
The politics of sacred places: Palestinian identity, collective memory, and resistance in the Hassan Bek mosque conflict

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Abstract. Geographers dealing with religion have pointed to the process of conflict and contestation involved in the production of sacred sites. This paper explores the conflict over a sacred site in the formulation of a minority identity through transformation of the place into a nexus of resistance and collective memory formation. I argue that under hegemonic secularizing states and within the context of ethnonational conflicts minority groups mobilize and articulate a dynamic meaning of sacred sites which allows an elaborate politics of identity. Further, in the context of their national struggle, members of the community emphasize different aspects of the sacred. In the context of the national struggle (and for the duration of the conflict), minority members enhance inclusive nationalistic (Palestinian in this particular case) identity; however, while in a community context they emphasize the religious (Islamic) meaning of the place. Particularly, I examine the dynamic nature of interpreting and constructing the sacred through the analysis of the restoration project of the Hassan Bek mosque by the Arab-Palestinian community of Jaffa, Israel.

“The minorities in son of the soil ideology states enter into a new polity which requires them to reterritorialize within a new civic order, whose ideology of ethnic coherence and citizenship rights they are bound to disturb.”

Arjun Appadurai (1997)

1 Transgressing sacred sites: prologue

On 1 June, 2001 a suicidal bomber detonated himself at the ‘Dolphin Disco’, a hip hangout for Tel Aviv youth during the busiest time of the week, late Friday night. Twenty-one people, mostly in their teens, were killed, and 120 were wounded in one of the most violent attacks on Israeli civilians during the Al-Aqsa Intifada.⁽¹⁾ The following morning, a crowd of a few hundred people gathered around Hassan Bek mosque, which is across the street from the site of the attack. The word on the street was that the suicide bomber spent the night before the attack within the mosque’s precinct (<http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-783369,00.html>).⁽²⁾

The unauthorized demonstration was mostly carried out by young Jewish citizens of the southern neighborhoods of Tel Aviv. They surrounded the compound for hours while shouting assorted obscenities and racist remarks towards the Arab-Muslim population of Jaffa and Palestinians at large. Some were seen holding the Israeli flag in a spontaneous nationalistic display. As the hours passed the situation escalated and objects were thrown at the mosque. The police were largely unsuccessful at keeping the demonstrators at bay, leaving the few dozen people stranded inside in eminent danger.

⁽¹⁾ The word ‘Intifada’ literally means uprising or awakening in Arabic. It was initially assigned to the first Palestinian civilian resistance to Israeli occupation in 1987–93. The term was applied later to the second eruption of violent resistance of Palestinians, this time under the Palestinian authority. This included a series of suicidal bombers and unprecedented use of violence on both sides. In its initial stage the second Intifada also entailed the Israeli-Palestinian citizens of Israel.

⁽²⁾ This unsubstantiated rumor featured in media reports and later in the interviews by some of my interlocutors.

It was only towards the evening that the demonstration waned and the police managed to release the Muslim devotees and deliver them safely to their homes in Jaffa, an easy 5 minutes' drive under normal circumstances.

The symbolic meanings of this act are readily apparent. The rioters wanted to annihilate the mosque by breaching its sacred boundaries and eliminating as much of its physical attributes as possible. But by this very act they did nothing but reify its sociospatial boundaries and make clear that this is indeed a different category of place. When asked by reporters about the reasons behind the attack, participants in the demonstration addressed mainly the meaning of the mosque as a Palestinian symbol that merited an attack. Eliran, a 23-year-old man from a nearby town, had been particularly resourceful in the stone-throwing department. He explained his behavior:

“Yesterday night I turned on the television around midnight and learned that there was another attack. People cannot take it anymore. Every day 5–10 more people are killed. I am afraid to wake up tomorrow to learn that my uncle, or someone else in my family, was killed. In one split second they take your life, and I am too young to die.”

As the reporter persisted and tried to understand why the mosque was targeted specifically, Eliran replied:

“Go figure, maybe he [ie the suicide bomber] spent the night here and probably even got their blessings” (<http://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-783369,00.html>).

The attack on the Jaffa Arab⁽³⁾ community entailed much more than the mosque, but this was the most concentrated and heated one. It was clear that in the Israeli context, sacred Islamic sites are read as Palestinian symbols/posts, and in the warlike atmosphere they were treated accordingly by segments of the majority group. The mosque of Hassan Bek is a highly contentious spatial metaphor of the intricate and meandering encounters and relations between Jews and Arabs in Tel Aviv–Jaffa and Israel at large. This paper constructs and analyzes its role as a sacred site and as a site of memory and resistance of the Palestinian community of Jaffa, and examines the role of sacred sites in multicultural and ethnonational conflicts.

2 Introduction

Geographers dealing with religion have pointed to the presence of conflict and contestation involved in the production of sacred sites (Chivallon, 2001; Kong, 1993a, 1993b; 2001; Naylor and Ryan, 2002). Indeed, the very word ‘production’, when applied to the allegedly transcendent outward quality of the spatiality of a sacred site, immediately grounds the place and locates it within the realm of everyday life. Chidester and Linenthal (1995) present us with an understanding of the multivalence of sacred sites and their inherent contested nature. They claim that “a sacred place is not merely discovered, or founded, or constructed; it is claimed, owned, and operated by people advancing specific interest” (page 8). Therefore, becoming a sacred place involves a process of production but is also inescapably linked to cultural–political contests regarding the multiple meanings assigned to the place. The conflict is not just over the production, Chidester and Linenthal continue to argue, but also over the “symbolic surpluses that are abundantly available for appropriation” (page 18).

