent the intifada, all of a sudden Sharon re-emerged as a leader. Sharon’s al-Aqsa maneuver is a textbook example of how national-religious feelings and holy sites can be manipulated for political ends.

On the Palestinian side, the Hamas military wing, the Brigades of the Martir Izz ad-Din al-Qassam (*Katā’ib al-shahīd ‘izz al-dīn al-qassām*), gained prestige for terrorizing Israel through suicide attacks. Some elements in the Fatah felt they had to stand up to these standards and formed their own military wing called al-Aqsa Martyrs’ Brigades (*Katā’ib Shuhadā’ al-’Aqṣā*), imitating Hamas’ religious language, symbols and tactics.<sup>5</sup> This was yet another step in the religionization of the conflict and the nationalization of religion. In the January 2006 Palestinian parliamentary elections that took place shortly after the end of the intifada and two years after the death of Arafat, Hamas won a majority.<sup>6</sup> For the first time since 1969, the legitimacy of the PLO and of Fatah as “the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people” was put to serious doubt. The following year Hamas led a violent coup in Gaza, establishing the first political entity controlled by the Muslim Brothers, four years previous to the events of the “Arab Spring.”

## THE COMPARATIVE APPROACH

The inter/intra dynamics around the Holy Esplanade continue, and have been enhanced since 2003, when tens of thousands of observant Jews started to regularly visit the Holy Esplanade, creating real pressure to change the status quo in the contested holy site. This was answered by a similar awakening on the Muslim-Palestinian side, crowning al-Aqsa as the ultimate national-religious symbol. Both discourses conduct a continuous dialogue around the Holy Esplanade, which goes beyond the boundaries of the site itself, also penetrating national and international politics. It is impossible to fully understand these processes without placing them under comparative scrutiny – examining the dialogue that the Jewish-Zionist and Muslim-Palestinian movements conduct. Such a research requires

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5. This dynamic of religionization and radicalization throughout the second intifada stands in the center of Zerkovitz’s book (2012).

6. For analysis of these elections, the policies that led to them and their results see: Rubin (2006: 138-152).

an understanding of the theoretical discourse on religious nationalism, but also a close acquaintance with the particularity of our case study: Jewish-Israeli and Muslim-Palestinian societies. This requires an interdisciplinary approach, combining social and political science and comparative politics, with historical research methods, textual analysis, comparative religion, Jewish and Islamic thought and conflict studies. The interdisciplinary approach will enable us to better deal with the tension between the universal theories and the particular case study, by building a solid theoretical foundation as we go along, onto which we shall “pour” the comparative historical development.

Comparing Judaism and Islam as two religions of law that encompass all aspects of life is common in the literature, yet only few works deal with the systematic similarities and differences between *Sharia* and *Halacha* in regard to the modern state. In that regard we can mention the articles of Kozlowsky (1986) and of Aharon Layish (2005). Despite their quality, the comparative debate in these studies is but partial (Miller 2009: 4). On the political aspects, both Zionism and the Palestinian national movement are considered to be anomalies and are not frequently referred to in the general study of nationalism or in comparative research. Khalidi argues that the case of the Palestinians – and this argument applies to the Israeli example as well – does contain a certain universal applicability for issues of national identity. This is true regarding a number of ways in which Palestinians and Israelis mirror other national groups, “including in the manner in which preexisting elements of identity are reconfigured and history is used to give shape to a certain vision [...]” (Khalidi 1997: xi),<sup>7</sup> but especially to the ways in which Israelis and Palestinians mirror each other.

Since the works of Zachary Lockman on relations between Arab and Jewish workers and labor movements in Palestine during the British mandate period (Lockman 1993, 1996), little effort has been done to place Israelis and Palestinians under an equal scientific scrutiny, as if each movement evolved separately. Some works compare Jewish and Islamic fundamentalism, but the emphasis in these works is in many cases on the supra-nationalist ultra-orthodox (*haredi*) Judaism and on radical Islam in the Arab world, notably in Egypt (Ali 2013; Klein 1993; Almond, Appleby and Sivan 2003). These works examine each case study separately, comparing it to a general model of fundamentalism. In this regard even if religious Zionist currents or Palestinian religious nationalism are considered, it is in relation to the Jewish or Arab-Islamic fundamentalism and not to one another. The existing works also relate to Zionist or Palestinian fundamentalists as anomalies, neglecting the national-religious background in which these fundamentalists are rooted, stemming from the mainstream of their respective national movements. Reiter’s work is an exception to this rule, since it compares directly between the Israeli and Palestinian religious nationalism and their role in the conflict, while examining religion as a barrier to compromise in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Reiter 2010: 228-263). Another recent exception in the Israeli academia is the work of Hillel Cohen in his book *1929: Year Zero of the Jewish-Arab Conflict* (Cohen 2013), which emphasizes the deep religious element of the conflict through a systematic comparison between Jews and Muslim in Palestine/the land of Israel. Reiter, Cohen and to some extent Klein and Nohad Ali represent a new emerging trend of treating both sides of this national-religious conflict as equal objects of research and scrutiny through a comparative analysis, which is crucial for a better understanding of the conflict.

The two opposing national-religious trends in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict represent two competing expressions of religious-nationalisms in the same space. While rooted in their own particular context, both trends constantly evolve facing one another. On the surface these two approaches completely negate each other, but they actually co-exist in great proximity and relate to the same territory, and to the same holy sites. It would thus be unreasonable to assume that they are not mutually influenced and that they do not conduct some sort of an indirect dialogue (among other forms of dialogue). These two competing ideologies reside in great proximity, sometimes literally in the same street. On the theoretical level we can examine the different case studies according to Bourdieu’s field theory, viewing religion and politics as interacting fields, and examining the relations

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7. In his argument Khalidi refers to the Palestinians only, we expand his argument on to the Israeli case as well.

between distinct religious, national and political actors (Bourdieu 1993). Institutionalized religious nationalism can be examined in light of new theories of institutionalization as a major factor in contemporary politics (March and Olsen 1984). Examining the role of religion in the conflict will also enable us to determine the influence religion has on the intensity and level of the conflicts involving strong religious-nationalism (Pearce 2005). Such a research may somewhat erode the barriers between the Jewish state of Israel and its Arab-Muslim environment, first and foremost with its immediate neighbours – the Palestinian people – through the study of the relations of the two religions of law to the modern nation state, which in both cases lead to a similar political reaction. This field possesses, in my opinion, rich grounds for more comparative study to come.

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