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THE DYNAMICS OF COEXISTENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Negotiating Boundaries Between Christians, Muslims, Jews and Samaritans

Julia Droeber

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1

INTRODUCTION: NABLUS AS RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL SPACE

When I for the first time went to speak to the minister of the old Anglican church in the Old City of Nablus, I was surprised to hear that the Church had actually given land to the Muslim community to build a mosque. As a result, I was able, while standing in the church yard, to see the minaret of that particular mosque right opposite. This was not the first time I was struck by such architectural closeness: my research stay in Jordan provided me with a similar picture, as I have explained elsewhere (Droeber 2005). Yet, while the research I conducted in Jordan focused on Muslims alone, I had come to Nablus to research the three different religious communities in the city: Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans. And while in Jordan I quite naively took this image as a beautiful symbol for the peaceful coexistence of religious communities in this part of the so-called Middle East, I had, by the time I visited that church and that mosque in Nablus, heard rather conflicting stories about these relationships. The church and the mosque did, however, become a symbol for this study, inasmuch as they quite nicely represent the *official* version of

coexistence of religious communities in Palestine in general and Nablus in particular. Spire and minaret sit peacefully next to each other; tolerating each other's call/tolling for prayer.

What this image fails to tell is the *unofficial* or *hidden* story of inter-religious relations. In this book, I am trying to disentangle these two stories and thus shedding some light on the possible reasons behind the coexistence of diverging versions of social relations. In this chapter, I will briefly introduce the research project before providing an overview of the historical, political, and socio-cultural position, in which it is located. While I would argue that this study can speak to community relations across Palestine, there are specific aspects that mark Nablus as a particularly useful fieldwork site. As there currently exist very few anthropological and ethnographic studies that deal with religious communities and/or minorities in Palestine, it is useful to locate such a study in a geographically circumscribed area, and as such it sees itself as continuing a time-honoured anthropological tradition. Further studies can then provide a more comparative framework.

Doing fieldwork in Nablus

I have had this research idea since the time I did my doctoral research. As I have indicated above, that research was about the role of religion in the lives of young women and its relation to social change. By coincidence, and against my own orientalist stereotypes (that the so-called Middle East is Muslim), my research sample included a fair number of Christian young women. Back then, I was struck by the similarities between the outlook and practices of Christian and Muslim women, but did not pursue the issue of similarities and differences any further. Yet, I was determined to return to this question at a later point in my research career. This opportunity presented itself in 2009, when a research grant from the University of

Aberdeen in Scotland, gave me the chance to pursue the issue in a slightly different context: in Palestine.

The reason for choosing Palestine in general, and Nablus in particular, are personal to an extent. Firstly, I wanted to spend some extended period of time in Palestine in order to get to know it better. Previously, I had only visited briefly. Secondly, having lived in Dundee in Scotland, a city that is twinned with Nablus, and being an active member of the Dundee Nablus Twinning Association, I had some previous knowledge of Nablus and its religious communities. I reckoned that this combination of facts would make it not only a very interesting research site, but also relatively easy to find entry to the research community, a problem that always haunts anthropologists.

Against this background I designed the research project, initially planned only for two months in the summer of 2009, with possible return visits. What I did not anticipate at the time was that I would, during this initial field stay, meet my future husband and, a year later, get married there and stay for good. In anthropological terms, this is of course an ideal situation, long-term fieldwork indeed. This book, then, is based on two months of intensive fieldwork, as well as two years of immersion into the community I was hoping to research. Perhaps it was coincidence that my husband and his family were from the local Christian community, so that I did, and continue to have, access to local Christians in Nablus from a very close range. This gave me the very rare opportunity to conduct the intimate research I was hoping to achieve, namely on what was going on "behind the scenes" of inter-religious relations.

These circumstances, however, also harbour a significant problem: the research may be unbalanced in favour of Christians, as I have a lot more and lot more intimate information from them than from and about the Samaritans. Muslim

research partners are relatively easy to get by, as I deal with them on a day-to-day basis as neighbours, work colleagues, students, and friends. The Samaritans, on the other hand, must be sought out, as they have "removed" themselves from the scene by moving out of town and into the settlement on Mount Gerizim. In other words, they only come to town on business, and have to be visited purposely in their settlement. This I did only twice. I did, however, have further opportunity to speak to them on a number of occasions, when their relatively new cultural youth association organised events in the local university, where I teach sociology and anthropology. Obviously, this information does not come anywhere near the ideal of participant observation that anthropologists have made their favourite fieldwork methodology. In other words, while the Christian component of the research leans more on the "participant" side of the continuum, the Samaritan one is largely "observation". Only the Muslim element of the triangle comes close to participant observation.

The research methods I have used in this framework are standard anthropological fare: participation, observation, unstructured and narrative interviews, historical research via books, as well as to a limited extent household analysis, network analysis, and genealogies. Most of this is detailed in Bernard (1994), so I do not intend to go into any details here. What I would like to note, however, is that the research approach I have applied is strongly influenced by feminist views of the research process. This has, for instance, been expressed quite early in editions such as Bell et al. (1993), Reinharz (1992), Moore (1988), and Altorki and El-Solh (1988). This means that the way I have done the research, analysed the data, and written this book reflects such ideas. It also means that I am very much aware of my position as a female researcher in a patriarchal society, such as Palestine, and the limits (and opportunities) this presents. Being married to a local man has

altered my position considerably to what I have experienced before in Jordan, yet the fact remains that anthropological research conducted by a woman is often quite far removed from what people in Palestine understand by the term "research". In other words, I was not always taken seriously, since I did not have questionnaires and was not a man. On the other hand, when I did bring my position at the university and/or my local husband into play, the situation changed, often considerably. For one, "doctors" at the university stand in very high regard in Palestinian society. Furthermore, through my husband I could be placed in the network of social and family relations of the local community – I stopped being the anonymous foreign researcher. As always, there is a downside to what I essentially consider an advantage: having a fixed position within local society also means having to face certain expectations about behaviour. At times, this was coming close to the issue of "studying one's own society", which has been at the centre of debate in anthropology for quite some time (see, for instance, the cases in Altorki and El-Solh 1988). Trying to find a balance has not always been easy.

What I have done, then, in order to obtain the data for this book, is to engage people in conversations about the issue of inter-religious relations. This was not always done with their knowledge that I was doing this particular kind of research. In the beginning I did tell everyone I met that this was my research topic, yet over time I stopped doing this, and the people I spoke to (often the same people over and over again) probably forgot about it. Sometimes I stimulated discussions by asking provocative questions, more frequently, however, I simply had to listen to people's conversations and take note of them. Especially in the Christian community, relations to the religious majority were the subject of daily debates. Samaritans also have express views about their relationship with the Muslim majority, yet since they have moved to

Mount Gerizim, there is less opportunity for direct encounters and therefore potential tensions. Muslims usually had to be prompted, since they very rarely worry about the religious minorities in their midst. Knowledge of my personal situation – being a Christian and married to a local Christian – did sometimes trigger discussions. What I heard in such discussions and conversations form the backbone of this book.

The way I have tried to make sense of this data was inspired by two concepts: the hidden and public transcripts described by Scott (1990) as well as the *habitus* and distinction ideas developed by Bourdieu (1977a, 1984). I will explain these concepts further while I am going along and depending on the themes that have emerged from my research. At this point I would just briefly like to introduce them in order to get an overview of the way I see and interpret inter-religious relations in Nablus. This might be applicable elsewhere, or it might not, since the political and socio-cultural contexts, which are different in other parts of the world, crucially influence such relations.