The debates over the relevancy of the geography of religion and its importance are age old. Students of the field have made numerous critical remarks (Brace et al, 2006; Kong, 1990; Proctor, 2006; Stump, 1986). Most of the arguments are assigned to the lack of theoretical coherence and contextualization as well as to a grave misunderstanding on geographers' part of the relevance and importance of religion

⁽³⁾ Throughout the paper the terms ‘Arabs’ and ‘Palestinian-Arabs’ are used interchangeably.

in the politics (and poetics) of everyday life (Buttimer, 2006; Holloway and Valins, 2002; Kong, 2001; Valins, 2003). The field has been slow to respond to the growing desecularization of the world and the rising part of religion at the center stage of multiscalar politics. A more critical note would be that secularization theories, as attested by Peter Berger, were essentially mistaken (Berger, 1999; also Hervieu-Léger, 2000).

Drawing on these discussions of geography, religion, and politics this paper is primarily concerned with the use and production of sacred sites within the context of ethnonational conflict. It focuses mainly on the ways minority groups develop intricate politics of identity that enable them to resist and subvert state and majority control over their symbolic (sacred) space and as part of a process of self-empowerment. Particularly, I present a reading of the construction and contestation involved in the restoration project of the Hassan Bek mosque in Tel Aviv–Jaffa, Israel. The paper explores the use of a Muslim sacred site as a place for identity formation, as a nexus of resistance for a minority group in the context of a hegemonic and secularizing state, and as part of an ethnonational conflict. It explores and analyzes the ways a dilapidating and deserted mosque on the verge of collapse was transformed into a symbol of a community struggle and into a site of resistance to Jewish majority and municipal and state agencies. Focusing on the long and convoluted history of the Hassan Bek mosque in Tel Aviv–Jaffa and the struggle of the Arab-Palestinian community therein, my objectives are threefold: (1) to analyze the role of the sacred in daily politics of identity; (2) to examine the meaning assigned to the sacred as political changes take place and sociospatial and political boundaries are transforming; (3) to explore the formulation of resistance among the Palestinian community and the struggle for self-empowerment through the sacred. Following these questions I seek to highlight the role of the sacred as a site of resistance, a space where minority identity (not sons of the soil citizens, following Appadurai) may be formulated and negotiated. Using the spatial and sociopolitical changes of the mosque as the main thread of the current discussion, I ultimately question the efficacy of sacred sites as religious attributes in national conflicts and as uniting forces for multireligious national groups.

The paper starts in section 3 with the construction of the sacred site and situates the mosque within a dynamic boundary between two ethnonational communities and their struggle to dominate the same geographic space. In section 4 it surveys the ways in which the mosque was reterritorialized by state agencies as part of modernization and secularizing processes. Put simply, it explores the ways different forces were trying to transform the mosque into a profane place and eradicate its Muslim religious significance. Sections 5 and 6 are concerned with the ways the sacred is used and understood in order to articulate resistance, and focus on the ways the sacred serves as a sphere where minority identities may be expressed more freely and unchallenged by state hegemonic position. Ultimately, the paper examines the changing sociospatial boundaries around the mosque as new understandings of the sacred are being formed and new categories of inclusion and exclusion, insiders and outsiders, are delineated.

3 Constructing the sacred: early phases.

The sacred is a realm of competing discourses! Eade and Sallnow focus our attention on the contested nature of the sacred: “The power of a shrine, therefore, derives in large part from its character almost as a religious void, a ritual space capable of accommodating diverse meanings and practices” (1991, page 15). In this they break free of former paradigms and contextualization of pilgrimage sites (Durkheim, 1912; Turner, 1974a; 1974b), and establish (like Chidester and Linenthal) a dynamic and highly political understanding of the role of sacred sites for communities and subgroups

while they are competing and performing their religious practices therein. I will allow a short historical narrative in order to demonstrate the role of the mosque as a contested space and as a symbol of identity since its very inception. Further, the historical developments to be described below will make clear how the Arab population has not become part of the sons-of-the-soil imagined community, although they stayed (those who remained) in the same locality. The history of the mosque parallels that of the Arab-Palestinian population—specifically, highly influenced by the dramatic changes of sociospatial and political boundaries that took place following the creation of Israel as a Jewish national state.

The contested nature of the mosque of Hassan Bek was determined as early as its construction in 1915–16 by the Ottoman governor of Jaffa, Hassan Bek al-Jabi (Dabbagh, 1972). During his short sojourn in the city, this entrepreneurial governor launched several urban projects which aimed at rejuvenating the historical city as well as establishing his authoritative position in the turbulent time of World War I (Tolkowsky, 1924). The reasons behind the building of a mosque bearing his name were highly political. Hassan Bek was concerned more with the growing numbers and presence of Zionists in the area than by any religious needs this mosque was supposed to accommodate (LeVine, 2005). His immediate worry was Achuzat Bayit, a fast-developing, Jewish, modernistic suburb that started out as a satellite neighborhood of Jaffa in 1909 (Azaryahu, 2007). This neighborhood, which later became the city of Tel Aviv, epitomizes the Zionist vision of the Jewish people's return to their homeland as a modernistic project (Rotbard, 2005). Hassan Bek came up with a plan that was initially meant to check the development of this urban Jewish rival to Jaffa and to prevent the possibility of Jews advancing their building activities on the northern, still undeveloped, shores north of the center of the city of Jaffa. The plan entailed the establishment of a *waqf*⁽⁴⁾ on a large tract of land in an area that was far from the center of the Arab city (LeVine, 2005). The mosque of Hassan Bek was constructed on part of this endowment. During the 1920s and 1930s, the 'far away' mosque became the Muslim religious center of Manshiyyah: a new blue-colored Arab neighborhood of Jaffa, bordering with Tel Aviv.

