Understanding the Development of Islamism and Islamic Fundamentalism from a Cultural-Logical Perspective: Social and Cultural Developments in a Palestinian Village on the West Bank

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The recent growth and apparent successes of the Islamic State and its apparent eclipse of al–Qa’ida have caused much concern around the world and have been the subject of much debate and discussion. Unfortunately, much of such debate and discussion is of limited value as it sees these organisations as separate, which they are as structures, rather than different particular manifestations of the same larger phenomena: the development of Islamism and Islamic fundamentalism.

This paper seeks inform such debate and discussion by presenting an ethnographic study illustrating to present a study of how local structures articulate with global circumstances to create recognisable outcomes on the ground: particularly the growth of Islamism (understood as a political project) and Islamic fundamentalism (understood as a religious project to return society and its members to posited original or correct teachings and practices of Islam). In this I show how political, social, and intellectual leadership by Islamists and Islamic fundamentalists is possible even when the success and standing of secular groups is great and their standing high, given appropriate structures and conditions. I aim to show how relations between secular and religious structures can change, how one or the other can become dominant, and thus how that dominance can change.

I have argued elsewhere (Kaim 1997, 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2005) that if we are to un-

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derstand the social and cultural implications of the integration of the whole planet into a single global system we must study the local level. This is the level at which action takes place, and it is through action that structure is connected to circumstance. The presentation is heavily ethnographic rather than theoretical. However, it follows the theoretical points outlined elsewhere (Kaim 1997, 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2013, 2014, 2015). It also builds on and extends the discussion of antecedent developments set out in Kaim (2005). As in that earlier study this article is concerned with the village of Tustas (not the village’s real name), which is a Palestinian village on the West Bank, situated in the Judean hills overlooking the Palestinian plain. It is a mixed Christian and Muslim village with a total population of approximately 1,000, about two thirds of which is Christian and one third Muslim. In particular I look at the development of Islamism and its relation to cultural logics.

The dangers of homogenising history and the limitations it places on our understanding are well illustrated by the surprise engendered by the growth of Islamism on the West Bank and the changes it has wrought on Palestinian national politics. The first Palestinian uprising (1987–1991) was important in this too. It was during that first intifada that the shape of the underlying Israeli–Palestinian conflict began to change, with changes particularly among Palestinians1. Until the uprising began there was no serious challenge from among Palestinians to the position of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) as the sole, legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. Since then, however, we find serious divisions between the PLO and Islamic militants, culminating on the de facto division of the West Bank and Gaza Strip between two Palestinian ‘Authorities’, one PLO and the other Hamas. Difficult as it may be to believe now, in the early years of the uprising many commentators believed that Islamist forces could not effectively challenge the secular nationalists such as the PLO for leadership of the movement against the Israelis. For example, even prominent experts such as Marshall (1989) and Taraki (1990) both argued this. As the case of Tustas shows, however, political, social, and intellectual leadership by Islamists was possible even in the early days of the uprising when the success of the PLO and associated secular groups was greatest and their standing highest. Moreover, it is not only possible in Tustas but also more generally, given appropriate structures and conditions. This has in fact been borne out by the growth of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB)–Hamas’ influence and strength in the territories, where Hamas has become the largest political movement after Fatah and is seen as the only movement capable of challenging Fatah’s political dominance.

1 Of course, there were also changes among Israelis but I shall not discuss them in any detail here.
The basic political fact in Tustas is that secular nationalists are exclusively Christian and religious nationalists are wholly Muslim. Christians overwhelmingly support the secular nationalist organisations of the PLO while Muslims support the MB–Hamas. More generally in the Palestinian national movement Muslims make up a significant proportion of the secular nationalists, though once again they constitute virtually all of the religious. However, the unchallenged dominance of the Muslim Brothers among Tustas’s Muslims is interesting in three respects. It allows us to understand relations between secular and religious politics and thus how one or the other can become dominant. It allows us to understand how that dominance can change. It also allows us to understand the social basis for one or the other’s growth and influence.

The structures of Tustasi society are important in explaining the dominance of the MB and Hamas. But there is a further point. Professional politicians understand that “all politics is local” and that those who forget this maxim will finally fall; unfortunately many social scientists are yet to understand the implications of this for their research. Often political conflicts and movements are analysed from the top down. General or national events, organisations, and activities are analysed and it is assumed that what occurs on the local level reflects these more general occurrences. However, study and understanding of the local level is crucial to understanding the national level. In an important sense national politics is a collection of many local politics. The national situation develops out of local activities and the efforts of local activists. It is the local significance of events that is the key to understanding why they have occurred and what they mean for higher levels. Despite this, however, study of the local level beyond the results of ballots is all too rare, partly because most social sciences are not well equipped to study local events and determine their local significance. But understanding of local developments and significance allows the discussion of complex issues which are often difficult to comprehend and to follow, not in the abstract, but in terms of the actual circumstances in which action takes place. This gives a deeper and clearer understanding of events and developments, their significance, and why they

