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Palestinian Christians and Their Identity and Resistance in the Twentieth Century

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Each year as Israelis celebrate their Independence Day, Palestinians and Arabs within Israel and the surrounding Arab States remember *al-Nakba* (النكبة) or “the Catastrophe.” In a poem entitled “The Story,” Kemal Nasir tells a brief story of the lost dreams of the Palestinians who lost their state during the Israeli War of Independence, or their *Nakba*.¹ One thing that stands out about the poem is that it was written by a Palestinian Christian, one member of a roughly ten percent Palestinian Christian minority sprinkled throughout Palestine. In fact, Palestinian Christians have been often overlooked when it comes to the historiography of the Israel-Palestine conflict. They are often only briefly mentioned in studies of Palestinian resistance and Israeli-Palestinian relations, or only certain figures that were Palestinian Christians are mentioned (such as Khalil al-Sakakini).² However, to better understand the broader story of the Palestinians and their struggle to have an independent state, it is imperative to study Palestinian Christians alongside their Muslim counterparts. From many sources available, including the documents from the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), newspaper

¹ Kemal Nasir, “The Story,” *Famous Inspirational Poems*, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.inspirationalstories.com/poems/the-story-kamal-nasir-poems>.

² Greshom Gorenberg, “Foundation Myths,” *The Washington Post*, November 5, 2000, accessed March 20, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy-ship.klnpa.org/docview/409066196/881C2A0C3B8B4E55PQ/1?accountid=28640>. An example is the book, *One Palestine, Complete*, which heavily examines the role of Khalil al-Sakakini in Palestinian nationalism but does not elaborate much on other Christian involvement in forming Palestinian identity and their roles in the Palestinian resistance to Israel.

articles, speeches, and periodicals written in the mid-20th century, we can tell that Palestinian Christians, as a whole, were active members of the Palestinian community. In particular, they were ardent nationalists in promoting Palestinianism (and in some cases Pan-Arabism), and they worked and struggled alongside their Muslim brothers. Some have argued that it is important to show that the struggle of the Palestinians is not just a Muslim struggle; rather it is a joint Muslim-Christian struggle.³ This paper aims to reveal that Palestinian Christians were both socially and politically active throughout the 20th century in many ways, such as their involvement with Muslim-Christian Organizations, political activism, and in the creation of a Palestinian identity. By participating in the social and political process, Palestinian Christians played a crucial role in the history of Palestine and the Palestinian struggle for a state.

Many Palestinian Christians have historically felt a connection with the land that is presently Israel. This connection is felt not only by the fact that many Palestinian Christians have historic family roots in the area, but they also feel a Biblical connection as well.⁴ This should come as no surprise since all three major monotheistic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) have ties to Israel, in particular the city of Jerusalem. This connection with the land is also the source of many conspiracies theories that Christians have come up with that accuse Israel of destroying Christian holy sites in order to better control the population. One example of this is the road to Emmaus, which was the site where Jesus first appeared after his resurrection according to the Bible.⁵ One photographer who was trying to photograph the site found it was

³ Meir Litvak, *Palestinian Collective Memory and National Identity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 148, accessed January 28, 2015, <http://www.ship.ebib.com/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=515032>.

⁴ *A Survey of Palestine: Prepared in December 1945 and January 1946 for the information of the Anglo-American Committee of Inquiry*, vol. 2, *A Survey of Palestine* (Washington D.C.: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1991), 881.

⁵ Luke 24: 13-35 (New International Version)

occupied by new housing complexes and development projects.⁶ This only added to the evidence that Palestinian Christians use to try to justify their claims that their religious heritage is being destroyed.