The explanatory framework

Bourdieu, over the course of his academic career, has developed several concepts that might be useful for the analysis of social practice in the Nablus context. Yet, I am hesitant to apply the formula that he developed for his model of praxis: [(*habitus*) (capital)] + field = practice. The reasons for my reluctance are that, for one, I am unsure whether I have sufficient data for this. I believe that it would take many more years of research in the area to successfully apply the formula; and secondly, while the formula makes it clear that action is more than just one element of the three (*habitus*, capital, or field), it does not clarify what the exact relationship or weighting between the three elements should be. I would argue, however, that even on

their own, these concepts may be useful for our understanding of relations in the Nablus context. I will take up the concept of capital when I discuss the drawing of boundaries between groups and classes. Similarly, I employ the concept of field when I discuss networks and relations. At this point I would like to take up the idea of *habitus*, so well-known among social scientist, but so often misunderstood, since it reflects the way I see individual and social action and actors.

Bourdieu (1977a: 8) sees action not as compliance to norms and rules, but at the same time it takes place within normative situations. One of the reasons for this is the uncertainties of everyday life and that the outcomes are, therefore, not always clear for the actor (Bourdieu 1977a: 9). And since Bourdieu sees all action as interest oriented, they follow rules only to the extent that it lies in their interests. The perceived choices of individual actors are, of course, only to a limited extent real choices. The limits to free choice are set by what Bourdieu calls dispositions. These, as Swartz (1997: 100) explains, "internalize in practical form what seems appropriate or possible in situations of challenge, constraint, or opportunity". Bourdieu (1977a: 10) also refers to such dispositions as 'practical knowledge' or a 'sense of practice'. Swartz (ibid.) summarises this view of actors quite usefully: "Actors are not rule followers or norm obeyers but strategic improvisers who respond dispositionally to the opportunities and constraints offered by various situations". Bourdieu himself (1990: 53) describes this relationship between social actors and social structures as "*habitus*", a by now time-honoured concept that has not yet lost its currency. In *The Logic of Practice* (1990: 53) he defines this as follows:

> A system of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively

> adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.

The dispositions that Bourdieu refers to go back to early socialisation, during which external structures are internalised. It is these internalised dispositions that provide the limits of what is deemed possible, reasonable, or probable. In other words, the *habitus*, or the dispositions of individual actors set both limits for actions as well as create the perceptions and practices of individual action; they shape the perceived chances of success or failure. Bourdieu (1977) uses these concepts mainly for his analysis of social classes, to explain how and why certain structural arrangements make sense to the dominant and the dominated. He argues that members of a specific class or social groups largely share a *habitus*, since they undergo similar socialisation processes in similar social environments. In *Distinction* (Bourdieu 1984: 170) he describes *habitus* as "necessity internalized and converted into a disposition", social and economic necessity that is constantly turned into a "virtue by instituting 'choices'". It is important to note that these dispositions are both cognitive as well as practical, embodied, which means that they become evident in the way people of a certain class comport themselves.

The reason why I emphasise these concepts of individual and group action for the Nablus context is that they help us comprehend some of the similarities and differences between Christians, Samaritans, and Muslims. Growing up in a similar socio-cultural environment, children and adolescents undergo similar socialisation experiences. If we understand this in terms of *habitus* and dispositions, it can go a long way in understanding why the members of the three religious communities do indeed have much in common in terms of social and cultural norms and practices. At the same time, there is

some reflection of Bourdieu's analysis of social class in terms of *habitus* to be found in the Nablus context. Here I refer to the differences in attitudes, worldviews, and practices between Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans, differences between the dominant and the dominated. Again, if we assume some degree of homogeneity especially within the Christian and Samaritan communities, we can expect similar dispositions, similar expectations and aspirations. I have indeed on several occasions heard them say that "the Muslims are cleverer than we are" (especially with regard to business shrewdness), thus limiting their own expectations of success and achievement. There has even been a campaign at the local university to reserve special places of study for young people from the Samaritan community in an effort to raise their level of educational achievement and, therefore, chances of success.

It is on the subconscious level of dispositions and *habitus* that Nabulsis live a degree of sameness. It was something that struck me during the research I conducted in Jordan: Christians and Muslims would constantly *say* how different they were, yet at the same time the similarities between them in what they *do* were strikingly obvious to me as an external observer. It is also on this subconscious level that the differences between dominant (Muslims) and dominated (Christians and Samaritans) are perpetuated. Yet, there is another level on which differences are maintained, an aspect perhaps neglected by Bourdieu. Here I refer to conscious attempts of resistance, of trying to consciously be different, of drawing discursive lines between selves and others through a variety of means. This is the other side of the coin of inter-religious relations that I have observed in Nablus. As I have just mentioned, despite the existing practical similarities between the members of the different communities, especially individuals of the minorities are engaged in a constant effort of setting themselves apart as "different". For my understanding of this aspect

of community relations I have found Scott's concept of hidden and public transcripts very useful. I will take up these ideas again at a later point, but would like to introduce them here for the reader get a better picture of the explanatory framework that shapes this study.

One could argue that Scott's (1990) ideas of hidden and public transcript in the relation between the dominant and the dominated are common sense. Yet, they clarify systematically how and why resistance of the dominated against the dominant is expressed, and the role these speeches, gestures, and practices ("transcripts") play in maintaining or altering the relations between these groups. Similar to my experience in Jordan and Palestine, Scott (1990: ix) observed in Malaysia that there were always diverging accounts of events and that sometimes the same people told two (or more) different stories, depending on the situation and the audience. He calls these two "stories" the "public transcript" – "describing the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate" (Scott 1990: 2) – and the "hidden transcript" – "discourse that takes place 'offstage,' beyond direct observation by powerholders" (Scott 1990: 4). He mentions that the powerful also have a hidden transcript, one that represents "the practices and claims of their rule that cannot be openly avowed" (Scott 1990: xii), yet he largely focuses on the hidden transcript of the powerless, and this is of less relevance for this study. He also explains that the shape of the hidden transcript depends on the extent of oppression: "the more menacing the power, the thicker the mask" (Scott 1990: 3). I will come to an evaluation of the domination in the Nablus context as reflected in the hidden transcripts later on.

The public transcript, in Scott's understanding is a performance by both the dominant and the dominated, put on for both sides to maintain the *status quo.* It is the public transcript that is most commonly observed in studies of power relations.

In the case of studies of religious minorities in the so-called Middle East this means that, unless there is public violence and open discrimination involved, it is the public transcript of good neighbourly relations that predominates. Since the hidden transcripts are only to be recovered in intimate situations "offstage", it requires in-depth, long-term, ethnographic research that is rarely feasible. The public transcript that is at the heart of most studies of inter-religious relations in the region can be described as a "*self*-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen" (Scott 1990: 18; emphasis in the original). In other words, it is in the interest of the Muslim majority population, especially in the current political climate, to portray themselves as having good neighbourly relations with the religious minorities living in the region. This is not to say that this may not be true in every case, but it is a biased image. In the case of Palestine, there are indeed hardly any of the violent incidents between members of different religious communities as is reported from, for instance, Egypt and Iraq. Yet, the hidden transcript that exists among the minorities reveals that not all is well. As Scott rightly points out, the public transcript "is designed to be impressive, to affirm and naturalize the power of dominant elites, and to conceal or euphemize the dirty linen of their rule" (ibid.). It must be noted at this point, that to some extent, as I will explain again later, the religious leadership of the minority communities appear to sing from the same song sheet as the Muslim majority, and they do not partake of the hidden transcript to the same degree as "ordinary" community members. Their interest in maintaining the public transcript may be sought in the benefits they receive from their leadership position, which requires a certain compliance with the Muslim majority. Scott (ibid.) argues that the leaders "must make out an ideological case that they rule, to some degree, on behalf of their subjects", a statement that applies to both Muslim, Christian, and

Samaritan leadership. Especially among Muslims, there has in recent years been increased emphasis on the Islamic tradition of respecting and protecting religious minorities in their midst, particularly the *Ahl al-Kitab*, or people of the Book, i.e. Christians and Jews. Arguably, these statements (academic and other) are made to impress the minorities themselves as well as Christians and Jews worldwide.