2 Also, on a less abstract level, until recent years such overwhelming support for Islamists was unusual on the West Bank (as distinct from the Gaza Strip). The general reasons for the greater strength of Islamism in the Gaza Strip than on the West Bank have been argued to be the former’s more traditional social structure, greater isolation, and more extreme poverty (see, for example, Roy 1995). However, others such as Hammami (1997) have argued that rather than differences in traditional social structure or religious history Palestine Islamism offered a model of society and social behaviour particularly relevant in the face of the effects of Gaza’s particular integration into the Israeli economy.
occur in the way they do. The structures that explain the dominance of the MB–Hamas in Tustas are the same structures which influence the articulation of the wider Palestinian national politics on this local level. This, then, is a realisation of Edward Said’s call for a non-homogenising history, but one derived from my approach and its imperatives, not his; indeed, it illustrates by way of contrast my proposition (see Kaim 1997, 1998, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2013, 2014, 2015) that his approach paradoxically inhibits that which it is supposed to enable.

**Religion and National Politics: opposition and competition**

Not surprisingly for a political movement, Islamism is expressed in very different ways from one country to another, within a given state (Legrain 1990:175) and between different organisations in a state. The Palestinian Islamic movement is not simply an extension of, for example, the Iranian revolution, though some members may claim that as a model. The most important fact that Palestinians have had to face, unlike their comrades elsewhere, is the exceptional strength of nationalist ideologies among Palestinians generally and the absence of a Palestinian state structure.

In other countries Islamist groups have commonly sought state power as a prelude to ‘re-Islamising’ society. Initially, Palestinian Islamists of the Muslim Brothers aimed to resocialise the whole of society along Islamic lines through religious education, in order to create the preconditions for their desired Islamic order rather than to actively seize power (Taraki 1989:173; Legrain 1990:175). State power was to be sought after the national liberation of Palestine. In this, religious ideologies were subordinated to the powerful nationalism of the Palestinian movement. However, the intifada caused the MB to change its position on the priority of resocialisation over the seizure of state power. The liberation of Palestine came to be seen as the most urgent task because as long as the occupation continues Islamisation is not possible. The MB thus became a national Islamic group rather than the pan-Islamic group it had been.

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3 Related to this Tripp (1996) provides an interesting analysis of the dynamic operating between various logics of the state in the Middle East, the use of Islamic themes by Middle Eastern states, and oppositional Islamist movements. Further background on the nuances of similarities and differences between different Islamist movements may be found in Sidahmed and Ehteshami (1996), and Beinin and Stork (1997). Abu-Amr (1994) examines differing Islamisms in Palestine, namely the MB and Islamic Jihād, particularly looking at their origins, development, their differences and the relationship between them, and their political–religious orientations.
Despite the ‘nationalisation’ of most Palestinian Islamists, disunity between them and the secular nationalists is a serious problem for the Palestinian national movement. Generally, in both the religious and secular camps, unity is recognised as one of the most effective weapons against Israel and neither is willing as yet to abandon it. There is, however, opposition and competition between the secular nationalists and Islamists. In spite of their being able to form a broad front of alliances there have been many disagreements, rivalries, and occasional physical confrontations between groups of the two camps. From the late 1970s on Islamism rose due to the apparent success of the Iranian revolution and setbacks suffered by the PLO especially after its expulsion from Lebanon in 1982 (Marshall 1989; Satloff 1989). However, when the first Palestinian uprising began, the Muslim Brothers were faced with marginalisation and made a serious effort to establish an alternative current in the uprising. Hamas was created as an attempt to overcome this marginalisation by translating into daily and political practice the radicalism of MB discourse on the liberation of Palestine. Initially, Hamas appeared quite separate from the Palestinian nationalist movement. In particular, both nationally and in Tustas, Hamas asserted its influence at the expense of the secular PLO bodies and the United national Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU), and presented itself as an alternative leadership of the uprising while denying it was doing so. However, Hamas in particular rose to a new prominence through the uprising. It promoted campaigns for boycotts of Israeli goods, tax payments, licensing, and called strikes in direct competition with those of the PLO–UNLU. Activists in Tustas enforced these strongly, using direct violence against villagers and their property if the villagers did not observe Hamas directives. They especially targeted shopkeepers who did not observe the boycotts and strikes called by Hamas. Violence against people ranged from threats to severe beatings; attacks on property were most commonly achieved through setting fire to the shops and houses of those who followed PLO directives but not those of Hamas. In one particularly dangerous case the only shop in the village selling bottled gas (on which the whole village relies, there being no mains gas) was set on fire early one morning. The only thing that prevented a huge explosion was a routine Israeli army patrol seeing the fire and putting it out.