With Jerusalem being one of the most central cities in the Christian faith, and the most likely to have Christian residents, it is important to note that Palestinian Christians have strong populations in cities other than Jerusalem. These cities include the West Bank cities of Bethlehem and Ramallah.⁷ Bethlehem, in particular, contains one of the largest populations of Christians in the West Bank.⁸ Jaffa is another city in modern day Israel that contains a segment of Palestinian Christians and it is most notably a center of anti-Zionist movements with the newspaper *Filistin* having its base there.⁹

It should be noted that the heaviest centers of the Palestinian Christian population is centered on cities and urban environments. This can be traced back to the Ottoman Empire as many Christians living in Palestine had a major role within the local economy and governments.¹⁰ Even as the Ottoman government began to lose control of its provinces during the late 19th century, Palestinian Christians' experiences in local governments and business led them to become prominent businessmen who would play a role in Palestinian economics and

⁶ Joseph C. Harsch, "Christians in Jerusalem," *The Christian Science Monitor*, August 26, 1980, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy-ship.klnpa.org/docview/1039139656/2824FA2FEABA4706PQ/2?accountid=28640>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Francis Bloodgood, "Palestine's Christian Remnant," *Christian Century*, 66, no. 42 (1949): 1227. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, Ebscohost, accessed April 10, 2015.

⁹ Gudrun Kramer, *A History of Palestine: From the Ottoman Empire to the Founding of the State of Israel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 91–92.

¹⁰ Baruch Kimmerling and Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People: A History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), 13.

government going into the Mandate period.¹¹ Another notable demographic statistic that can be of some importance is that marriage rates among Palestinian Christians were much higher than their Muslim counterparts in urban settings.¹² The general trend presented through this data and through historical means is that Palestinian Christian populations are often based in urban societies and, they are well integrated into local economies and political structures.

Palestinian Christians have also had a heritage of being fairly well educated. In *A Survey of Palestine*, a detailed study created in 1945–1946 on the demographic make-up of Palestine, it shows that Christians pride themselves in education and that they created Orthodox societies in Jerusalem, Jaffa, and Haifa to promote education.¹³ It is important to note that these organizations were formed in cities and in contrast, statistics from the time period show that most of the Arab education in Palestine was being done in rural communities. This is proven by the fact that the document stated that approximately 15,299 students were being enrolled in public schools in urban settings, whereas 34,334 students were enrolled in public schools in rural settings.¹⁴

Another demographic piece of information that is important to understanding Palestinian Christians is their denominational make up. Palestinian Christians are usually found to be either members of the Greek Orthodox Church or Roman Catholic Church.¹⁵ This is true for Christians that can be found in Galilee, the coastal Israeli cities, and as well in the West Bank.¹⁶

¹¹ Paul Lewis, “Jordan’s Christian Arabs, A Small Minority, Play a Major Role,” *The New York Times*, January 7, 1987, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy-ship.klnpa.org/docview/426397502/F1084395C0054E5CPQ/1?accountid=28640>. 3.

¹² *A Survey of Palestine*, 793.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 661.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 664.

¹⁵ Lewis, 3.

¹⁶ As’ad Ghanem, *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 2.

Regionalism and denominationalism played a major role in early Palestinian Christian politics as friction caused between the denominations and local alliances stressed relations amongst Christians.¹⁷ With Palestinian Christians having a diverse denominational make up and dispersed population focused heavily in some of the major urban areas in Israel/Palestine, one can see how they could have influenced Palestinian society in their respective areas. One of the most important ways they influenced their local societies and Palestinian ideology was through the use of newspapers.

Newspapers have played a crucial role throughout history, and in particular Middle Eastern history. This is no less the case than in Palestine during the Ottoman era up to the creation of Israel. The first newspaper founded in Palestine during the late Ottoman era was founded by two Christian cousins in Jaffa.¹⁸ The newspaper was titled *Filistin*, which means “Palestine.” By 1911, *Filistin* had the largest circulation in Palestine and was a leading voice against Zionism.¹⁹ Aside from promoting anti-Zionism, *Filistin* also focused on the Palestinian branch of the Greek Orthodox Church and their struggles in breaking off of the Greek Orthodox branch and becoming an independent church with an Orthodox background.²⁰ Other newspapers such as *al-Ahram* and *al-Karmil* also voiced their opinions, quite often taking strict sides, regarding the Zionist movement and Jewish immigration during the early 20th century.²¹ *Al-Karmil* took an ardent nationalist stance that promoted Arab unity while *Filistin* focused on anti-Zionism.²² By circulating newspapers, and with a rising literate population, the Christian

¹⁷ Litvak, 2.

¹⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Kramer, 93.

²¹ Rashid Khalili, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 135–136.