In 1923 the Supreme Muslim Council—the leading Muslim authority under the British Mandate—embarked on a series of renovations and religious-building constructions, one of which was the mosque of Hassan Bek (Hamuda, 1985; Kupferschmidt, 1987). This was not about the physical building. This was a part of the full-scale ethnonational struggle between Muslims and Jews, which was taking its first steps at the time (Porat, 1974). Hassan Bek mosque was, indeed, a religious building but it was also a Muslim landmark in the city of Jaffa facing the flourishing and fast-growing Jewish city of Tel Aviv. Its strategic location on the northern borders of Jaffa was responsible for the role it played during the tumultuous times of 1947–48 when the armed conflict erupted. During that period of clashes (December 1947–May 1948), Arab snipers were regularly stationed at Hassan Bek and used its minaret as a shooting platform while firing on the streets of Tel Aviv (Hamuda, 1985). During that period, the municipal borders of the two towns became not just highly politicized ethnic–national borders, but an active war zone.⁽⁵⁾ On 28 April, 1948, forces of the Irgun Zevai Leumi captured the neighborhood of Manshiyyah (Lazar, 1961; Tel Aviv–Jaffa Archive 14-84/310). This was also the crucial gambit for the final surrender

⁽⁴⁾ 'Waqf' is the Arabic term for a religious endowment. One of the important traits of such a religious act is that it delineates a parcel of land for the community and ultimately God in perpetuity.

⁽⁵⁾ Jaffa had a significant Jewish population but as of the late 1930s it was receiving its municipal services, and paying its taxes, to the Jewish city of Tel Aviv (Golan, 1995).

of Jaffa to Jewish forces on 13 May, 1948 (Golan, 2001). Manshiyyah, as other parts of the Arab city, was emptied of its former residents. Jaffa's population, once a bustling city of 70 000 people, shriveled to roughly 4000 (Golan, 1999).

The mosque that was imposed on the city by a colonialist foreign power was gradually accepted by the local population. Due to its location and impressive features, it transformed into a major symbolic icon in the ethnoreligious conflict that was escalating under British rule. The dramatic political changes brought forth by the outcome of the war contributed directly to modifications of the municipal (and in a sense national) boundaries in the area. I will come back to the different ways Hassan Bek mosque was perceived among the local population, drawing mainly on Henri Lefebvre's conceptualization of space. Presently, I will analyze the dormant phase of the mosque under the new modernistic Jewish state, which verges on topocide.

4 Modernity, urban planning, and the annihilation of the sacred

Critical writings on cities share an understanding that they are by and large the most elaborate and advanced form of modernity, modernization projects, politics, and progress as perceived by the enlightenment project (Harvey, 1989; 2000; Mumford, 1938; Zukin, 1995). However, cities, particularly in conditions of modernity and postmodernity, are fast becoming sites of extreme inequality and contestations between those who have and those who have not (Leitner et al, 2007). A less explored theme is the role of cities and urbanization policies in nation and state building (Yiftachel and Yacobi, 2003). Tel Aviv may serve as a highly condensed case study that fittingly represents all the above characteristics. As an urban project the city was envisioned as a modernistic Jewish–Zionistic manifestation. The city was designed as a separate external suburb of Jaffa according to prevalent Western European notions of the Garden City (Shavit and Biger, 2001). Its European-style vistas, its street arrangements duly formed in a grid pattern, the architecture a unique ensemble of buildings fashioned in accordance with the international style all convey a clear ideological message of detachment and separation from old, historic, Middle Eastern, traditional Jaffa.⁽⁶⁾

In the aftermath of the 1948 war the tables turned. Jaffa, the former big metropolitan area, was annexed to its nemesis, Tel Aviv, hereafter Tel Aviv–Yafo (Hebrew name of Jaffa). Manshiyyah, being empty of its former Arab population, was resettled with old and new Jewish immigrants. The mosque was deserted and all religious and social activities therein ceased. In the years which followed, Manshiyyah and the mosque underwent a dramatic change as a result of new planning policies and the development of new master plans for the city. Under the guise of modernization and urban planning, these plans were about to wreak the annihilation of the sacred.

Zionism, as an ideology rooted in modernity, adopted planning as a central tool to implement its ideology and as an efficient mechanism for spatial control (Kimmerling, 1983; Yiftachel, 1992). Not surprisingly, from the early stages Israel, as a Jewish state, had a planning policy that was highly centralized and inclined to favor Jewish–Zionist interests and groups (Law-Yone and Kallus, 2001). The Zionist project was often advanced in accordance with these understandings, ultimately resulting in numerous plans and planning projects throughout the land. The young municipality of Tel Aviv–Yafo was no exception. As early as 1954, and later in 1968, new master plans were formulated [Hashimshoni, 1968; Tel Aviv–Jaffa Municipal Archive 22-1-1968-1 (2216)].

⁽⁶⁾In 2003 the historic part of Tel Aviv was recognized as a heritage site by UNESCO under the name, the White City. This was followed by an ardent debate regarding the very name itself and its contribution to the contemporary city. See especially, Sharon Rotbard (2005).

Both of these plans were blatant expressions of a national policy of Judaization through space that coalesced bureaucratic and ethnocentric logic (Yiftachel and Yacobi, 2003). From 1948 to the 1980s, the urban policy regarding the social and spatial needs of Jaffa's Arab community ranged between unplanned neglect and intentional underplanning (Monterescu, 2005).

Manshiyyah was designated, in both plans, as a vital part of the future central business district. It was rendered indispensable to allow an adequate and viable transportation system to develop (Niv, 2003, interview; Pen, 2002, interview). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, most of the Arab neighborhood's houses were razed to the ground. Stranded between the debris and torn down houses, the mosque was an obstinate and protruding landmark of the urban unwanted past.⁽⁷⁾ It presented a bigger obstacle as it was part of a religious endowment and therefore not easily subjected to demolition. Officials in the municipality and at the national level were concerned that the mosque would present an obstruction to the development plans. It would seem that the sacred Muslim site posed no moral problem at this stage for modernistic and nationalistic planning. In order to understand some of the complexities involved in the state and municipal policy towards Palestinian-Arab land and the Muslim minority's religious sites in particular, and as a way to understand how the topocide of sacred sites was facilitated, it is pertinent to look at the legalist developments that enabled Israel to exercise its control over former Arab lands.