Hamas later reached accommodation with the Palestinian nationalist movement, though profound political differences remain. Rejection of the peace process and continued calls for the liberation of Palestine, the destruction of Israel, and the establishment of an Islamic state have seen Hamas resort to violence in direct opposition to the interests of the nationalists as represented by the PLO, presenting the national movement with a real crisis. For
their part the Islamists believe that the PLO’s efforts will founder and that the people will be left with no alternative but Islam. If they are to take leadership at that time they must participate in the anti-Israeli struggle now.

More directly, the relation of Israel to Islamist groups raised questions about those groups in the minds of many Palestinian nationalists. Israel sponsored such groups, particularly the Muslim Brothers, and acquiesced in their rise in order to challenge the nationalists (Satloff 1989; Graham-Brown 1984). Israel also attempted to present the Islamist movement in general as a serious challenge to the national movement and Hamas in particular as an alternative to the PLO (Taraki 1990). Not surprisingly, many nationalists believed that Hamas was incited or encouraged by the Israeli intelligence services to sow discord and disunity among Palestinians.

**Religion and national politics locally**

The complete allegiance of Tustas’s Muslims to the MB and Hamas (and their willingness to express that allegiance) makes sense in terms of the structures and dispositions of the village’s two communities. As a challenge to the secular policies of the PLO–UNLU associated with the Christians, support for the MB–Hamas plays on the wider opposition in Palestinian politics described above. The stress of the MB–Hamas on Islamic morality is also appropriate as a method of promoting communal unity and orthodoxy in opposition to the manifest heterodoxy of the Christians.

Religious affiliation is important both in terms of identifications made in the village itself and in the wider context of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. It is true that while religious affiliation has an obvious role in identification among Palestinians, that role is primarily one of differentiation and distinction and as such does not lend itself to the national political mobilisation of the population as a whole. In fact, attempts to mobilise people along religious lines would be divisive, as the PLO’s secular policy admits. The majority of politically active Christian youth in Tustas use global or international (and non-religious) discourses such as those of communism and secular nationalism to express their political desires and to stake their claims. Young Tustasi Muslims, however, use and express themselves in religious or semi-religious terms such as using interpretations of verses from the Qur’an to predict the inevitable destruction of the State of Israel by Muslims, and arguing that a holy war (jihād) is necessary. Such terms exclude non-Muslims and are a source of con-
stant concern among Christians, who see them as threatening their position as a minority within the struggling Palestinian population as well as threatening the secular stance and campaigns of the PLO. They also cause concern about whether there will be a place for Christian Palestinians in any future independent Palestinian state, because Hamas’ goal is the liberation of Palestine to allow the establishment of an Islamic state and society. Indeed in Hamas’ charter Islam is required to be central to all Palestinian national efforts. The charter also says that there is no solution to the Palestinian problem except jihâd and that Palestine is an Islamic land so that no portion may be ceded to non-Muslims (Journal of Palestine Studies 1993).

There has been a development of interest in Islam among Tustasi Muslims since the late 1970s, the same period over which interconfessional visiting has declined. Leading members of the Muslim Brothers in the village say that this has come about through disillusionment with the USA, Europe, the former USSR, and even the UN as well as ideologies such as secularism, nationalism, socialism, and communism. According to Amin, a teacher at the government school and the leading Muslim Brother in the village,

in the past the people trusted the West, the USA and Europe, to help them in their struggle with the Jews [sic], but without benefit. The British gave the land to the Jews and from 1948 until the present day there has been no further progress. Some people turned to communism but the USSR did not give any real assistance either. The Middle East merely became a market for arms and an arena in which the rivalries of NATO and the Warsaw Pact could be played out. The Palestinians even trusted the UN and especially the five permanent members of the Security Council, but to no avail. For all their talk of human rights none was realised here. The people had thus tried all the available roads except one. That which had not been tried was Islam. Thus, in the past ten years the people have begun to return to their religion [i. e., Islam].