²² Kimmerling and Migdal, 93.

founders and editors of these newspapers were able to help to raise anti-Zionist sentiment as well as ideas of nationalism, and that Palestinians need to be unified in order to combat Zionism. Often, these newspapers were influenced by local elites and political leaders. This means that elitist ideology would spread via the newspapers to the general population.

One of the most famous and loudest supporters of the anti-Zionist movement was Khalil al-Sakakini, a member of the Greek Orthodox Church, who in 1909 founded the Dusturiyyah School in Palestine. This school was known in the region for teaching Arab nationalism in its progressive education system.²³ Al-Sakakini was a well-known scholar amongst the urban schools and throughout Palestine during the early twentieth century.²⁴ He joined the Arab Revolt in late 1930s in Hejaz where he composed the “Anthem of Arab Revolution.”²⁵ Many Arabs and Palestinians rallied around al-Sakakini’s nationalistic views in response to Zionist movements and Jewish immigration to Palestine. The anti-colonial sentiment that was sweeping through the region would also rally many Palestinians to voice their support for his nationalistic views. In order to cross the religious gap between Christianity and Islam and to show unity amongst Palestinian nationalists and Arab nationalists, al-Sakakini frequently met with Hajj Amin al-Husseini, who was the Grand Mufti in Jerusalem during the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶ This religious unity would prove to be an essential goal of Palestinian Christians throughout the mid-20th century.

²³ “Khalil al-Sakakini,” January 10, 2011, accessed March 23, 2015, <http://www.jerusalem-studies.alquds.edu/jers/210>.

²⁴ Harold Willoughby, “Archaeology and Christian Beginnings,” *Biblical Archaeologist* 2, no. 3 (September 1, 1939): 25- 26.36, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 10, 2015.

²⁵ Srayo, Shapiro, “Carrying the Arab National Torch,” *Jerusalem Post*, March 7, 1993, accessed April 2, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com.proxy-ship.klnpa.org/docview/321093393/28F28579E2154814PQ/2?accountid=28640>. 07.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 07.

Khalil al-Sakakini's work in education extended beyond his founding of the Dusturiyyah School in 1909 as he worked in numerous educational positions in Palestine and Egypt leading up to the Arab Revolt.²⁷ While an ardent anti-Zionist and Palestinian nationalist, he also campaigned for Pan-Arabism and a united Arab State.²⁸ This was not an uncommon theme throughout the region during the Mandate Period in the Middle East. Al-Sakakini was one of the most notable Palestinian Christians who advocated for nationalism and Arab unity reflected the sentiment among the common Palestinian citizens who were concerned for the well-being and future of their state. When asked about Zionism and the various riots in 1920s and anti-British movements, he is quoted saying, "The battle for Palestine is in full force... Victory is in the hands of God... If we live, we shall live with honour. If we die, we shall die with honour."²⁹ Al-Sakakini's vocalism stirred anti-Zionist sentiment and sent a message to the world, mainly the British, that the Palestinian people were staying in Palestine, and they were will to fight for it.

Khalil al-Sakakini's rhetoric and influences on Arab education that promoted anti-Zionism and nationalism was felt throughout the region. Some of his ideas were even carried into political and social organizations that were formed between Muslim and Christians throughout Palestine.

Muslim-Christian organizations became a very important part of the political and social spectrum during the early 20th century. Though the two faiths have historically had many conflicts with each other, for the most part, Palestinian Muslims and Christians were able to work together successfully to argue that Palestine is the rightful home of Palestinians. These

²⁷ "Khalil al-Sakakini"

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

groups centered mostly in urban areas where they could easily organize.³⁰ Jerusalem and Jaffa were the homes of some of the earliest Muslim-Christian Organizations in Palestine.³¹

These groups were extremely important in shaping inter-faith relations and showing combined strength to the British and the Zionists. There was a large increase in the membership of various groups during the Mandate Period.³² Many of the new members in the organizations were youth.³³ Youth involvement was important to both faiths, but especially to Christians. Many of the youth joining the groups came from an educated background which would be important if they were to play a meaningful role in Palestinian politics.