In terms of political discourse, Scott differentiates between four levels: firstly, that which is based on the self-image of elites; secondly, the hidden transcript itself; thirdly, the discourse that lies between the first two, where disguise and anonymity "shield the identity of the actors" (Scott 1990: 19); and finally, the times when the hidden transcript fully enters and disrupts the public transcript. In this book, I concern myself mainly with the second and third kinds of political discourse, since the first is sufficiently well-known and the last one I have never observed.

The hidden transcript comes in a variety of guises. Scott (1990: 111) explains that if the public transcript contains aspects of material appropriation, such as taxes, aspects of subordination, such as humiliation or rituals of hierarchy, and aspects of ideological justifications for inequalities, such as public religious or political worldviews by the elite. The hidden transcript, in turn, can be described as offstage reactions to all of these aspects, or "negation", as Scott (1990: 111ff.) calls it. The hidden transcript, therefore, is "a self-disclosure that power relations normally exclude from the official transcript", it "takes back the speech of behaviour that seemed unavoidable in power-laden encounters" (Scott 1990: 115). It is important to note, as Scott (1990: 118) does, that the hidden transcript needs a public – it cannot exist without coordination and communication within the group that employs it. There must be social spaces where the hidden transcript can be safely expressed. In the case of Christians and Samaritans,

these can be found in private homes as well as at the times, when their religious communities have exclusive get-togethers, such as in the church or the synagogue, or trips and events organised by their community. It is in those contexts that negation can be created and expressed. Obviously, these spaces are "domains of power relations in their own right", meaning that the formation and articulation of hidden transcripts is subject to peer pressure and discipline, just like the public transcripts are (Scott 1990: 119). Scott (ibid.) speaks here of a process of socialisation into the hidden transcript.

Samaritans and Christians in Nablus seem to be well aware of the difference between hidden and public transcripts and the respective power they hold. Frank conversations were regularly followed by a warning not to make it public. Ireton (2003) reports a similar experience, when he explains that "although people, especially the youth, were happy to give me their unsolicited political opinions it was strictly off record". One of his respondents put this circumspection in the following way: "You can't give, especially with the Palestinians, the idea that you know best. . . . you have to give him (sic) the feeling . . . that you are impressed with his methods" (ibid.). In other words, this means that many, like most others of the two minority communities, know quite well what can be said to whom, what is part of the public transcript and what must remain hidden.

Given the threatening nature of the sites of such resistance, it does not come as a surprise that elites try to suppress or control them. In the Palestinian context this takes the shape of having to apply for official permission for meetings, buildings, or events from either the municipality, the Palestinian government, or even the Israeli government. All of these are dominated by either Muslims or Jews, hence Christians and Samaritans depend on their good-will for having opportunities to meet. It must be noted that, generally, there are no great hindrances for members or leaders of the religious

minorities to obtain such permissions, unlike in other countries of the region. Another way to control the formation of hidden transcripts of subordinates is for the elite to employ "individual strategies of preferment" to "encourage normative and practical defection" (Scott 1990: 129). I have referred to this problem above with reference to the leadership of the religious minorities. Being aware of this kind of control, dissident subordinates often encourage or foster conformity to the standards of the hidden transcript that violates dominant norms (ibid.). This kind of control from below takes the form of any kind of social control, such as gossip, ostracising, rumours etc. I will come back to the issue of conformity and defection at a later point, when discussing inter-religious marriages.

The concepts of the hidden and public transcript go a long way in explaining the differences and similarities in discourse and practice between the Muslim majority, on the one hand, and the Christian and Samaritan minorities, on the other. They explain at first sight, why on official occasions everyone seems to be singing from the same song sheet, while behind closed doors one hears very different stories. I will, in the course of the following chapters, every now and again make further reference to these concepts in an effort to understand some of the specific practices discussed. At this point I would like to take a look at the official and obvious side of co-existence of Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans in Nablus.

The religious landscape of Nablus

The first time I remember consciously hearing a reference to Nablus was, when I was when I was doing fieldwork in Jordan and everyone recommended *kunafeh* to me – this very sweet dish of cheese under a layer of pastry and lots of sugar water. When buying it, I was told, I should make sure it is "*Nabulsiyeh*", the one from Nablus, as this was the best one. In fact, a friend of

mine said that *kunafeh* is often only referred to as "*Nabulsiyeh*". Every town, every region has its culinary specialities, and this seemed to have been the signature dish of that West Bank town. In many aspects, Nablus is a town like any other Palestinian or Middle Eastern town, steeped in history with an Old City of busy and noisy markets and narrow alleys, more recent additions of new and incorporated neighbourhoods, and the ubiquitous refugee camps. On the other hand, Nablus is rather unique. It has found its distinctive niche in a variety of ways. Apart from being associated with *kunafeh*, its hallmarks have historically included economic success – perhaps most notably its soap manufacturing –, political resistance – having gained the name "Mountain of Fire" (*Jabal an-Nar* rather than the geographic descriptor *Jabal Nablus*, the Mountain region of Nablus) due to being considered a major historical and contemporary centre of resistance against various occupying forces –, socio-cultural conservatism – resisting a "Westernisation" of norms, values, and behaviour – and being home to not only a number of religiously significant sites, such as Jacob's Well and Joseph's tomb, but also to one of the two only remaining Samaritan communities in the world.

This character of the city, carefully cultivated by its inhabitants, is what creates a special kind of geography and perception of space, which I want to focus on here. As cities (and other environments) are so much more than mere geographical maps or historical "facts", but instead are imbued with diverse meanings and local significances, I will refrain from reiterating such facts and figures, unless I deem it necessary for better contextualisation. Instead I hope to provide a description of the space, in which this research was located, that reflects some of the significance it has for its inhabitants. The economic and culinary aspects mentioned above will not be belaboured here as this was done elsewhere in some detail (Doumani 1995). What is of more interest here as

forces shaping the city as a socio-cultural space are, on the one hand, the local (and arguably inter/national) perceptions that Nablus is a harbour of conservatism and resistance. On the other hand, there is the significance of a sacred geography that is relevant for the Christians, Samaritans, and Muslims sharing this space, as well as for Jews expressing similar claims to sacred places.

Let me begin with the idea of sacred space. It goes without saying that Nablus lies in what is frequently described as the "Holy Land". The religious communities resident in the area – Christians, Muslims, Samaritans, and Jews – all claim a historical and/or mythical connection to the territory. All their sacred scriptures – Qur'an, Bible, and Torah – make reference to, or are set in the region. This fact, for many people in the area and abroad, makes Palestine and Israel more than just a profane landscape or a state one happens to live in. In fact, for most of humanity's history, landscapes have never been simple, disenchanted "environments", but were part and parcel of a people's cosmology and ordered along a sacred/profane fault line. Mircea Eliade (2008) has quite usefully described the fact that for religious people space is not homogeneous, but divided into qualitatively different parts. The perceived chaos of space, he argues, is separated into sacred, power-laden, meaningful areas, and the remaining "amorphous" areas that are profane, without structure or stability (Eliade 2008: 15). What makes an area sacred is the belief that it is a site of a hierophany, i.e. that the Sacred has manifested itself there (Eliade 2008: 8). From this point of view, the location of the hierophany is, of course, not of human choosing, but the decision of the Sacred and, therefore, incontestable. It is this belief that then converts a profane spot or object into something that is set apart or sacred, i.e. its immediate reality is turned into supernatural reality. In fact, it is often believed then that the site of a hierophany is a mirror-image of the supernatural. It is, therefore,

not surprising that humans would seek out such spots in an effort to come closer to the supernatural and the sacred (Eliade 2008: 9).