In the new state of Israel, planning policy was characterized by vast and violent dispossession, displacement, and appropriation of Arab lands (Forman and Kedar, 2004). The new land regime thus represented and legitimized the new power relations between Jews (ie the state of Israel) and the state's Arab citizens. The use of planning policies to further the Judaization of the land was a strong and highly successful mechanism which was backed by a cultural adaptation process that justified and vindicated the dispossession and marginalization of the Arab-Palestinians as a Jewish-Israeli nationalistic virtuous act (Yiftachel and Yacobi, 2003). In Jaffa, as in other 'mixed cities', the state was confronted with vast tracts of 'absentee land'. This is the legal term describing real estate that belonged to Arabs failing to report to the Israeli authorities until a certain date after the end of the war.⁽⁸⁾ The Custodian for Absentees' Property governmental authority was established in order to control, manage, and facilitate the transfer of these assets to various state agencies (Golan, 2001). The Law of Absentee Property (Israel Book of Laws 37/b March 1950) was formulated in such a way that the Custodian was allowed to release land and property only to another state agency, the Development Authority (section 19/a). This prevented any legal manipulation that would return land or property to its former Arab owner (Golan, 2001). The state considered Muslim religious endowments that were not in use or uncalled for (abandoned, ruined, or unclear ownership as the case may be) as absentee property (Shaqar, 2001, interview).

A new turn in the state policy towards its Arab citizens' property took place in 1965, which was about to directly change the municipal status of the mosque. An amendment to 1950 law (section 29/b) paved the way to forming a new legal entity by the name of the Muslim Charitable Trust (hereafter the Trust) in seven mixed cities in Israel.⁽⁹⁾ Ostensibly, this was a new state apparatus that allowed Muslim

⁽⁷⁾ In a sense the resilience of the mosque to modernity forces may be paralleled with David Sibley's (1995; 1999) contextualization of stubborn identities.

⁽⁸⁾ The term 'mixed city' is used to denote cities where Jews and Arabs populations are to be found sharing the same urban space. On the complexities of the term and elaboration and contextualization of facts on the ground see Dan Rabinowitz and David Monterescu (forthcoming).

⁽⁹⁾ Not all of them were established as planned.

communities direct control over their communal and religious property. In reality, these committees were confined to administer only properties that were released to them by the Custodian. It should also be stressed that the Custodian's customary inclination was to approve development plans of abandoned property in cases of a future lease or sale contract to a Jewish third party (Attorney Victor Herzberg, interview by the author, 13 July 2002, Tel Aviv, Israel). The state made sure that members of this new regulatory mechanism were approved by a governmental committee that was to ensure collaboration and cooptation. Under these circumstances it follows that those trusts became mere rubber stamps that facilitated an easy transformation of Muslim property into agents that were deemed supportive of the state's goals.

The Jaffa Trust members were nominated on 23 November, 1967 [Tel Aviv-Jaffa Archive 7(24)-146-1495]. The Trust was to play an important role in the plan to alter the status of Hassan Bek and transform it into a tourist center. The following are excerpts of an interview with Gershon Peres, the entrepreneur and contractor of the Hassan Bek transaction. Peres reveals the untold story of how hegemonic forces operating within a capitalistic and a nationalistic logic were coconspiring, in tandem with planning policies (hegemonic perceptions fashioned as a professional, allegedly objective, understanding) to annihilate the mosque. In a sense he divulges the 'hidden transcript' behind the 'official story'⁽¹⁰⁾:

"it all started when three people came to me; Shemulik Toledano, the Prime Minister's Consultant for Arab Affairs, Aharon Danin,⁽¹¹⁾ and Joshua Rabinowitz the Mayor of Tel Aviv. ... Rabinowitz saw that the south [namely, Jaffa] was decadent and *all of a sudden there is this mosque of Hassan Bek* that was deserted ... while at the same time people began to put in gigantic investment in hotels and this [the mosque] was like a thorn in the flesh of the system So they [state and city officials] paid money [to the Jaffa Charitable Trust] but they did not deliver" (emphasis added).

Indeed, as Peter Marcuse argues: "neither cities nor places in them are unordered, unplanned; the question is only whose order, whose planning, and for what purpose" (1995, page 224). Peres's description discloses the way hegemonic forces analyzed the development of the city. The use of the passive to describe the state of the mosque (deserted) is indicative and telling. The underplanning of the south side of the city is considered a contingency and not intentional. The pertinent question at this point would be, deserted by whom? The mosque was perceived as a disturbance and a financial risk to the urban projects that were taking place in the area. Peres justifies the hegemonic position and the move for a creative destruction (Harvey, 1989) of a unique urban landmark. Clearly, for state officials the mosque was a landmark which symbolized an urban past they preferred to eliminate and a potential hazard for the urban future as they perceived it. The bribe paid to the Trust's members was evidently not conducive and did not yield the desired results, and this is where Peres's services were needed. He was approached by these officials and was asked to take upon himself the construction project of the mosque:

"They told me do it as a service for the state ... so I met with the Trust people and told them: listen guys there is no money here but for once in your lives put on a beautiful face and we will all work together ... but I told them; keep your mouth shut or else it will be noisy and dirty!" (Peres, 2002, interview).

⁽¹⁰⁾ These terms are taken from James Scott's (1990) seminal work on resistance. What I am trying to suggest here is that it is not only the subordinates that have an unofficial story but also the dominants. In this case Peres, as a part of the hegemony, is revealing the untold story hidden behind official policies.

⁽¹¹⁾ Danin was a very influential person in the Israeli land and planning policies and projects.