One notable characteristic was that these Muslim-Christian organizations often operated with much success in advocating for Palestine and representing all of the Palestinian people.³⁴ The coming together of the two faiths forced religious leaders from both religions to work together to make a joint organization to counter Zionism.³⁵ The religious leaders and other Palestinians were able to make a connection with the opposite faith often times through the shared belief in an Abrahamic God and having Jesus in both religions.³⁶ While there are different interpretations of Jesus in Islam and Christianity, Christians and Muslims both used him to show their shared heritage, despite religious differences. Palestinian Christians in particular, along with some Muslims, viewed Jesus as being Palestinian and representing the Palestinian struggle, a common view that is still held by some Palestinians to this day.³⁷

³⁰ Ghanem, 12.

³¹ Kramer, 202.

³² Kimmerling and Migdal, 87.

³³ Kramer, 202.

³⁴ Ghanem, 12.

³⁵ Kramer, 207.

³⁶ Anton Murra, "What do Palestinians Want for Christmas?" *Huffington Post*, December 16, 2014, accessed March 3, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/anton-murra/what-do-palestinians-want_b_6329524.html.

³⁷ Litvak, 108.

Muslim-Christian organizations were an example of how Palestinian Christians worked with Muslim Palestinians in order to create a sense of unity and Palestinian Nationalism. The organizations also placed Palestinian Christian leaders in the center of local politics.³⁸ Christians had already had a strong economic involvement in local economics, as discussed previously, which guaranteed that at some point, Muslim and Christians would have to work together if they hoped to secure or advocate for an independent Palestine.³⁹ Thus, Palestinian Christians were able to use these organizations to establish themselves on the political scene to defend Palestine. The impact of these organizations were felt early on in the conflict and even impacted Yassir Arafat as he is quoted saying, “We are in the frontier lands defending the Holy places of Christianity and Islam.”⁴⁰ The inclusion of Christians in official documents and statements by Palestinian Muslim leaders shows the success of these organizations in creating a Palestinian narrative and ideology of unity, not disunity.⁴¹

Muslim-Christian organizations were, for the most part, peaceful. However, after the Israeli War of Independence or *al-Nakba*, many of the Muslim-Christian organizations were dissolved because of the refugee crisis. As international focus was on the growing Cold War and the tension between Israel and the Arab states, Palestinians as a whole seem to have had less international focus during the mid-20th century except for in certain situations. During the mid-20th century there was an urge to create or revive some of the Muslim-Christian organizations,

³⁸ Kramer, 203.

³⁹ Kimmerling and Migdal, 75.

⁴⁰ Litvak, 141.

⁴¹ Admittedly, there were still tensions between radicals on both sides whom did not want to work together. Radical Islamists which wanted an Islamic government established in Palestine clearly were not fond of the Muslim-Christian organizations and formed their own in response. An example is the Young Men’s Muslim Association which took an Islamist stance on Palestinian affairs and was anti-Christian as well as anti-Jewish. See Kimmerling and Migdal, 97.

this time, not to prevent the creation of a Jewish state, but to advocate for the autonomy of Palestinians and their right to their lands.⁴² The interest in reviving these societies would peak during the 1970s after the 1967 War and the October 1973/Yom Kippur War, with the main interest in these organizations lying within young Palestinian Christians and Muslims.⁴³ The organizations took on much of the same rhetoric and they promoted the need for an independent Palestine, as well as regional nationalism. In particular these sentiments, for obvious reasons were felt most in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.⁴⁴

The new groups that were formed had more than just a political role in arguing for an independent Palestine. These groups filled an economic and social gap in the lives' of Palestinians who were displaced by the creation of Israel.⁴⁵ The groups brought people together that, collectively, shared the same problems created by the refugee crisis and various wars that had taken place. The groups helped to give people a sense of meaning and helped them define their place within Palestine, or newly Israel. Factions, both in and out of the organizations, rose when political views such as Marxism, socialism, conservatism, and nationalism were all combined.⁴⁶

While organizations made up of Palestinian Christians and Muslims were a source of unity for Palestinians. Other institutions helped to create a sense of identity, and often times, resistance to Israeli settlement of former Palestine.

⁴² Harsch

⁴³ Erika G. Alin, "Dynamics of the Palestinian Uprising: An Assessment of Causes, Character, and Consequences," *Comparative Politics* 26, no. 4 (July 1994): 479-498, accessed March 22, 2015. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/422027>.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* 483.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 485.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.* 485.