Marking and ordering the chaotic space in which humans live is, as Eliade (2008: 16) explains, an act of creation. It creates a new kind of world by marking it with fixed points that offer orientation in an otherwise amorphous environment. Sacred markers in the landscape provide "centres" in which the supernatural can be experienced, and humans tend to gravitate towards them (ibid.). Frequently, the most holy sites are described as the "centre of the world", and they are perceived as the transitory space from one cosmic region (the natural) to another (the supernatural) (Eliade 2008: 26ff.). Prominent symbols in this regard are trees, ladders, columns, or mountains that form the *axis mundi*, the world's axis. One of these "centres of the world" is located in Nablus: Mount Gerizim, the holy mountain of the Samaritans, can be seen as linking Heaven and Earth, and it is the site of most communal rituals of the group. It is on those occasions that the other faction of the Samaritans, residing in Holon near Tel Aviv, travel back to the original community in Nablus. Mount Gerizim is also one of the aspects that is repeatedly emphasised by Samaritans as marking them as *non*-Jews. Whereas Jews' "centre of the word" is located in Jerusalem, Samaritans have little interest in it, claiming that Mount Gerizim is the original centre and most sacred place on earth.

It is easily conceivable that sites, in which the Sacred has become manifest, should be marked in one way or another. While these markers could be something as simple as Buddhist prayer ribbons on a tree, humans have frequently gone to much greater length to signal that a specific spot in the landscape is in fact sacred. The grand architecture of cathedrals, mosques, or temples is perhaps the most prominent examples of this perceived need to set apart and highlight the sites of

manifestations of the Sacred. And as Eliade (2008: 31ff.) points out, this kind of architecture is usually modelled on people's notion of cosmogony and cosmology. As the creation of the world is frequently believed to have started from a centre, spreading order into chaos, so the buildings on sacred sites are persistently established around an axis or a core, from which sacredness and blessing radiates into its environment. Such a building is, thus, an *imago mundi*, a picture of the world (Eliade 2008: 33). At the same time, as I mentioned above, it is modelled on a supernatural reality. The temple, mosque, church becomes a sacred mirror-image of the cosmos. Architectural features acquire sacred symbolism and meaning, especially pillars, doors, and ceilings, and the four directions are imbued with sacred meaning.

If this religious structuring of the world, as Eliade (2008) wants to make us believe, is something that is common to all religious systems in the world (excluding what he calls a "profane" or secular world view), then it is also easily understandable why conquerors so frequently took over and simply reconsecrated the sacred buildings of the population conquered, as I will explain in a moment. He gives another explanation for the timeless significance of the sacredness of temples regardless of religious affiliation: the sacredness of the temple cannot be corrupted as the model and plan for the building is the work of the Sacred and it remains with the Sacred, i.e. it has an untouchable and spiritual existence (Eliade 2008: 43). The God of the Old Testament, for instance, gives clear instructions about what the temple should look like that Solomon is to erect (1 Chronicles 28:19; as quoted in Eliade 2008: 44). If we assume, for the sake of argument, that the Christian, Samaritan, and Muslim ideas of the Sacred are not essentially different, then it would also make sense to maintain the sacred architecture of previous generations. On the other hand, there might be a much more profane

explanation for this phenomenon – laziness and the lack of funds, so that razing sacred buildings and rebuilding them was not an option. It must also be mentioned at this point that human history is full of instances when conquerors or other enemies of religion have destroyed religious buildings or fought bitterly over them.

The debate about the precise meaning and significance of religious buildings is full of controversies that I have no space to go into here. Suffice it to emphasise that all cultures have a way of ordering space, more often than not along the lines of sacred and profane. This, as we will see shortly, is significant in the case of Nablus as well. The city has been the site of various Old Testament and Qur'anic events and figures, most notably Jacob or *Ya'qub* as he is known in Arabic by all residents regardless of religious affiliation. I will return to his story and the sites associated with it later. At this point I would like to take a brief look at some of the sacred sites that mark the city space and landscape of Nablus.

The story of sacred buildings changing ownership and religious affiliation throughout history is an old one. As I have mentioned above, most conquering forces in the history of the world have claimed existing sacred places and assigned to them new religious meaning. The big Umayyad Mosque in Damascus is an eloquent example of this tradition – having been the place of a Roman Temple (and before that probably sacred ground for several previous cultures and civilisations), it was taken over by Christians and turned into a church, which in turn was then converted into the mosque it is today when Muslims conquered the area in the seventh century CE. Nablus is no exception in this regard. Many of its religious landmarks – of which there are many, located as it is in the "Holy Land" and figuring in various Qur'an, Bible, and Torah stories – have either changed ownership in the course of time or are equally revered by Muslim, Christians, Samaritans, and

Jews due to their link to the respective sacred history. Here I would like to take a brief tour of some of the religious landmarks of Nablus in order to get a clearer understanding of how inter-religious relations in the city have become manifest in stone. I will rely mainly on Dabbagh's rather insightful and thorough narrative.

The Green Mosque (*Jami' al-Khadra'*) in the Old City of Nablus, in the Yasmineh-Quarter, is claimed by the Samaritans as having been built originally as the "Green Temple" (*Kanis al-Khadra*) by their High Priest Iqban in the year 4,735 of their calendar[1] (Dabbagh 1988:222). Its location, it is said, is the place where Jacob (*Ya'qub*) mourned his son Joseph (*Yusef*), a story that is part of the sacred history of all religious communities in the area. Samaritan historiography goes on to explain that the Temple was taken over by Muslims for a short period of time, recaptured by the Samaritans, only to be finally seized by Muslims again and turned into a mosque. During the wars of the Crusades, crusaders built a church on the same plot of land. When locals demanded their holy place back, this was the final change to being a mosque. Today it is the Muslim claim that lasts, quite literally written in stone: above the entrance a sign reads "This mosque was built during the days of Sultan al-Mansur Saif ad-Din Qalawun as-Salihiy, may God strengthen him, in honour of his father Sultan as-Salih 'Ala' ad-Din" (ibid.). The victors were able to erase the narratives of other religious communities. Yet, the common people, Dabbagh (1988: 223) reports, simply say that the mosque used to be the house of Jacob (*Ya'qub*), pointing to a little grotto inside as his birth place. Furthermore, people believe that it is the location where Ya'qub received the news of his son Yusef's death and mourned him there, hence its other name "The grief-stricken solitude". In other words, despite the ability of the victorious to write their version of history in stone, meant for later generations to be accepted as History, people's oral

traditions paint a different picture – one in which this place has spiritual significance for all religious communities, regardless of who has built on it. In fact, one of the other names by which this mosque is known is "the mosque of Ya'qub's mourning" (*Jami' Huzn Ya'qub*) (Dabbagh 1988: 224).

Likewise in the Old City is the Al-Nasr Mosque (*Jami' an-Nasr*), which has its origins in a Byzantine church built in the second century CE. When, in the seventeenth century CE, an Ottoman official visited the mosque, he reported that it was still obvious that this had been a big monastery in the past (Dabbagh 1988: 225). This building was almost completely destroyed during the devastating earthquake of 1927, and the High Islamic Council rebuilt it in 1935. It is said that its name al-Nasr (*the victory*) is to honour the victory of the Muslims over the Crusaders on the spot where it was built. Dabbagh (1988: 226) explains that this link is unlikely, as the battle took place outside Nablus, yet they seem to have buried their fallen inside the mosque. In contrast to the Green Mosque, Al-Nasr Mosque does not seem to have any significance for Christians, Jews, or Samaritans. Despite its being built on the grounds of a former church, both official and folk histories appear to portray it as a clearly Muslim affair. In fact, given that the Crusaders were Christians, and that their defeat is embodied in the building, it has the symbolic value of assigning Christians their place in history and society today – as the vanquished and *dhimmis.*

A less well-known mosque is the "Prophets' Mosque" (*Jami' al-Anbiya'*), which is in the Hibla Quarter, close to the former train station. It takes its name from the prophets, who are the sons of Ya'qub, who are said to be buried there. The tomb of these prophets, whose names are inscribed in a wall, can still be visited today, in a separate room inside the mosque: Ruben (*Rubil/R'aubin*), Simon (*Sham'un*), Levy (*Lawi*), Judah (*Yahudha*), Issachar (*Yasakir*), Zebulon (*Zabulun*), Joseph (*Yusef*), Benjamin