This “return to religion” and the rise of fundamentalism or a religious politics among the Muslims has been a source of real concern for the Christians. They fear that if the more extreme Islamist elements gain influence once a Palestinian state is established the Christians’ position will be at best unenviable and at worst they will be exterminated as a group. A story circulated in the village saying that shortly after the intifada began Muslims in mainly Christian Bait Jalla (near Bethlehem) had gone from house to house telling Christians “you must convert, you must convert. We don’t need any Christians here.” The
threat contained in the story is that a fully Palestinian state will have no place for Christian Palestinians and that just as the Israelis will have been driven out so will Christians. The Christians of Tustas feel acutely any Muslim accusations that their Christianity somehow reduces their commitment to Palestine or to fight for Palestinian liberation, or that it gives them a ‘special’ relationship with the Israelis, as they were accused of after an attack on the village by Israeli settlers (Kaim 2013), for example. Interestingly, however, although this story was told with passion in the Christian community, it was often accompanied by the comment that “our Muslims” (i.e., Tustas’ Muslims) are fine and good, contrasting harmonious relations within the village with problems outside it. Privately, Christian villagers admitted that if an Islamic state was established in Palestine “there would be many problems for the Christians and we should be able to do nothing to protect ourselves because we are a minority.” At the same time they publicly denied any deep differences between Christian and Muslim Palestinians by referring to common history, customs, life, and even nationality (“we are all Palestinians”). In this avowal of historical, customary, existential, and national commonality with Muslim Palestinians the Christians do two things. Firstly, they invoke a local dogma of harmony and unity in the village in contrast to the outside. Secondly, they deny that their religion is a threat to the unity of the wider national movement, which is dominated by Muslims (as is the Palestinian population at large).

The fears of the Christians are summed up in the phrase “after Saturday comes Sunday”, which circulates widely through the Christian community. There are a number of stories accounting for its origin, but they all share common characteristics: non-Tustasi Muslims met in a centre of Christian population outside the village, usually Bethlehem or Jerusalem, to decide what to do after the Six Day War, which they thought they would win, and decided that once the Israelis were driven out Christians would have to be as well, giving birth to the phrase, Saturday being the Jewish holy day and Sunday the Christian holy day. For example, Abu Faraj, told me that that it originated at the time of the Six Day War. When my sister was living in Bethlehem Muslims met in a house to decide what they would do when they won (as they thought they would) and said, ‘After Saturday comes Sunday,’ meaning, of course, that once the Israelis were vanquished it would be our turn.

4 While the great majority of Palestinians are (Sunni) Muslim approximately 7 percent are Christian, and a further 2 per cent are Druze.
In this story too the threat to Christians is displaced outside Tustas and its community to Bethlehem, so maintaining the village dogma of interconfessional harmony.

Tustasi Muslims strongly deny any harassment by Muslims of Christians to convert or that there would be no place for Christians in Palestine after the Israelis had been expelled. In the words of Jawad, a young Muslim in his late twenties and an enthusiastic supporter of Hamas, “the people who say such things and harass Christians are not true Muslims and are not supporters of Palestine. They are people who want to cause disturbances and strife among the people and thus weaken the struggle.” Here again unity in the national struggle is paramount and religious differentiation is seen as weakening that unity.

Thus there is a denial on both sides of the religious divide of conflict both between the confessions and in the village as such, leading to statements that “relations between all the families are good,” or that there have never been Christian-Muslim conflicts, per se, in the village. The recurrence of an idea of a lack of differentiation (especially economic differentiation) in the village contributes to a strong sense of commonality among the villagers. This is reinforced by the also frequently mentioned sharing of customs between all groups in the village. Members of both confessions subscribe to this evocation of commonality based on the absence of confessional strife, the sharing of customs, and, a further feature, the common experience of difficult circumstances such as hunger and hardship.

The idea that there have never been outright Christian-Muslim disputes in the village, together with ideas of shared historical experience and customs, are very important for the identifications made by members of both confessions. They are local elements important especially in establishing village identity. More than this, however, these local elements also feed into and support claims for a common national identity and politics not threatened by religious divisions. Global5 elements are also used by Tustasis, especially in wider contexts than that of the village and its community, for example, in developing notions of

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5 My distinction between ‘local’ and ‘global’ terms, elements, or discourses should not be taken to imply any dichotomy or ontological separation of the two any more than authors using such terms as ‘great’ and ‘little’ traditions are guilty of developing such rigid structures. Such labels are, rather, merely heuristic tools designed to express and ease understanding of the fact that social actors make use, in continuo, of terms, elements, and discourses of wider or narrower relevance and of greater or lesser exclusivity. Rather than trying to make a rigid distinction between the two the use of these terms indicates an awareness of such continuity.
'Palestinian-ness' as a nationality.

On the national level both Muslims and Christians see oppression by the Israelis as common to all sectors of Palestinian society without discrimination. This is seen as outweighing religious differences and making such differences irrelevant for the purposes of the national struggle. It is argued that all Palestinians are united by sharing the experience of dispossession and oppression by the Israelis. It is also emphasised that any divisions among Palestinians themselves threaten the continuation and success of the struggle itself. Religious terms of identification are a particular problem because of their divisive potential. On both the national and the local levels of Palestinian politics they must be subordinated to 'shared historical experience' in order to overcome that divisiveness. Given this necessity of the subordination of religious differences the local struggle for dominance in Tustas between the Christian secular nationalists and Islamists presents a particularly serious political and social problem which must be overcome. This is achieved through the dogma of inter-religious harmony and unity referred to above.