The synonymy between the good of the state and the transgression of the mosque recalls Pierre Bourdieu's description of the ways the materialization of an ideology is concerned with the power to impose a schematic perception and a concrete schema of urban order (Bourdieu, 1993). Following Christine Chivallon, I would claim that the attempts to deterritorialize the mosque were a codification of prevailing power onto the symbolic urban landscape (Chivallon, 2001). The various state agencies contributed directly to the deterritorialization of the mosque, which was, indeed, on the verge of annihilation. Peres reveals what Lefebvre saw as the perceived space—that is, the official dominant power as expressed mostly by professional planning (conceived space) and which is usually the most effective in the actual production of social space (1991). But often enough this process of deterritorialization leads to reterritorialization (Appadurai, 1997). To draw again on Lefebvre, it may be inferred that against the professional—hegemonic perceived space a counterhegemonic lived space is to be found: that is, the perception of the city by those who often enough experienced their collective memory and cultural attributes being jeopardized—indeed, annihilated—by modernized planning and ethnocentric municipal and national policy (Sandercock, 1998).

Whether a hindsight or by premonition, Peres was not mistaken when he warned the Trust's members to remain silent about the lease. Rumors about a sordid deal did circulate in Jaffa for a long time. Following an appeal for an injunction against the legality of the contract submitted to the Tel Aviv District court by one of the Trust members, the secret lease was publicly revealed (Maariv, 31 August, 1973). In what follows, I will approach directly the politics of identity and forms of resistance that individuals within the Arab community of Jaffa⁽¹²⁾ put into practice through the legal struggle and the restoration project which resulted ultimately in the reterritorialization of the place and in it resuming functions as a religious sacred center.

5 Resistance through the sacred

Resistance is typically reactive and cannot be understood apart from domination and power relations. It relates to those behaviors and cultural practices applied by subordinate groups that contest hegemonic social formation and threaten to unravel the strategies of domination (Haynes and Parkash, 1991). It is also the ability of people to alter situations and realities through a myriad of tactics and behaviors. Resistance is therefore the weapon of those occupying a subordinate position in power—geography relations, who are therefore less likely to influence or change their spatialities. Naturally, those who have more access to resources (hegemonic groups) will also be those who will be able to codify space in accordance with their ideologies and political aims. But hegemony can never be fully achieved, and therefore the equilibrium is constantly in motion (Gramsci, 1971). Further, the relations between dominant and subordinate groups are a process in which boundaries and consensual norms are always shifting and being negotiated. Tangled in a web of political and social relations, dominant and subordinate groups are constantly competing and transforming the spaces they are sharing (or competing for) in accordance with their cultural, economical, and, surely, political stances. Resistance arrives from a place (and can take place) outside of the hegemonic control or is less monitored by dominant agencies, be they state controlled or socially constructed ones. What I find alluring about this spatial conceptualization of resistance is that resistance can be understood as it takes place and therefore it can

⁽¹²⁾ The term 'Arab community of Jaffa' needs some elaboration as it is a form of reification. For lack of space in the current format I would add only that under this heading I include all Arabs living in Jaffa that felt part of this struggle at one time or another.

be mapped and explored (Pile, 1997). It does not just simply take place but also seeks to appropriate place: a place that was subjected to hegemonic manipulations or is about to succumb to such dominant maneuvers to alter its character, accessibility, etc. From this perspective, resistance is less about particular acts than about the desire to find a place in a power geography where space is denied or totally controlled (Scott, 1990). The struggle for a particular space and the spatial changes in the sociospatial boundaries of a place are inexorably linked to politics of identity. The struggle of a subordinate group over a particular place (resistance) is by and large a spatialization of identity conflicts and, at the same time, identity constructions around a particular object.

By creating alternative spatialities or alternative readings of the same spatiality, people can challenge, mitigate, and at times overcome the effects of domination and power on their daily lives. In order to accomplish such a task, a group must be mobilized in deference of common interests. Urban movements—indeed, all social mobilization—happen at the initiative of a conscious and organized operator that can define a common enough goal for the group (Castells, 1983). Mobilization, therefore, will take place when the goal appeals to a ‘critical mass’ (Marwell and Oliver, 1993). The mosque of Hassan Bek will prove to be such a place in its capacity to instigate a meaningful mobilization and ally groups and individuals that under other circumstances would not be mobilized or agree to cooperate.

Following a court injunction (August 1973) to halt all legal procedures in the mosque transaction, given at the request of one of the Trust’s members, the mosque would gradually become a site of resistance among the Arab community of Jaffa. The key figure in the initial organization of resistance was Abd Badawi Kabub, a Muslim native of Jaffa who was also a shareholder in the predominantly Jewish local bus corporation (Dan), a rarity in those days for an Arab Israeli citizen. Upon learning of the mosque transaction and the general misconduct of the Trust, he took it upon himself to bring the mosque back to the Jaffa community:

“I have registered an NGO in order to act in a dignified way and to build something clean and respectable. I did not want to create a nuisance. Following [this], civilized and respectable people in the community joined me. We began by demanding to renovate the mosque but this was met with a governmental objection. So I called a few important people and let them know that everything that happened [the leasing of the mosque] was Foyleshtik.⁽¹³⁾ I told them [the ‘important people’] we need to renovate the mosque in a respectful manner and legally, without making a lot of noise and without attacking anyone” (2003, interview).

In view of later developments, and a more antagonistic approach to the state and Jewish majority performed by members of the Jaffa community, Kabub’s insistence on doing the ‘right’ thing and working in what he calls a ‘respectful manner’ is indicative of the changes in the Arab minority politics of alterity. This will be made clear as I explore the development and conceptualization of resistance as played out during the lengthy struggle to restore the mosque into the hands of the community. The issue addressed here is the changes in the forms of resistance and the way different members of the Jaffa community were acting, promoting, and narrating the struggle over the mosque both to their respective community and to the public at large.