(*Benyamin*), Dan (*Dan*), Naphtaly (*Naftali*), Gad (*Jadh*), Asher (*Ashir*) (Dabbagh 1988: 228). Who indeed is buried in this mosque is a controversial question, as Yusef, who died in Egypt and was later taken back to Palestine by the Israelites, is also said to be buried in a place in the village of Balata, just outside Nablus, now the location of one of the biggest refugee camps and subject to the fiercest struggles about control between Jews, Muslims, and occasionally Christians. Others say, his body was later transferred to Hebron. Dabbagh (ibid.) tellingly ends his description of this mosque and the mystery of who is buried here with the phrase "only God knows the truth". Although this mosque does not seem to have an architectural link to changing religious dominance in history, it is potentially a sacred spot for all religions of the area, as they all revere the sons of Ya'qub in their respective sacred histories. In contrast to Yusef's tomb, for this place, I am not aware of any aggressive claims by non-Muslim communities. It must, however, also be kept in mind that Christians place greater significance on New Testament events and figures, and therefore, this place might be less important in their religious geography.

The Great Mosque (*Al-Jami' al-kabir*) in Nablus' east is the biggest and arguably most well-known mosque in town. Dabbagh (1988: 228) explains that its origins lie in a church built by Emperor Justinian in the sixth century CE. The Crusaders rebuilt it in 1167 before Muslims converted it into a mosque. In 1271 CE a Turkish official reported that the existing church had been turned into a mosque by Salah ad-Din (Dabbagh 1988: 229). Its eastern entrance apparently looks like the Roman-style, arched door of the Ascension Church (*Kanisat al-Qiyama*) in Jerusalem, and has been preserved like this (Dabbagh 1988: 228). The current *mihrab* (niche of prayer direction) used to be the eastern entrance to the church.

In other words, places of worship in Nablus embody the relations of power between the different religious communities. Yet, most of the changes, conquests, and occupations that have taken place in a distant past and do not usually figure greatly in people's memories when reflecting upon inter-denominational relations in the city. Other than as evidence for the fact that this country "was once entirely Christian or Samaritan" and that Muslims are indeed "newcomers", these changes appear to be largely accepted as historical and undisputable fact. When it comes to defining relationships today, people seem to have a much shorter memory, referring to much more recent events or conflicts that have impacted on how Christians, Muslims, and Samaritans see each other. The most significant century in terms of socio-religious relations appears to the twentieth century CE.

One final instance of how sacred space is appropriated by successive generations of adherents of different religions is a place that is said to be the site where Adam prayed (*Musalla Adam*). Even though today, Dabbagh (1988: 232) explains, Nabulsis tend not to know about the place, a Muslim traveller reported about a visit around 300 years ago (then a semi-ruined mosque), and there is a Samaritan tradition that Adam, after having been expelled from Paradise, came to worship on Mount Gerizim, their holy mountain.

In other words, besides Jacob, the most prominent figure of Christian, Muslim, and Samaritan sacred historiography of the area, Adam is also incorporated into their sacred geography. It is in this sense that members of all three religious communities are able to inscribe their claims to the territory – their right to exist in this area – into the natural and architectural landscape. When these figures of sacred history can be said to have trodden the ground somewhere, and all three (or four, including Jews) religions can refer to these figures, then this affirms their claims. It is easily conceivable that this can be

both something that binds them together, rooting them both in their sacred history as well as the land, and at the same time a cause for considerable conflict, as claims overlap and control over land and territory has become one of the most vital questions in the region. Despite the potential for shared history and geography, the political power-relations also speak a very clear language in the architectural landscape of the city: a mosque may have been a church or a temple, yet for hundreds of years until today it has remained a mosque, it has not become a shared place of worship. The Umayyad Mosque in Damascus has, for a short period of time been shared by Muslims and Christians, but once political power had clearly shifted towards the Muslim conquerors, it was wholly consecrated as a mosque. While Christians and Samaritans are given the opportunity to feel allegiance to a place due to the link with their sacred history, they are also made painfully aware of the political reality, that they are in a minority and had to cede territory to the victors, who are their compatriots. If, then, most of the historical sacred buildings are now used by Muslims, what are the buildings that signify for Christians and Samaritans today?

Nablus is, of course, today dominated by its mosques as houses of worship, of which there are at least 55 (Zajel 2004). After reassigning the ancient churches and temples to the newly arrived religion of Islam, not only the number of Christians and Samaritans in the city dwindled, but also the places where they could worship became fewer in number. Apart from surrounding villages like Rafidiya, the Old City of Nablus was home to Christians and Samaritans and their places of worship. Today, the Old City has become emptied of the city's religious minorities, and like most inner cities of modernity, it has been taken over largely by poorer sections of the population. The Samaritan synagogue is no longer in active use, as the community has moved up onto Mount

Gerizim. The couple of churches that remain in the Old City are only in occasional use, usually once a month. The active worship of Christians takes place largely in the (now incorporated) neighbourhood of Rafidiya, where since the nineteenth century most churches are located.

One of the churches in the Old City is the Greek Orthodox church of St. Dimitrius. It was built in 1861 in the Yasmineh Quarter, where Christians used to live (Zajel 2004). In its close vicinity we find the Samaritan synagogue. The church is relatively small and not in best repair and it is used only on special occasions, such as baptisms, religious holidays, or saints' days. Adjacent to the church building are the living quarters of the local Greek Orthodox priest. Then there is the Anglican Protestant church of St. Philip, which was built in 1921 by the British Christian Missionary Society (CMS), whose mission to Nablus was led by Father Fisher. They first arrived in the city in 1881 to take on pastoral services for Nablus' Christians (ibid.). They established a school with Christian influenced curriculum as well as a mobile clinic, which in 1918 became a fully fledged hospital, the so-called Anglican Hospital (*al-mustashfa al-injili*). Interestingly, the CMS in 1927 donated some of the land, which they had purchased for the church building for a mosque to be built on it (ibid.). Thus, today we find the Al-Khader mosque right opposite the church at this site at the entrance to the Old City. Like its Greek Orthodox counterpart, this church is only used occasionally, once a month for Sunday services and on special occasions. Adjoining it is the home of the minister and a Christian nursery. The guardian to this church, resident at its gate, is a Muslim.

Another Greek Orthodox church, St. Moses Church, was built in Rafidiya, apparently on the remains of an old Byzantine church (ibid.). This church is an impressive building and very spacious inside. Its interior style is a mix of modern simplicity and Greek Orthodox iconography. This church is used for

the usual Sunday services and other occasions, such as Easter or Christmas services, when the space is needed to house the fairly large congregation.

A third Greek Orthodox church is an equally impressive building on the outskirts of Nablus. The Church of St. Joseph's well has been built over a well that is said to be the one where Jesus met the Samaritan woman and drank water from (John 4:4–42) (ibid.). John's gospel retells the story of Jesus travelling through "Samaria" – the Nablus region – and rested close to a town called "Sychar, near the plot of ground Jacob had given to his son Joseph" (John 4:5). Whether this town was Balata, the village, near which we find the church today, is not clear, but St. John says that where Jesus rested "Jacob's well was there" (John 4:6). In other words, the site where the church was built is said to have links to sacred history, both Old Testament and New Testament history. While the episode of Jesus, to which I will return again later, is of course highly significant for Christians, the Old Testament reference to Jacob turns this spot into a sacred site for Christians, Muslims, Samaritans, and Jews alike. Its story is told in Genesis 33:18–34:31. Jacob and his family arrived in "Shechem", which is today Nablus, camped there for a while and eventually bought land from the local leader Hamor (Genesis 33:18–20). While a well is not mentioned in the book of Genesis, it is highly likely that a plot, where Jacob with his family and herds settled, would contain a water source of some kind. While the current church building is of very recent origin (completed in 1998), it is apparently built on the site of a Byzantine and later a Crusader church (Zajel 2004). In 1907, the Russian Orthodox Church donated a new church on this spot, yet the building work was interrupted in 1917 by the Russian Revolution (ibid.). Today, it is watched over by its latest builder, Father Justinus, a Greek Orthodox priest, who is said to have done all the work of building and decorating the church himself, including the

icons inside. This church building has become a tourist site, but is used for Greek Orthodox services on special occasions. The main guide at the church is a Muslim.