This dogma of intra-village harmony is given extra force by presenting the harmony not only as a feature distinguishing the village from other present-day Palestinians, but by saying that it has always been so, throughout history, thus making it appear a natural, unchanging, and unquestionable fact of village life. This is done by referring to a division of the village into two groups formerly found across Palestine: the qais and yaman.

This division does not operate today, but existed until recently, becoming redundant in the nineteenth century and the early part of this century. Until that time, power and political activities throughout Palestine were based in families and extensive alliances and affiliations were built up over wide areas. The division into qais and yaman was the most extensive of these systems of the political affiliations of families.

Because power and politics at that time were based in kinship structures and relations po-

6 Indeed, Muslih (1988) has located the origins of Palestinian nationalism in the politics of Palestinian notable families and their enhanced economic, social, and political status and power as a result of Ottoman reforms from the middle of the nineteenth century, European economic penetration, and economic expansion. Additionally, Khalaf (1991) has implicated the continuation of pervasive factionalism based on kin cleavages and links into the twentieth century in the collapse of Palestinian society in 1948. On the connection between factionalism and class structures see Tamari (1982).
litical relations were expressed using kinship terms. The names qais and yaman derive from two ancient tribes of Arabia of which yaman is regarded as the older and qais the younger (Patai 1962: 183). The people saw themselves as descendants of the ancient tribes which bore these names. Alliances such as those expressed through these terms were necessary historically as the state was weak and inter-factional warfare was common throughout Palestine (Johnson 1982; Owen 1981; Hoexter 1973). The strengthening of the state under the Ottomans and British reduced the need for these alliances to ensure local security, and economic changes similarly made them unnecessary for economic relations. Today kinship relations are irrelevant to the economic activities of the individual labouring for wages, while the fact that the parties of the Palestinian national movement have fully national reach means that they are irrelevant to macro-level political organisation also.

Throughout the Middle East the division of recognised groups, communities, or areas into two parts or factions was common. Groups belonging to different sects or even religions were often part of the same faction and, conversely, members of the same sect or faith were divided between both factions; similarly, where there were politically significant kin divisions they were commonly cut across by qais-yaman affiliation (Patai 1962: 180) (see diagram 1, below).

![Diagram 1](image_url)

**Diagram 1**

General Middle Eastern alliance configuration

In Tustas, religious links were undermined, but kin links were not. The Ghazal were allied with dar Ishaq, while the Faras were allied with the Wazir and Nabulsi (see diagram 2, below). Because whole clans were contained in either qais or yaman the alliance system

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7. On the cultural context in which claims of kinship were used to legitimate political claims, schisms and violence see also Hoexter (1973).
in no way undermined the locally significant *kin* divisions; rather it incorporated them without division. On the other hand, by dividing the two Muslim clans from each other and the two Christian clans from each other and allying one of each religion with one of the other religion, the system did undermine the significance of religious affiliation for political purposes.

Both Muslim and Christian villagers see this division as the basis on which they have had peaceful relations throughout their history of cohabitation, in contrast to the surrounding villages, Palestine as a whole, and the world in general. Historically, as soon as any dispute or conflict between individuals or groups of the two different religions arose in the village the system of cross-cutting alliances would come into play, preventing Muslims from being pitted against Christians and vice versa. By this very fact, such disputes were not

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8 Political warfare among Palestinians gradually lost its effectiveness under the British as the state structure was strengthened. After 1967 and until recently it was particularly circumscribed owing to the effective system of control imposed by Israel and the fact that any widespread violence would invite the intervention of the Israeli authorities. Israeli occupation, recognised as an external threat, also provided a focus for solidarity contributing to the limitation of intra-Palestinian political violence. It is not surprising, then, that Tustasis (as Palestinians more generally) saw advantages in limiting conflicts among themselves. The profound violence perpetrated among Palestinians during the intifada and afterwards by groups such as the Red Eagles was a real departure from the previous situation. To the extent that the intifada itself was a limitation of Israeli control by Palestinians it opened a space for the activities of such vigilante groups. Now, of course, the PLO and Hamas’s security forces are accused of oppressive brutality, though this is violence by the ‘state’ against its people, rather than political warfare among Palestinians.
Muslim–Christian conflicts per se. This has created a tradition of religious harmony within the village because there are no examples that villagers can draw on of conflicts between the two religions. This tradition of harmony in turn constrains political activists today by making Muslim–Christian conflicts seem unnatural and alien to the village. Thus the current importance of the qais–yaman system of alliances does not lie in its continuation to the present day. Rather, despite the fact that it is no longer operative, or indeed because it is not, it is used to support the notion that relations between Christians and Muslims in the village are, and always have been, peaceful and harmonious. It is important as a rhetoric because it produces an overt local politics in which the terms ‘Muslim’ and ‘Christian’ are not salient. Through this the struggle between the secularists and religious activists is made covert, defusing current tensions in, and disguising, the Christian–Muslim struggle for dominance in the village and making it less threatening to the unity of the national effort to oust the Israelis.