⁽¹³⁾ This word means foul play in Yiddish. It is rather telling that Kabub, an Arab-Muslim citizen, would use this word. During his interview Kabub often elaborates on his camaraderie with Jewish friends and the fact that his activities need not be seen as antagonistic to the state or for that matter to anyone.

Kabub was joined by a few other people from the Jaffa Muslim community and together they established an NGO under the name of al-Maqasid al-Khayriyya al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Philanthropic Association, hereafter, al-Maqasid). As it so happened, this took place not long after a new mayor, Shlomo Lahat, was elected to Tel Aviv–Jaffa (1974) and a new coalition was formed. This municipal coalition proved to be more empathetic to the Jaffa Arab community than its predecessors. In response to Peres's company application for a building permit—a mere formality under the former political structure—the new deputy mayor, Yigal Grippel, issued a public statement according to which the municipality does not favor the promotion of a shopping mall on the site of the mosque (Haaretz 26 October, 1975). Kabub operated within and without the municipality. He approached the vice general manager at the Ministry of Religions and convinced him to act on behalf of the community interests. This yielded a media-covered visit of six leading Islamic judges to the site, the issue of a report, and a religious ruling (fatwa) that the mosque cannot be sold or leased in perpetuity [Tel Aviv–Jaffa Archive 07(26)-52]. The report was addressed to the general manager of the ministry, David Glass, who acted accordingly and notified the Tel Aviv deputy mayor that he would oppose any plan that would change the nature of the building. In an interview with Glass (2002), he relates the reasons that led him to this ruling:

“We had a hunch that above all there were illegal dealings involved. But this was not the main issue, but rather my own personal conviction that we need to respect the religious rights of minorities. We would have cried bitterly if anyone would have built something on top of a synagogue.”

Put simply, the object of resistance mattered far more than the legal proceedings or technicalities. In the aftermath of 1948 and the years to follow, religious Muslim buildings have undergone considerable changes and at times were confiscated, transformed, or actively destroyed. The marked difference in the Hassan Bek mosque struggle was the very act of resistance. Kabub managed to halt the authorization of the municipal permit and to transform the reconstruction of the mosque into a prolonged public and legal debate.

In 1977 Israel experienced for the first time a dramatic political change when the Likud Party (right wing, nationalistic, and conservative) won the general election for the first time since 1948. The political changes on the national scale had their implications for the municipal scale as well. Some of the al-Maqasid members were engaged in political activities on behalf of the newly elected Minister of Finance, Yigal Hurvitz (Asfur, 2003, interview). Hurvitz proved to be very instrumental in the changes about to take place in Jaffa and ultimately in the mosque. He made sure the current Trust members were to resign. A new Trust was nominated consisting mostly of al-Maqasid members with Kabub acting as the new chair. Under this capacity Kabub legally challenged the lease and the former Trust members' motives to authorize the transaction (Herzberg, 2003, interview; Kabub, 2002, interview). The proceedings and informal meetings between the Trust and the municipality were taking place from 1978 to 1981. Be that as it may, on 21 October, 1981 the Tel Aviv–Jaffa Local Planning and Building Commission unanimously approved Peres's renovation plan (Haaretz 22 October, 1981). In response Kabub organized a protest prayer at the mosque, the first one since 1948. More than 2000 people from Jaffa and other Muslim communities around Israel attended a Friday noon prayer at the deserted mosque (Haaretz 2 November, 1981). Kabub even invited Lahat, the Mayor, to attend this historical event.

Throughout the prayer some of the participants called for Jihad (a holy war) and openly opposed the mayor's invitation. These were mainly members of the Council for the Arabs of Jaffa (hereafter, the Rabita), a new self-governed organization that was

initiated in 1979 by local young Arabs (Muslims and Christians) to promote and facilitate solutions to the lingering problems of the Jaffa community: housing, education, and drug trafficking (Satil, 2002, interview; Shaqar, 2002, interview).

The formation of the Rabita and its members' active participation in the protest prayer mark the changing of the guards in the Jaffa community and, in a sense, the coming of age of Palestinians at large in Israel. From 1948 until 1967 Palestinians were seeking mostly security and accommodation within the new political regime that was forced upon them (Amara, 1999; Bishara, 1993). This period of adaptation in which the Palestinian component of their identity was highly suppressed ended or gradually changed after the 1967 war. After the war, Israeli Palestinians enjoyed the geopolitical changes and could establish their contacts with their copatriots in the Occupied Territories, and, through them, with the entire region. As indicated by most studies, the 1967–73 years were characterized by a growing identification with the Palestinian part of their identity (Ghanem, 2001; Rekhess, 1989). From 1973 to the 1990s, along with the strengthening of their Palestinian identity, Palestinians in Israel experienced an awakening of an Islamic component (Mayer, 1993; Meir, 1998; Schnell, 1996). In addition to local developments, this needs to be connected also to global trends of Islamic resurgence and particularly to the success of the Islamic revolution in Iran (Rekhess, 2002). The formation of the Rabita—indeed, a local initiative—cannot be disconnected from these developments. The organization was formed mostly by the first generation of university-educated Arabs (of all religious denominations) from Jaffa who took it upon themselves to empower their community in the face of continuous discrimination at the state and municipal levels (Abid, 2003, interview; Satil, 2002, interview; Shaqar, 2002, interview). The activists realized that in order to grapple with the complex problems of Jaffa they must overcome sectarian differences—namely, Muslims' and Christians' rivalries. Therefore, since its beginning in 1979 the Rabita presented a clear, nonmitigated Palestinian nationalistic stance and formulated its struggles within a highly antagonistic and confrontational rhetoric towards the state and the Jewish majority. The religious Islamic nature of the Hassan Bek mosque presented no problems, as the place was perceived as a national Palestinian heritage rather than as an Islamic symbol. Nakhla Shaqar, one of the leading activists in the early years of the organization, is a secular Christian.⁽¹⁴⁾ He explains the alleged incongruence between his religious affiliation and his participation in a religiously motivated culture war quite simply:

“We in the Rabita were conducting a nationalistic struggle and not a religious one. For us the mosque was part of our national heritage and this is why we did it” (Shaqar, 2003, interview).