Palestinian Christians had had a heritage of respecting education and, as mentioned previously, many groups funded Christian students in some of the major cities in present day Israel and the West Bank. In Bethlehem, where there is a prominent Palestinian Christian population, there have been clashes between Israeli police forces and Palestinian Christian students at Catholic University. This should come as no surprise since many of the people involved historically in the Muslim-Christian organizations and other groups were youth. Another University that has been impacted by Palestinian Christians and has historically had clashes is Bir Zeit University near Ramallah. Bir Zeit was founded in the 1920s by Christians. Many newspapers and periodicals from the mid-20th century cite Bir Zeit as being a center for demonstrations and pro-Palestinian rallies. One article in particular states that it, “Thrives as a center for education and radical Palestinian ideology.”⁴⁷ This shows that journalists have taken note of where some of the sources of radical Palestinian nationalist thought was coming from and labeled the universities as being one of the sources.

Clashes at universities sometimes turned violent but Palestinian Christians, often times, had a reputation for being peaceful. Many journalists have noted the peaceful movements led by Palestinian Christians. In David Neff’s article for *Christianity Today*, titled “Peace in Palestine”, he highlighted that Palestinian Christians played a crucial role in promoting peaceful protest movements, in contrast to suicide bombings or other attacks on Israelis.⁴⁸ Another article that looks at non-violent movements in Palestine noted that there has been a culture of non-violence amongst many Palestinian Christians in their anti-Israeli movements, and that they have been

⁴⁷ James M. Wall, “Road to Emmaus,” *Christian Century* 94, no. 42 (1997) *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 10, 2015.

⁴⁸ Neff, David. “Peace in Palestine.” *Christianity Today* 37 no. 11, (October 4, 1993): 15. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 10, 2015.

joined by some Muslims.⁴⁹ A recent example of non-violent protest to Israeli occupation and military action was in the summer of 2014 during the Hamas-Israel conflict. Taybeh, a Palestinian Christian village in the West Bank, and home to the Taybeh Brewing Company, suspended their celebration of Oktoberfest in order to show unity with Gaza.⁵⁰ In fact a recent survey conducted in 2009 found that approximately seventy percent of Palestinian Christians wanted to live peacefully alongside Israelis.⁵¹

While peaceful movements were prominent throughout the mid-20th century, their violent counterparts were always not too far away. Violence was used by a minority of Palestinian Christians but it was not uncommon for Palestinian Christians to resort to violence. A Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon that had a prominent Christian population was raided during the Lebanese Civil War and was found to have weapons.⁵² In 1970, Christian nationalist sentiment and ideology also influenced Arab guerilla units who would go on raids into Israel.⁵³ Palestinian born Bishop Eliya Khoury in an interview in 1987 stated that Palestinians resist Israeli occupation much like various groups throughout Europe resisted the Nazi onslaught, even though Khoury is not for violent resistance.⁵⁴

As many people did oppose violent resistance to Israel, there were those Muslims and Christians who embraced it. One of the most prominent Palestinian Christians who embraced

⁴⁹ Bush, Trucly, "Non-Violence in Palestine," *Christian Century* 118, no. 12 (April 15, 2001): 5 *Religion and Philosophy Collection*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 10, 2015.

⁵⁰ Daoud Kuttab, "Palestinian Christian Village Cancels Oktoberfest," *Al-Monitor*, October 10, 2014, accessed February 2, 2015, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/10/palestine-oktoberfest-canceled-solidarity-gaza-war-victims.html#>.

⁵¹ Sammy Smoohe, "Arab-Jewish Relations in Israel: Alienation and Rapprochement," Washington D.C. *U.S. Institute of Peace* 2010, <http://www.usip.org/publications/arab-jewish-relations-in-israel>, 25.

⁵² James M. Markham, *The New York Times*, August 15, 1976, accessed January 25, 2015, <http://www.lexisnexis.com.proxy-ship.klnpa.org/hottopics/lnacademic>.

⁵³ Thomas Cosmades, "New Thought Stirring Islam," *Christian Century* 87, no. 38 (1970): 1133. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 10, 2015.