In the nineteenth century the qais–yaman opposition was used to legitimise political struggles in kin terms. Today it is used to disguise religio–political contests. This difference relates to the transformed nature of the circumstances in which Palestinians now find themselves. As we have already discussed the Palestinian confrontation with Israel is nationalist. Palestinians have made national unity central to their struggle. Religious divisions are a threat to that unity and so cannot be accepted as legitimate without placing the national struggle in jeopardy by undercutting the dominant political opposition of ‘Palestinian’ and ‘Israeli’. Rendering the terms ‘Christian’ and ‘Muslim’ insignificant in local politics resonates with the wider national politics, and preserves the ‘national’ nature of the local effort. This is useful for the Muslims supporting Hamas in view of misgivings and suspicions in the wider Palestinian population about Hamas’ loyalty to the national movement. However as we saw earlier, the Christians cannot afford to have their loyalty to the national effort openly challenged either. Thus, it is in the interests of both groups that they not be seen as working against the national movement. In the nineteenth century the qais–yaman opposition created patterns of alignments in which inter–regional or village disputes would not disrupt the solidarity of the village. Today, the idea of the qais–yaman opposition serves a similar purpose of preserving village solidarity in the contemporary, different context of domination by a strong state.

9 See also Tamari (1982).
Local relations between religious and political divisions

Even though the religious idiom is not appropriate or available for general or interconfessional mobilisation religious divisions affect political activities in Tustas. For about one month after an attack on the village by Israeli settlers (Kaim 2013), activities associated with the uprising were drastically curtailed, and even when they were resumed they did not reach the same level as before the attack. It was the opposition of Hamas which prevented a resumption of political action. The basis of that opposition was Hamas’ opposition to the secular nationalism of the PLO and associated groups and its demands for a religious and Islamic state. This caused difficulties in co-ordinating action between the PLO and Hamas generally, and in Tustas also.

The total dominance of the MB–Hamas among Tustas’ Muslims and the political adherence of the Christians to the PLO poses great problems of co-ordination and has turned the village into a scene of contest between the two camps for dominance and for the opportunity to project the successful one’s political campaign.

In the struggle for dominance in the village the Christians of Tustas are at a disadvantage in that their political, kin, and religious divisions inhibit organisation. In such a situation seemingly minor questions can have great political importance and cause passionate argument. This occurred at the funeral of the villagers killed in the settlers’ attack. Muslim activists demanded that the bodies be wrapped in Palestinian flags and that nationalist emblems and symbols be incorporated into their funeral and subsequent memorial service. Nationalist activists opposed these demands. Elsewhere such questions are not problematic and would have been done as a matter of course, but in Tustas became highly charged issues. They were significant because while the emblems and symbols were nationalist the villagers who died were not nationalists but Islamists. Thus, if the nationalist emblems and symbols were used they would honour Islamist activists who did not work for the secular Palestinian state that those symbols and emblems represent, but for a religious, pan-Islamic state and order. The use of the symbols would allow the Islamists to strengthen their claim to represent Palestinian nationalism and would compromise the secularists’ position, through the PLO, as the sole legitimate representatives of that nationalism. Recognition of the Islamists’ claim would threaten the Christians’ place in the national movement and threaten the position of secularism on the national political agenda, and could see secularism and the Christians weakened and made peripheral, perhaps paving the way for
their defeat and removal or oppression.

Christian Tustasis’ self-consciousness as a fragmented religious minority and their interests as such explain their alliance with the heterodox and secular PLO. However, while the secularism of the PLO promises to protect their long term interests by separating religion and politics, the factional nature of the PLO accentuates rather than reduces their political divisions.

An important factor in the fragmentation of the Christians, apart from the religious and kinship factors that I have already referred to, are the socio-economic developments where the increased economic independence of the individual undermines not only the ties of the individual to his relatives, but because communal ties are also traditionally expressed through kin connections, serves to undermine the ties binding the community together also.

Of course, the Muslims of Tustas are subject to the same socio-economic developments and forces which are undermining communal ties among the Christians. Unlike the Christians, however, they are united and resist the fragmenting influences of those forces. Their kinship affiliations provide one way to express unity, and their religion another, neither of which are viable in this role for the Christians. In both these idioms (the kin and the religious) the Muslims can not only express and reinforce unity but they can do so in opposition to the Christians and their fragmentation, which further reinforces that unity and turns it into a mark of their distinctiveness as Muslims.