While Kabub and his associates (although not all of them) defined the struggle over the mosque within a religious context for the members of the Rabita, this was a struggle for their place in history and their status within the municipal and national landscape. For Nassim Shaqar, the first chair of the Rabita, the mosque resonates far more than its Muslim-religious functions:

“Since the mosque was the last relic which attests the Arab existence in the neighborhood of Manshiyyah we in the Rabita wanted to preserve it. As you well know, if one sees such a building one understands that Tel Aviv was not a desert, as we are told in national history books, but rather one learns that there was a settlement here and it had a mosque, and it had a cemetery, and it had a life, and someone ruined that life!

⁽¹⁴⁾ The term ‘secular Christian’ is not an oxymoron. It relates to the fact that Shaqar comes from a Christian-Arab family and is thus defined as such by others in the community but defines himself as an atheist.

This is why the struggle over the mosque is highly symbolic. ... And why was the mosque neglected and not returned to its community for prayers? Because, in such a way it would collapse and with it the last memory of the Palestinian community of Tel Aviv will be lost” (interview, 2002).

The formulation of the mosque as a national symbol and as a relic of a Palestinian urban history in the area transforms it from a religious ethnic symbol (Islamic) into a national (Palestinian) one. Indeed, more people from the community could ally and identify with the struggle as the number of people attending the protest prayer indicates. Shortly before the prayer, although it was revealed only after it, the mosque was appropriated from the municipality by a governmental writ issued by the Minister of Finance. The plan to transform the mosque was indefinitely suspended and the legal debate was over, as well as the plan that was about to dramatically alter the place.

6 Reclaiming and reconstructing the sacred.

Under the guise of modernistic planning, and urgent urban needs, state and municipal agencies were almost successful in obliterating (or at least completely transforming) the mosque. But against those forces and the proposed plan, members of the community were mobilized to actively resist this process. Indeed, the appropriation of the mosque brought an end to the commercialization and practical topocide of the place, but it neither brought it back to the community nor ended the continuous deterioration of the building. On 8 April, 1983, (two years after the alleged triumph of the struggle) the minaret of the mosque tumbled down in what was, according to official understanding, an unfortunate, unintentional event; for common understanding among the community’s members it was nothing but a deliberate sabotage (Penn, 2002, interview; Satil, 2001, interview). The struggle to hold on to the mosque became much more intense after the highly symbolic fall of the minaret. The Rabita organized a protest prayer on site which was followed by the sporadic and unprofessional restoration of a meager part of the mosque. But this very act of concretizing the resistance and attaching it to a tangible space highlights that the contested political meaning of the place is revealed not just vis-à-vis the state, municipality, or the Jewish majority but also internally among the multireligious Arab community of Jaffa. The mosque has transformed into a *lieux de memoires* (Nora, 1996) which celebrates different things for different people within the community. While the Rabita people were promoting its role as a nationalistic symbol (and therefore, in essence, secularizing it in order to be able to transgress it) others (prominently, Muslims) were less enthusiastic about this inclusive reading of the place:

“After the minaret collapsed we decided to partially renovate it in order to put our mark there I remember a meeting in the Islamic Club where Kabub reproached me publicly for renovating the mosque because I am a Christian” (Nakhla Shaqar, 2003, interview).

The Rabita was successful in obtaining a silent approval of the mayor for the restoration of the minaret. When the minaret was finally completed it was six feet higher than its predecessor (Tel Aviv–Jaffa Archive, Building File 0410-078-2). This was the very first act of the concrete reterritorialization of mosque.

In 1985 the mosque was officially handed over to the Trust from the Custodian of Absentee Property (Asfur, 2003, interview). Due to internal problems of the Trust, and the realization among Rabita members (mainly Christians) that the actual restoration needed to be preformed by an Islamic agency, a new body was elected from among Muslim members of the Jaffa community: the Islamic Council of Jaffa. It appears that the desire to form a community, and to formulate a community around the mosque, coincided with a desire to preserve Islamic identity and thus the exclusion of those

who threaten it (Young, 1990). Much like in the contestation over the meanings of the Basilica of the Sacre Coeur, where different parties could lay different symbolic claims (Harvey, 1979), so in the Hassan Bek mosque the symbolic interpretations could reside in and over the place as long as it was unattainable. Once the place was approachable for the community, a different politics of identity was taking its course: that which promoted its religious sacredness. Put simply, the nationalistic interpretation and identity politics (Palestinization of the place) were not viable or feasible enough to enable the restoration of the place as a sacred site. This does not negate the semiotic reading of the mosque as a Palestinian symbol and as a site of resistance to the dominant group and modernistic planning policy. Within the community a different reading of the sacred and a different politics of identity was applied. Since its inauguration in 1988, the Islamic Council of Jaffa was responsible for the restoration of the mosque. In 1994 the restoration was concluded and the mosque resumed its original function as a religious site (Rehan, 2003, interview; Tel Aviv–Jaffa Archives, Building File 0410-078-2).

Since 1996 the mosque has undergone another boundary and political change. Due to a split within the Islamic Movement in Israel it is now governed by a group of people who are affiliated with the more extreme northern faction of the movement. The Northern Islamic Movement is advancing a more defying and militant fusion of Islamic-Palestinian identity. This identity politics is responsible for the new and less penetrable and tolerable cultural–political boundaries of the mosque. Thus, most of the activists who participated in the lengthy struggle over the mosque find themselves again marginalized and excluded from it. The Christians, who were involved, mainly through the Rabita organization, surely have nothing to look for in an Islamic sacred site, and the Muslims who do not share the goals and visions of the Northern Islamic Movement tend to avoid it as well. Bassam abu Zayd has been a leading religious figure in Jaffa over the last thirty years. His description sums up the current sociospatial boundaries and internal political situation of the mosque:

“The mosque now is in the hands of the Northern guys. ... People are turned one against his brother and each of us is looking for his own. This is not a good thing for Jaffa. I have tried to talk sense into people’s minds but nobody listens” (2003, interview).