⁵⁴ Lewis, 3.

violent and extremist resistance was George Habash, the founder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). Habash was one of many Palestinian Christians who would play crucial roles in various pro-Palestinian groups that would use terroristic tactics to send their message. Other Palestinian Christians that joined Palestinian organizations was, Wadi Haddad (PFLP), Nayef Hawatmeh (Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine), and Kamal Nasir (PLO and close advisor to Arafat. Nasir was assassinated in 1973).⁵⁵

Of the men mentioned, Habash, was the most prominent. Known as al-Hakim, he gained support from various Palestinians and in particular students for his Pan-Arabism ideology.⁵⁶ Habash also promoted unity amongst Palestinians and Arabs through revolution that would lead to the liberation of Palestine.⁵⁷ Habash's ideology would gain the attention of many prominent Palestinian leaders such as Yasser Arafat. Habash's group, the PFLP, would play an intricate role in Palestinian politics throughout the 1970s as they would align, and then pull their alliances with the PLO. The trend of Habash's organization was that it would pull out of leadership roles or alliances if any policies were not in their favor.⁵⁸ This shows the stubbornness of the PFLP but also speaks to the importance of the specificity of policy to Palestinians when it comes to policy of reform and resistance. Habash also called on Arab states such as Iraq, Algeria, Yemen, and Libya to resist the Western imperialism (Israel) along with the Palestinians.⁵⁹ This shows that, though Habash, a Christian, was able to cross religious boundaries by using his nationalistic ideology as a common bonding characteristic, much like many other Palestinian Christians during the mid-20th century. Habash is also quoted saying, "When my land was occupied, I had

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Kimmerling and Migdal, 281.

⁵⁷ Ibid pp. 246.

⁵⁸ Norton and Greenberg, 61.

⁵⁹ "Arab Documents on Palestine and the Arab-Israeli Conflict," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 4, no. 2 (Winter 1975): 176, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.jstor/stable/2535859>, 176.

no time to think about religion.”⁶⁰ With this quote, Habash is clear that he is willing to put everything aside, including his faith, to fight for his home, which he did. The PFLP would be responsible for multiple airplane hijacking in the 1970s (such as the Dawson’s Field Hijackings) and would be responsible for a terrorist attack at Lod (now Ben-Gurion) International Airport in 1972.⁶¹ Some supporters of Palestine abroad, though they did not support terrorist attacks, understood why they were happening. In speaking of Hamas in the Gaza Strip, the co-founder of Palestinian American Churches for Peace said that he didn’t blame Hamas for their history of attacks against Israel.⁶²

Peaceful movements and sometimes violent acts have been a part of Palestinian Christians’ ways of advocating for Palestinian rights. However, in order to better understand the context in which Palestinian Christians fit into Palestinian society as a whole, it will be important to understand how the groups and events that have been discussed have helped shape Palestinian identity as a whole.

One historically noticeable trend in Palestinian politics is the open solidarity of Muslims.⁶³ The question for most moderate Palestinian Christians and Muslims is the role of faith and politics. Some Muslims and Christians have shown that they wanted to link faith to politics since the land of Palestine/Israel is in the heartland of Christianity and Islam.⁶⁴ Anwar

⁶⁰ Scott MacLeod, “Terrorism’s Christian Godfather,” *Time*, January 28, 2008, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1707366,00.html>.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Philip Farah, “Palestinian Christians Against the Occupation,” *Huffington Post*, May 1, 2012, accessed February 13, 2015, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/philip-farah/palestinian-christians-against-the-occupation_b_1466027.html.

⁶³ Robert Root, “Whose Holy Land?” *Christian Century* 65, no. 2 (January 14, 1948): 46 *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 10, 2015.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

Sadat even stated that Christians in the Middle East and Palestine have a role to play in the political/peace processes and said that they “are also a party to this stage.”⁶⁵

Palestinian Christians, during the mid-20th century would prove why Sadat said in 1978 they were a party on the stage of the peace process. During the mid-20th century, Arab political parties in the Occupied Territories and Israel were formed. Many of these parties dissolved due to internal factionalism, but parties such as Hadash (Arab) and Progressive Movement (Leftist) were formed to influence regional politics.⁶⁶ Christian political organizers who wanted an independent Palestine argued that if Palestine were to become independent, it should be a democratic secular state, thus addressing the concerns Christians had over what may happen if an Islamist government were to take over.⁶⁷ However, as secular ideas over how a Palestinian government should be run if given autonomy developed amongst Palestinian politicians, many politicians and intellectuals lobbied for the religious heartland of Israel. This does not mean that religion would be woven into the political structure of Palestinian government, but rather, a new Palestine would thrive as a center for religious learning for Christianity and Islam.⁶⁸ This is system would be similar to how the Shi’a learning centers in Najaf and Karbala in Iraq fit in within the context of Shi’a Islam.