However, Hamas similarly provides a political structure and idiom which allows the Muslims not only to express and reinforce unity but to do so in opposition to the Christians. Through the imperative of maintaining religious unity, pressure is brought to bear through Hamas for political unity in a way and to a degree that secular political parties such as those in the PLO cannot achieve, because of the deeper root of religion in the individual’s socialisation from childhood. Adherence to Hamas in the political arena therefore complements the kin and religious factors keeping the Muslims united. Hamas is a single organisation, provides one orthodox view of politics and what needs to be done and does not admit any alternative views, is religious, and is explicitly opposed to the PLO and parties associated with the peace process. Thus, in all three socially important areas—politics, kinship, and religion—the Muslims enjoy structures that allow them to express, practise, and even enforce, unity, and to deny any political, religious, or kin alternatives. In contrast, the
political organisations supported by the Christians are varied, often opposed to each other, express a heterodox variety of political creeds and ideologies, and are secular. Thus, in all three areas—politics, kinship, and religion—the Christians lack any structures to express, practise, or enforce unity. It is not surprising therefore that the Christians have fallen victim to the individualising and fragmenting influence of socio-economic developments.

Of course, religion must be of practical use in political understanding or mobilisation if it is to play a political role at all. This comes from a number of sources. Through its base in the individual in socialisation from childhood, religion becomes an integral part of the individual’s self-identity and understanding. It also provides an expressive vocabulary and series of images, concepts, and allusions through which past religious leaders, events, and struggles can be used to provide emotive parallels with, and paradigms for understanding, the present. In Islam categories of conflict and struggle, particularly those of *shahīd* (martyr), and *jihād* (holy war), are especially powerful because of their importance as part of the cultural logics of that religion. However, they are also important in that their integration into the individual’s most basic understanding means that they can be used to mobilise individuals to action and self-sacrifice for political ends, if those political ends are defined in religious ways. Not surprisingly, the Islamic idiom in Palestinian nationalism...
emphasises these categories at the same time as it leaves them ambiguous (Johnson 1982: 94). This is happening in Tustas. Two examples will suffice to demonstrate the practical importance of religion and terms from the religious idiom in the political rhetoric and mobilisation of Muslim Tustasis. These are the use of the idea of martyrdom, and millenarianist political visions.

Tustasi Muslims use the concept of martyrdom almost wholly in its religious sense. Expressing views shared by virtually all his fellow Muslims in the village, in discussing the unrest and the people’s motivations and actions, Abu Ahmad, a Muslim shopkeeper of about forty years of age, said that, “Our faith in God is the source of our strength. It is that which allows us to struggle and change the situation. Nationalism is secondary to this. It is religion which makes us strong and shall give us victory. Basically we want to die more than the Israelis want to live and because of this we shall continue this struggle and prevail over them.” Or, as Ziad, a member of the Muslim Brothers of about thirty years of age, said “we want to die. For Muslims, anyone who dies in this struggle to put things right is a martyr and will go to heaven. This makes us irresistible and means that our cause cannot fail.” Christians, on the other hand, did not invoke the idea of martyrdom to explain why there should be an eventual victory by the Palestinians. They preferred to put their faith in political organisation and pressure, arguing that victory would come because the Palestinian movement was a genuinely popular movement boasting a genuinely democratic organisation. Some even went so far as to deride martyrdom as a wholly Muslim idea and a naive and reactionary one at that. They did recognise, however, that it had a great and potentially dangerous motivational power precisely because “the Muslims want to die and feel that if they fight at the admonition of their religious leaders, struggle and death have the sanction of religion, and that if they die they will go to heaven.”

Among Tustasi Islamists religion is not only used directly to mobilise individuals to participate in the political movement through ideas such as martyrdom, but also to prophesy (and claim) the future. One of the most common ways to do this is to apply millenarianist interpretations to verses from the Qur’an. “The Cow” is especially enthusiastically interpreted to indicate the inevitable nature of the destruction of the State of Israel and the creation of a Muslim State in Palestine. This verse is universally interpreted by Tustasi Muslims to mean that it is inevitable that Muslims will succeed in overthrowing the current State of Israel and expel the Israelis. The interpretation has strong mobilising power and is often made during sermons in the mosque, at public gatherings, and was made by
one of the prime Hamas activists in a graveside commentary at the memorial service for those killed in the attack by Israeli settlers.

Such a practical importance of religion in the pursuit of political ends for the Muslims is not, perhaps, surprising given the often repeated axiom that Islam does not separate politics from religion. This idea is stated explicitly by the Muslims as distinguishing them from Christians and Westerners. It is also stated explicitly by the Christians, who recognise it as a distinctive feature of the Muslims and one which makes co-operation with the latter difficult.