The Roman Catholic presence in Nablus is marked by three sacred buildings. The Catholic (Latin) Church of Visitation was built in 1890, towards the end of Ottoman rule in Rafidiya (Zajel 2004). The visitation in its name refers to the Jesus' visit of the area, mentioned above. It was largely run by the Rosary Sisterhood, which first came to Nablus in the early twentieth century and established a monastery close by. The church remained in active service until the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, when it was used to house Palestinian refugees from the territory of Israel (ibid.). The Rosary Sisters left and in 1951 part of the monastery and church was taken over by the Red Cross and Crescent Society, which remained there until 1975. It was during that time that the resident priest, Father Dominique and the Latin Patriarchate in Jerusalem decided to turn the old monastery building into an old people's home (ibid.). Nuns from India were brought in to run the institution. The project failed, yet was reopened in 1991, when more nuns from the Indian Mother Teresa Sisterhood took over. It remains open until today, yet serves disabled and other disadvantaged people. The nuns rely on the charity of Nablus citizens and others to keep the home going, and it is said that many Nabulsis, of all religious denominations, help out with money, food, and other donations.

When the Rosary Sisters arrived in Nablus in 1904, they established the St. Joseph's convent, with an adjoining clinic and a girls' school (ibid.). The hospital specialised in eye and ear problems, the first of its kind in Nablus, serving the city and the surrounding areas. The school, still in existence today, has had and continues to have a reputation of providing a very high level of education. In 1998, most of the nuns left Nablus, announcing the end of their mission (ibid.). Today, three nuns

remain in the city, serving the Roman Catholic congregation and supporting its priest in his daily duties.

A second Roman Catholic (Latin) church is found in Rafidiya, built in 1887. St. Justinus Church, also served by the Rosary Sisters, was badly damaged in the earthquake that hit Nablus in 1927. The Patriarchate in Jerusalem restored it and in 1931 it could be reopened for services. In 1956, a bell tower was added to the church building and the main body of the church extended. In 1980, it was further expanded and refurbished. It is in active use today for everyday services.

Two of the more recent churches in Rafidiya are those of the Greek Catholic (Melkite) Church and the Anglican Protestant Church. The Church of the Beheaded St. John the Baptist was built on land purchased by the then Melkite Metropolitan Abu Sa'ada in 1958 (ibid.). Originally, the "church" was only a house, with a room for worship and living quarters for the local priest. In 1961, the church, as it exists today, was built on the same site and inaugurated in 1963 by the Patriarch. The name of the church goes back to a church in the neighbouring village of Sebastia, which had been turned into a mosque in 1261. That church/mosque is said to be built on the site where John the Baptist was imprisoned and eventually beheaded (Matthew 14:1–12; Mark 6:14–29), a belief shared by Muslims and Christians in the region alike (Zajel 2004). The site houses the tomb of John the Baptist, yet his head is said to now rest in the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus. The church in Nablus is apparently built in the style of the Sebastia church. It was refurbished in 1986 in the traditional Orthodox style and is used for the usual Sunday services and on special occasions. Adjacent to the church are the priest's living quarters.

Finally, the Anglican Protestant Church of the Good Shepherd was established in 1932 in an ordinary house serving as church building, school and guest room. It has been turned into a fully fledged church, built in the emblematic

plain Protestant style, the interior modern and devoid of any of the imagery so typical in all the other churches in the area. It is now used for the usual Sunday services, except for one Sunday a month, when the congregation worships in the Old City church.

To end this exposition of contemporary places of religious significance in Nablus, it seems in order to refer to the places where Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims end their earthly journeys. The Samaritans bury their dead (according to their own rituals) on the "Al-Amwat" cemetery on Mount Gerizim or on the "Kiryat Sha'ul" cemetery in Tel Aviv, carefully separated from the dead of other religious denominations. Christians in Nablus also have their own cemetery, in Rafidiya, where they take their dead. It was once pointed out to me by a Muslim in Europe that they prefer to have their own cemetery, as they believe in a pre-punishment in purgatory. Muslims, so they believe, are more likely not to be punished at this point (if they answer the three questions of the Angel of Death correctly, that is), and so they would be exposed to the excruciating wails of the non-believers, waiting for the final Judgement Day. In how far this belief has a basis in orthodox Islamic teachings I have so far failed to establish, yet it does point to the possibility of the existence of certain beliefs, which have fed into current (and historical) practice to keep members of different religious affiliations separate, even in death.

So far I have focused on human-made buildings on what are considered sacred sites for a variety of reasons. I would now like to turn to one of the most significant landmarks in Nablus that is actually a natural landmark – Mount Gerizim or *Jabal at-Tur*, the most sacred site for the Samaritan community. It is one of the two mountains close to Nablus, the other being Mount Ebal. The new Samaritan settlement, Kiryat Luza, is located on the mountain top, until summer 2012 sealed off

by an Israeli checkpoint. Prior to the first *intifada* Samaritans were largely living in downtown Nablus, but moved to the mountain village, which was built for them by the Israeli government, in order to escape the violence.

The mountain is sacred to the Samaritans – one of the main differences to mainstream Judaism, which sacralised Jerusalem, a fact, Samaritans like to emphasise in conversations with non-Samaritans, especially Muslims. This disagreement between Samaritans and Jews is not new – in John 4:20 the Samaritan woman, whom Jesus met near Nablus, is reported to have said: "Our ancestors worshipped on this mountain, but you say that the place where people must worship is in Jerusalem" (NRSV). The mountain is also called "Beit El", the House of God, and it forms the direction of their prayers (Ayash 2003: 62). The mountain is the only real place, according to the Samaritans, where to worship God (ibid.).

The sacred nature of Mount Gerizim is based on the Torah narrative of God having chosen Mount Gerizim as the site for a temple: "When the LORD your God has brought you into the land that you are entering to occupy, you shall set the blessing on Mount Gerizim and the curse on Mount Ebal" (Deuteronomy 11:29 NRSV). Furthermore, Samaritans consider it the place, where Jacob nearly sacrificed his son Isaac, the location of which is interpreted differently by Jews. Ayash (2003: 63) cites six reasons why the mountain is sacred for the Samaritans: firstly, it is where Noah made a thanksgiving sacrifice after the flood (Genesis 8:20f.); secondly, it is where Abraham wanted to sacrifice his son (southeast of the mountain top) (Genesis 22:9–14); thirdly, Jacob slept there and had the dream of the ladder leading to Heaven and saw the angels (Genesis 28:10–12); fourthly, it is where Moses prayed for a vision and his safety; fifthly, it is the place, where Joshua son of Nun built the temple of Moses after he entered the Holy Land (Deuteronomy 27:5; Joshua 8:30); and finally, it

is where the Israelites found blessing, which is why it is also called the Mountain of Blessing. There is no need to go into the details of the theological debates about these locations[2], suffice it to emphasise the fact that Mount Gerizim is of paramount theological, social, political, and historical importance for the Samaritans, and that Jerusalem bears hardly any religious significance for them. In fact, they consider Jerusalem, as well as Mount Ebal as cursed places, the latter being the place of residence of devils (*shayatin*) (Ayash 2003: 64). The holiest site on the mountain lies 240 feet south of the old temple, which is a natural piece of rock (48x36 feet), where they take off their shoes when walking across it (Ayash 2003: 63). The Torah mentions 14 different names for the mountain, including Luza, which is now the name of the new village on the mountain top (Ayash 2003: 64).