Other Palestinian Christians, in particular intellectuals and professionals, kept traditional Palestinian ideals and often times sided with the PLO and Arafat.⁶⁹ Israeli economic policy

⁶⁵ Anwar Sadat, “Speech by President Sadat of Egypt explaining recent developments in Egyptian-Israeli talks,” (July 1978) quoted in IPS Research and Documents Staff, *International Documents on Palestine 1978* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1980), 481.

⁶⁶ Kimmerling and Migdal, 199.

⁶⁷ Alfred Sherman, “The Palestinians: A Case of Mistaken Identity?” *The World Today* 27, no 3, (March 1971): 109

⁶⁸ Root, 46.

⁶⁹ Thomas A. Indinopulos, “Yasir Arafat and the West Bank People,” *Christian Century* 92, no. 6, (February 19, 1975): 159, *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 10, 2015.

during the 1970s led to the downfall of agriculture in Palestinian and Israeli society which led to some Palestinian Christians throwing their support behind the PLO and other radical Palestinian factions as they faced economic crisis.⁷⁰ Political figures, such as the mayor of Bethlehem in 1977, Elias Frejj stated, “We cannot accept the Israeli military presence.”⁷¹ Military presence was a key in Palestinian Christian thought and local political leaders were able to connect Muslims and Christians based on this common belief that, at least, the Israeli military presence throughout the occupation period, must end.

Palestinian Christians also helped to shape Palestinian nationalism through politics. Local politicians would emphasize Arabism through the common Arab heritage and the Arabic language.⁷² Bishop Eliya Khoury stated in his 1987 interview that Christians are as Arab as Muslims and their political activism proves their sincerity.⁷³ Khoury, who at the time of this interview held the Christian seat on the Executive Committee of the PLO, shows that Christians, on local and regional political levels, were trying to prove their “Arabness”. Also, during the late 1970s and into the 1980s, the memory of Khalil al-Sakakini proved to be a rallying cry amongst Palestinian Christians. Memories of his championing of Palestinian nationalism helped motivate local politicians to cross religious boundaries and create a collective identity that included both Muslims and Christians in the Palestinian narrative.⁷⁴ The legacy of Palestinian Christian

⁷⁰ Alin, 481.

⁷¹ “West Bank Reception Cool for Begin Plan on Self-Rule,” *The Globe and Mail*, December 30, 1977, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/387075035?accountid=28640>.

⁷² Ghanem, 37.

⁷³ Lewis, 3.

⁷⁴ Shapiro, 7.

involvement in local politics can be seen to this day as Christians have held important seats within the Palestinian Legislative Council and in 1996; six seats were reserved for Christians.⁷⁵

Palestinian Christians have also gone beyond their Palestinian identity to try to gain support for their cause. They have resorting to just their Christian identity to try to gain empathy from the West since many of the countries involved in helping organize peace processes have Christian backgrounds or prominent Christian populations.⁷⁶ Palestinian Christians call on Christians to help them but also have brought out the point that they have a duty to Arabs, as well as Jews, if Jews were to be incorporated into a Palestinian state.⁷⁷ Overall, this plea to the West and Christian nations was another way the Palestinian Christians used their identity to attempt to affect political processes and in this case, peace processes.

Khalil al-Sakakini once stated that, “My aim is to make the Arab nation proud of being Arab.”⁷⁸ This quote refers to all Arabs, including Christians. Palestinian Christians have commonly expressed this same feeling of wanting Arabs to feel proud to be Arab. Acts of unity promoted Arabism and the pride of Arabism. Throughout the 20th century, there have been many times where Christians used acts of unity to promote nationalism and Palestinianism. One example of this can be seen during the Arab Revolt from 1936 to 1939 when Palestinian Christian women wore the veil to show unity with Muslims and that Arab culture is unified, despite religious differences.⁷⁹ During this time period, Christians focused less on

⁷⁵ Barry Rubin, *The Transformation of Palestinian Politics: From Revolution to State-Building* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 26.