By contrast, among the Christians, as we have seen, religion is not important for achieving political ends; indeed, it cannot be used because there is a radical separation between the two. It is in the Christians' interest to separate politics and religion in order to promote a secular nationalism. Only a secular nationalism can guarantee the Christians full rights or equal consideration in a future Palestinian state. Religion becomes important politically only in so far as they feel themselves threatened by the prospect of religious Muslims gaining the upper hand or having excessive influence in such a future state.

For Tustas's Muslims, in opposition to the secular nationalism of the Christian villagers, the use of Islam provides a high degree of group boundary maintenance and solidarity based on ideas of religious difference and the themes of unity and fragmentation. It provides for enhanced group consciousness and solidarity. These features are encapsulated in their contrasting characterisation of the Christians as having 'one hundred religions'.

Nationally, the Islamic idiom of the MB–Hamas emphasises moral renewal in the face of a claimed failure of secular ideologies and parties to secure national liberation. It therefore allows the individual to take up a cause and states that there can be no other way; hence its orthodox shape. This is done by linking cosmology, history, the group, and the individual in opposition to encroachment and oppression. This works in the specific conditions of Tustas also. There, however, as well as mobilising the Muslims in an orthodox political structure for the national struggle it opposes itself to the heterodox and secular mobilisation evident among the Christians. Among the latter, because of their denominational divisions religion cannot serve the same role even in political mobilisation among themselves.

Thus, in the context of Tustasi Muslims' dispositions, adherence to a single party has ob-
vious advantages within the village as a direct expression of unity. There are added advantages in Hamas being a Muslim organisation. These advantages are oppositional: it excludes Christians and its very religious rhetoric opposes it to the secular parties supported by the Christians. But the arrangement is not simply a Muslim–Christian opposition. Because of the social–structural features in place it is also an opposition between heterodox and orthodox structures or, in other words, those (such as the PLO) which admit the possibility of alternative ways and methods and those (such as Hamas) which do not.

Orthodoxy only exists in opposition to heterodoxy, and this is a structural aspect of the appeal of Hamas to Tustas’s Muslims. Hamas is appealing precisely because by being a Muslim organisation it excludes the Christians at the same time as opposing them. This opposition is manifested in its constitution as a single and religious political force in contrast to the multiplicity of secular groups among the Christians. Thus, in the political arena we find replicated the differentiations found in the religious and kin realms. The unity of the Muslims (with one religion, ancestor, and political organisation) is opposed to the plurality of the Christians (with ‘one hundred religions,’ diverse ancestry, and several political organisations). Radical differences between the political groups supported by the Christians are celebrated by them as showing their democratic credentials. A further elaboration of this opposition is found in the location of all the ‘Christian’ forces in the ‘democratic’ PLO while Hamas is found outside it (and indeed in real opposition to it).

Thus, locally there is a potentially complicated articulation of oppositions between Muslim and Christian; secular and religious; foreign contamination and Islamic purity; democratic pluralism and political singularity; inside the PLO and outside it. That articulation is made through an orthodox opposition to heterodoxy. Common to the articulating opposition of orthodoxy/heterodoxy and the other, articulated oppositions, however, are the themes of unity and fragmentation. These themes indeed are fundamental cultural logics through which sense can be made even of seeming anomalies such as local Muslims’ complete allegiance to Hamas.

While other commentators are surprised at or deny the potential for religious groups to assume leadership of the Palestinian national movement, a cultural–logical approach is more flexible in this matter. The adherence of Tustasi Muslims to Hamas is explicable in terms of their disposition to orthodoxy and that disposition is explicable in terms of the cultural logics discussed. Other authors have understood, as MB–Hamas activists did some long time before, re-socialisation is a key attractor but have not explained in all but
the most general terms why this should be so. In Tustas the disposition to orthodoxy explains the appeal of an organisation concerned with re-socialisation conceived of as a cleansing of the people from ‘foreign’ contamination and to which there are no alternatives. Of course, I am not saying that the same circumstances and dispositions will be replicated across Palestine and Palestinian society, though undeniably perception of Hamas as a national opposition to the PLO is strengthened by the former’s very orthodox opposition (both politically and perceptually) to the disarray, ineffectiveness, corruption, oppressiveness and weakness towards Israel of the latter. I hope, however, to have demonstrated the feasibility and something of the explanatory utility of the cultural-logical approach and how it, more than text-based criticisms, avoids homogenisation by anchoring discussion to individuals and groups. Laborious they may be, but after a generation of work inspired by Said’s approach in which any reduction in “Orientalism” has been more than matched by the production of “Occidentalism” and the dangers of treating life and society as if they were texts rather than texts as products of life and society, it is such subject-centred local studies which hold the key to successful “anti-homogenisation”. In addition, this alternative approach makes clear that given appropriate circumstances religious groups can indeed successfully challenge the secularists in the Palestinian national movement.

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