Elias and Scotson (1965) argue that every form of identification necessitates the social construction of difference, and as a result new boundaries and distinctions are formed. Newman and Paasi (1998) advance the idea that, in order to understand processes of place-based identity formation and the social construction of place, attention should be paid to the formation of boundaries and the meanings these boundaries have for different people. Promoting this conceptual framework, Catherine Brace et al (2006) demonstrate how different beliefs were played out in different social contexts among Methodist communities. The communities in question were not unified (or reified) but constantly changing as different social boundaries were formed inside and outside of church and chapel. In the case of the mosque, different meanings, and therefore boundaries, were promoted in different stages of the struggle and through a constantly changing politics of identity (and alterity). While being highly instrumental in the formulation of the community resistance to the imposed space, it also became, as a situational and relational category (Hecht, 1994), a contentious spatiality among community members. As long as the struggle over the mosque was external, the blurred nationalistic–religious identity of the place could be promoted. Once the place was ‘won’ and social actions were grounded and no longer imagined, a new politics of place and identity inevitably emerged. New forms of exclusions and boundaries have formed which currently situate most members of the Jaffa Arab community as outsiders.

7 Conclusion

Given the contested nature of sacred places, it should come as no surprise that they are often used as a space for politics of alterity (Jazeel, 2005). In the context of ethno-national conflict, and within multiethnic states, minorities are inclined to use the sacred for promoting and performing their alterity through their own sacred sites as a form of resistance. The religious space is used as a spatiality for overthrowing (resisting) the hegemonic materialization of space through planning policies and deterritorialization of symbolic spaces which are deemed not consistent with dominant state logic. The sacred thus presents a spatiality which counters the hegemonic, and one where culturally marginalized characteristics may be presented, preformed, and spatialized. Religion is, indeed, used to assign a symbolic meaning over space (Ivakhiv, 2006), but in the case of minorities it is a counterhegemonic one. The religious space is used to deconstruct the hegemonic social order inscribed on nationalistic spaces and to replace such spaces with representations that are free of (or at least less constructed by) prevailing and hegemonic conceptualization of society and therefore space.

Sacred sites are highly instrumental for minorities and subordinate groups' formulation of resistance and politics of identity. Following the growing awareness among geographers of the relevance of religion in mundane and everyday politics, this study highlights the political nature of the sacred and its use as a nexus of identity formation and as a site of resistance to state agencies and planning policy. It outlines the changing sociocultural boundaries in and around the mosque and the different meanings assigned to it by different members of the minority community. Under a hegemonic secularizing state, and within the context of an ethnonational conflict, a dynamic meaning was formulated which allows an elaborate politics of identity. While negotiating the status and ownership of the mosque vis-à-vis the state and municipality, members of the Jaffa community were promoting a more inclusive 'nationalist' understanding of the place. Thus, it was considered an Islamic-Palestinian sacred site and part of the minority heritage. This allowed more people to identify and participate in the struggle over the sacred. Internally, this conceptualization was not viable. In the community context, more restricted religiously based boundaries were formulated. Thus, new definitions of insiders and outsiders were formed and new meanings and politics are constantly debated.

The (hi)story of the mosque also calls to attention the role of religion and symbolic sites in the construction of national identity. In a rather similar fashion to their Zionist counterpart (Azaryahu and Kellerman, 1999), Palestinians are invoking new and elaborate meanings through sacred sites as part of the national building process. Since the very beginning of the struggle to reclaim the mosque a very complex play has been taking place between the efforts to preserve the mosque as an icon of the Palestinian cultural heritage and its original religious Islamic identity. This intricate process has been unfolding along with the changes that were (and still are) taking place within the Arab-Palestinian community of Jaffa and Israel at large. Initially, the fight over the mosque was promoted as a solely religious one and hence the place was conceived only as a mosque, naturally attracting Muslim members of the community. During the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s under the Rabita a more inclusive and nationalistic understanding emerged which rendered the mosque part of the symbolic landscape of the Palestinian cultural heritage. Thus, a new all-encompassing understanding was promoted and duly broader sociocultural boundaries were established. But while the Rabita was advocating a secular national understanding of the mosque the newly established Islamic Council of Jaffa offered a religiously based interpretation of the mosque and eventually restored and reestablished its function as a religious institute.

The emergence of new voices among Israeli-Palestinians embodied in the Northern Islamic Movement constitutes and attests to a new internal and external struggle. Since its inception in 1996 the movement has been promoting a nationalistic–religious understanding which promotes, on the one hand, more emphasis on Islamic values and an Islamic vision of society and, on the other hand, a religiously based ideology of Palestinian national identity. Thus, the mosque is at the same time an iconic manifestation of the Islamic and Palestinian components of the Palestinian minority identity and cultural heritage. Following this understanding, it would seem that the cultural-geographic reading of the rioters, who attacked the mosque (as mentioned in the preamble above), as a result of a suicide bombing in its vicinity, is rather similar to that of the contemporary keepers of the mosque. The very same traits that have halted the plan to annihilate the mosque and saved it from being wrecked—its various, greater than life, meanings—were in a sense those that provoked the aggressive and intrusive response on the part of Jewish majority members to it in response to dramatic events in its proximity.

Religion and religious places, as the convoluted story of the mosque of Hassan Bey reveals, are crucial and relevant in contemporary societies. Sacred sites therefore merit further investigations in different settings and within various political and sociocultural spheres.

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