⁷⁶ Marc Gopin, *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 139.

⁷⁷ Wilbert B. Smith, “The Arab Problem is a Christian Problem,” *Christianity and Crisis* 3, no. 14 (August 9, 1943):6-7 *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 10, 2015). 6.

⁷⁸ Shapiro, 7.

⁷⁹ Kimmerling and Migdal, 120.

interdenominational problems and deemphasized their religion in order to promote Arabic and Arab culture as a countering force to imperialism or occupation.⁸⁰

Protests and public gatherings were chances for Palestinian Christians to assert themselves as advocates of Palestinian nationalism and spread their ideas of what Palestine should become, if it were to gain autonomy. One such instance is in March 1977, when a massive demonstration took place on the fortieth day of mourning for a Yawm al-Arba'in, a Palestinian killed by Israelis. Palestinian Christians took to the streets to assert the Palestinian identity of Christians and Muslims.⁸¹ By asserting a Palestinian nationalist idea in a public place, Palestinian Christians were able to make their case as to why they too are as Arab as Muslims and why Arabs, regardless of religion, should be proud of being Arab. Some have argued that the reason why Palestinian Christians take ardent nationalistic views is that those views are the only way they could achieve equality if an Islamic government were to take over.⁸² Overall, Palestinian Christians sense of unity with Muslims and acts of unity help them create a shared narrative of both history and culture.

The Palestine National Charter, created in 1968 is another source for the effects of Palestinian Christians in the political and social realm. Examples of their impact can be seen in Articles 4 and 5 where Palestinianism is defined.⁸³ These definitions of what it means to be Palestinian often align with the same arguments Palestinian Christians have been making

⁸⁰ Ibid., 180.

⁸¹ "Press interview statements by "Sons of the Village" representative Kiwan describing aims of organization as defending Palestine land, asserting Palestinian identity, and creating a Palestinian mass movement capable of dealing with national issues," April 1978, quoted in IPS Research and Documents Staff, *International Documents on Palestine 1978* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1980), 450-451.

⁸² Shapiro, 7.

⁸³ Palestine National Council, "Palestine National Charter: Resolutions of the Palestine National Council, July 1-17, 1968," accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.icsresources.org/content/primarysources/PalestinianNationalCharter.pdf>.

throughout the first half of the 20th century. Article 16 also guarantees the freedom of worship which was also one of the goals of Palestinian Christians.⁸⁴ Article 12 states that “The Palestinian People believe in Arab Unity.”⁸⁵ This statement in the document is another key point that Palestinian Christians had argued throughout the 20th century. Throughout the 20th century, the question of Pan-Arabism in conjunction with Palestinianism was raised, particularly in the 1960s.⁸⁶ This is important to keep in mind as the shaping of a Palestinian identity for Christians and Muslims would be formed within the context of these two movements and would be impacted by both. This impact can be seen internationally as King Hussein of Jordan spoke in 1978 of the “Arabness” of Jerusalem.⁸⁷

Palestinian Christians, throughout their long history, have played a role in the politics and social aspects of Palestinian life, and the Arab-Israeli conflict. By having influence in educational systems, having influential political leaders, and by showing unity with Muslims, they have been able to shape the meaning of what it means to be a Palestinian. They are often outspoken and forgotten and further research needs to be done to address more specifics of their political and social activism. However, throughout this essay I have tried to bring to light the general roles that Palestinian Christians have played in the Arab-Israeli conflict, as well as their role in shaping Palestinian identity.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Richard W. Fox, “Protracted Jihad in Palestine,” *Christian Century* 86, no. 46 (1969): 1450. *ATLA Religion Database with ATLASerials*, EBSCOhost, accessed April 10, 2015.

⁸⁷ “Press interview statements by King Hussein of Jordan discussing the representation of the PLO and the consequences for the area if peace negotiations fail,” January 1978, quoted in IPS Research and Documents Staff, *International Documents on Palestine 1978* (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, 1980), 411.

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