There are a few other places that are considered sacred or special by the Samaritans, including the burial places of prophets in the vicinity of Nablus, like graves of the priests in Al-Azar, Itamar, Finhas, as well as the seventy elders in Awarta, the grave of Joseph in Nablus, of Joshua son of Nun in Kafl Haris. Then there are the graves of the ten blameless in Hebron, who are Adam, Seth, Anush, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, as well as the grave of Rachel between Bethlehem and Hebron. Finally, there is the grave of Aaron on Mount Moab in the Moses Valley in what is today Jordan (ibid.). From this brief description of sacred places for the Samaritans it is quite easy to see that the West Bank in general and Nablus in particular hold special significance for them, which is arguably one reason why they emphasise being Palestinians rather than Jews. Should they be obliged to live in what is today Israel, they would be deprived of their most holy sites. This means that it is at least in their religious interests to maintain good relations with the Muslim majority in the country.

Religious communities coming and going

I first came to Nablus as part of a delegation from the town's twin city Dundee in Scotland in 2007. We visited some of the people that over the years of the twinning relationship had become old acquaintances. One of them was an elderly priest of one of the local churches, and we sat in his back garden (in view of the church building) and listened to his woes. In broken English, but nevertheless eloquent, he conveyed to us some of the sorrow he perceived when reflecting upon the state of his flock. "The Christians here have many problems", I remember him saying, "there's unemployment, lack of education, the political situation (it was just after the very difficult years of the Al-Aqsa Intifada), and most important of all, they are leaving the country and we're going to die out". Even though I had been familiar with the exodus-scenario from literature and conversations, I had not realised that this would be such a common theme over the next few years during which I revisited Nablus many times. "Our numbers are going down" or "soon there will be no Christians left in this country" or similar versions of this scenario I would hear over and over again. Likewise, Church leaders decried the decreasing numbers of Christians. Pope Paul VI, for instance predicted in 1974 that if the trend continued there would soon be no Christians left in the Holy Land and that then the "shrines would be without the warmth of the living witness of the Holy Places of Jerusalem and the Holy Land would become *like a museum*" (Apostolic Exhortation, 'Concerning the increased needs of the Church in the Holy Land', quoted in Prior and Taylor 1994: 1; emphasis mine). Archbishop George Carey, after a visit to the region in 1992, speculated that Jerusalem and Bethlehem "might become a kind of Walt Disney theme park" (MECC News Report, January 1992: 2; quoted in Prior and Taylor 1992: 2). For some reason, I had always been rather sceptical about this

imagined future, but the persistence with which Christians living in the area itself pointed to the decrease in numbers made me curious to make more enquiries about actual figures. What was the statistical situation on the ground in terms of Muslim-Christian-Samaritan relations?

It is, of course, obvious that first Jews, then Christians once formed the majority of the population in the area and this shall not be the focus here. More interesting are the developments over the past one hundred years or so. Dabbagh (1988: 206–7) provides us with useful statistics on this issue. In 1882, he writes referring back to an encyclopaedia of 1894, the population of Nablus amounted to around 8–9,000 people, the majority Muslims. Only about 650 of them were Christians and 200 Samaritans. At the very beginning of the twentieth century, the number of inhabitants had risen to 19,202, of which 602 were Christians (341 Greek Orthodox, 115 Roman Catholic, and 146 Anglicans). There were 164 Samaritans resident in the city, and 50 Jews. In 1911, the total number of Nabulsis had gone up to 21,072, of which 725 were Christians, 160 Samaritans and 29 Jews (ibid.). So, while the numbers of Christians in Nablus has not changed significantly over this period of time, its percentage of the total population has: it went from over 7 per cent in the 1890s to around 3 per cent ten years later, and almost 3.5 per cent another decade later. Similarly, the number of Samaritans has not changed dramatically, yet their percentage of the total population went from 2 per cent to less than 1 per cent. The Baedeker figures of 1912 provided by Dabbagh (1988: 208–9) paint a similar picture. In that year the population was said to be 27,000 people, including 800 Christians and 170 Samaritans, i.e. about 3 per cent and just over half a per cent of the population respectively.

Yet another decade later, in 1922, i.e. after World War I had caused death and disease, the numbers had gone down in all quarters: Nablus' population amounted to a mere 15,947

people, of whom 544 were Christians and 147 Samaritans, 3.5 per cent and 1 per cent respectively (the number of Jews at that point had decreased to 16). The 1931 census showed that the numbers had not recovered much: out of 17,498 people 617 were Christians and 160 were Samaritans (6 Jews remained), while percentages stayed the same. The census of 1945 gave the number of Nabulsis as 23,250, of whom 680 were Christians and 210 of other religions (the majority probably Samaritans), taking the percentage of Christians down again to 3 per cent. By 1961, after the foundation of the State of Israel and the expulsion of thousands of Palestinians from their homes in what was now Israel, Nablus' population swelled to 45,773 people, including 627 Christians and 212 Samaritans, causing a more dramatic drop in percentages of the minorities to 1.4 per cent and just under half a per cent respectively. The population then grew steadily to 53,000 in 1966 and 60,000 in 1980, with a significant drop in 1967 down to 44,000, when 9,000 Nabulsis left the country for Jordan and the Gulf countries (Hilu n.d.: 45). In 1989–90, two surveys[3] of areas of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip show that there were 1041 Christians resident in Nablus (Sabella 1999: 90). Of these, 436 were Greek Orthodox, 291 were Latins (Roman Catholic), 250 Anglican Prostestants, and 64 Greek Catholics (ibid.). The figure for 2004 is 712 (Zajel 2004), in all likelihood further decreased since then. These Christians are distributed unevenly between the different denominations: adherents to the Greek Orthodox Church number 81 families with 277 individuals; Roman Catholics count 57 families with 241 individuals; 43 families or 150 individuals are said to be Anglican Protestants, and 12 families or 44 individuals are Greek Catholic (Zajel 2004).

As for the larger district of Nablus (including surrounding villages), the figures show that in 1904 the number of Christians was 3,252. In 1908 it had gone down to 1,961 people, rising again slightly in 1917 to 2,009, and to 2,421 in

1941. The number of Samaritans in the district equals those in the city, as this is their only residence (Hilu n.d.: 53).

In other words, the relative statistical relations between the religious communities changed very little over those 70 years up to the middle of the twentieth century. What caused a major change, however, was the influx of refugees from inside Israel, of which Nablus would receive a fair deal. Of the over 700,000 Palestinian Arabs that had to leave what is now the state of Israel, around 50,000 were Christians, i.e. 35 per cent of the Christian population at the time (Prior and Taylor 1994: 2). Yet, the absolute majority of the refugees that came to Nablus were Muslims – Samaritans by that time had their only residence in Nablus, and Christians are not to be found in the refugee camps, all being original Nabulsi residents (unless they moved there through marriage). Hilu (n.d.: 45), however, cautions us that the official figures of registered residents may not reflect the actual numbers, as people moved to and from the city or did not care to get registered.

The village of Rafidiya, west of Nablus and now included in the city's boundaries, used to be an almost exclusively Christian village. It is said that the first Christians came from al-Karak in southern Jordan to Rafidiya in the seventeenth century CE (Zajel 2004). It is worthwhile quoting its founding episode in more detail here:

> There was a family with a father, three boys and a girl. The boys were called Fode, Hreim, and Dheib, and the girl was called Rafeed. One of the princes of the times from the family of Udwan asked for the girl's hand in marriage. The prince was Muslim and she was Christian. After asking for time to think, the father and his sons decided to flee to Palestine through the Dead Sea and then to Taybeh near Ramallah and El Bireh, and from there to Nablus where they asked the Tuqan[4] family for

> protection. The Tuqan family gave them this western part of the city which was later called Rafidia (from the girl's name – Rafid). There was one Muslim family in the area, the Hassouneh family, and they split the land and the water between them equally (Zajel 2004).

Today, there are four clans represented in Rafidiya, all except one Christian: the Hreim, Fodeh, and Dheib families are Christian, the Hassouneh family is Muslim (ibid.). Yet, this balance has become unsettled in recent years, and Rafidiya's Christian residents frequently bemoan the fact that they have lost not only the majority in this part of town, although it remains the "most Christian" part of Nablus (being the location of most churches in use today), but also quite literally lost "ground" to the Muslims, because people had to sell land to make ends meet during the difficult days of the two *intifadas.* Hilu (n.d.: 49) reports that Rafidiya's population had increased from 430 to 922 between 1945 and 1961. Most of this increase would have been due to natural population growth, which, he writes, was at that time (1961) "one of the highest in the world" with 20–30 live births per thousand inhabitants (ibid.). Yet, it is said that Christians in the region tend to have less children than Muslims, and given the fact that in most other neighbouring villages of Nablus district the number of inhabitants increased by no more than 50 per cent within the same space of time, Rafidiya must indeed have experienced a growing influx of Muslims. Despite this shift in ratios, the neighbourhood continues to be associated by Nabulsis with Christianity, and has in recent years (after the Al-Aqsa Intifada) experienced a modernising boom, gaining it the reputation of being a "chic" quarter of town.

The neighbouring village of Zababdeh, situated north of Nablus and with a total population of around 3,500 remains distinctly Christian with 2,251 Christians in residence in

1989–90 (Sabella 1999:90). The majority of these were Latins with 1,302 community members, followed by 631 Greek Orthodox Christians, 150 (Anglican) Protestants, 125 Greek Catholics, and 43 Syriacs. The village is of ancient Christian heritage, yet had lain deserted for over 1,000 years after it was destroyed in recurrent religious wars in the seventh century CE. In around 1800, it was resettled by families from the Christian village of Taybeh, south of Nablus. In 1874, the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate established a parish in the village, followed in 1883 by the Catholic Church (Zababdeh. ps). This village continues to play an important role in the socio-religious life of the Christians in the area, and is also known among Muslim Palestinians as a "Christian village".

Then there are those neighbouring villages, who lost substantive parts of their Christian population due to a variety of pressures and circumstances. The village of Burqa and Nisf Jubail, north-west of Nablus today only contain a small minority of Christians, as the Christian families of Dhaher (from Burqa) and Musallam (Nisf Jubail) amongst others emigrated to Nazareth, Haifa, Ramallah, and Jerusalem (Zajel 2004). The foundation of the state of Israel in 1948 triggered another wave of emigration of Christians from Nablus and the surrounding villages, this time to the Gulf countries, Lebanon, the United States, and Europe. Before this exodus, Burqa was home to a Latin monastery with school, a priest and the Rosary Sisters, who left in 1955. The monastery and school were eventually sold in 1960 and the mission closed (ibid.). The Protestant Church ran a mobile clinic in Burqa until 1961. In Nisf Jubail a Greek Orthodox church could be found, with a priest in residence. Yet, when he died in 1961, this permanent representation also came to an end (ibid.).

As for the Samaritans, their story is in many ways quite similar to that of the Christians. Their numbers have declined quite dramatically over the centuries, from once being the

absolute majority in the region (over one million in the fourth century CE) to around 70 at the end of the nineteenth century. The reasons for the decline in their numbers are manifold, yet Ayash (2003: 148) reports that forced conversion to Islam was a major motive. Several families of contemporary Muslims are known to have been Samaritans in the past: Al-Matari, Maraqa, Al-Muhtadi, Al-Danfi, Al-Ansari, Al-Mu'ayad, Al-'Adhm, Al-Nuhas, Al-Zayid, and Al-Faqahari across the West Bank and Gaza; as well as the family of Ya'ish, Maslamani, Muhyi, Shari, 'Aker, Taher, and Sufan in Nablus (Ayash 2003: 28).

After this low point their number gradually increased again to around 250 in 1948 and around 350 in 1967 (Ayash 2003: 149). After the split into two communities in Nablus and Holon, there were 250 Samaritans resident in Nablus, and 281 in Holon in 1989. In 2000, there were 301 Samaritans in Nablus and 324 in Holon (Ayash 2003: 150). By 1 January 2012, these figures had gone up to 751,353 of which resident in Nablus, and 398 in Holon (The Samaritan Update 2012). As I will outline in more detail later, the demographic problems of the Samaritans are not to be sought in migration, as is the case for Christians. The Samaritans did, and continue to have the problem of endogamy, as they are only allowed to marry within their own religious community. Firstly, the balance of males to females is uneven, there are more males than females, which makes reproduction of the community an arguable difficult issue. Furthermore, in-marriage has over the centuries produced disabled offspring, which, again, impacts on future reproduction and the health of the community. Aware of these issues, the Samaritan leadership decided relatively recently to address the problem by allowing a limited number of marriages outside the community, as I will explain later. Women of Jewish origin were converted to Samaritanism and married Samaritan men, hence their numbers increased slightly.

From this brief exposition of the historical and contemporary situation of religious community relations in Nablus it becomes immediately obvious that the boundaries between Christians, Muslims, and Samaritans, as well as the relationships between them have been undergoing constant changes. Depending on the political situation of the day, social, personal, and religious interests of community members, and even outside influences, relationships have been warm or strained, boundaries have been drawn strictly or flexibly. As is the case for most community relations, they have been in persistent flux in Nablus.

In this book, I would like to shed some light, if only a spotlight, on what these relationships and boundaries look like at the beginning of the twenty-first century. I am trying to make sense of two parallel discourses about religious community relations in the region: one that focuses on insurmountable differences between the religious communities, and the other one on the equality and sameness of all regardless of religious background, especially as it is reflected in much nationalist rhetoric. I argue that we need to look beyond the rhetoric of unchangeable similarity or difference to understand the essentially fluid nature of the boundaries that people draw between their respective communities, how they maintain, negotiate, cross, and manipulate them. Such boundaries are not merely drawn through words, but crucially also embodied and become manifest in people's comportment and practices. It is in this sense that embodied religious selves and "Others" are crafted.

In the following chapters I trace a number of exemplary practices, such as marriage patterns and hospitality practices, as well as discursive strategies of members of the different communities in order to show how they, on a daily basis, reconcile, accommodate, and emphasise differences between them, while at the same time living very similar lives and sharing a sense of common belongingness.

2

BOUNDARIES: NEGOTIATED, EMBODIED, MANIPULATED

One sentence that I heard over and over again in my discussions with Christians and Samaritans is that "we are different from them", meaning, depending on the context, either the Muslim majority or the West. It was this constant discursive drawing of boundaries between "us" and "them" that made me aware of the border work that was going on in this society on a daily basis. In contrast, and parallel, to this, there was another process under way – that of presenting the people as indeed *one* people, without differences.

The drawing of boundaries between communities has, of course, been of anthropological interest for a number of decades now. While early models have been rather static – creating essentialised groups and communities –, more recent work has tried to take into account the constantly changing nature of community boundaries and the various strategies employed to draw, maintain, and manipulate them. Two trends emerged, one emphasising the overwhelming influence of social groups on individual behaviour, thus locating the power to draw boundaries in some timeless entity, myth, or elite. In much early anthropological writing, emphasis has

been put on normative boundaries – on what people *say* they do – very often from the gatekeepers' perspective. On the other hand, there are "rational actor" models that emphasise individual agency above anything else. Such models have more recently been revised to bring the two approaches together and to include more practical strategies of day-to-day behaviour as well as discourse, perhaps most notably by Bourdieu, as I will explain later.

Studies about religious communities in Palestine tend to fall into the former category, often in fact neglecting minorities[1] such as Christians, Samaritans, or Druze, pitching essentialised "Jewish Israelis" against "Muslim Palestinians" as the only players. Minority studies, on the other hand, tend to not only gloss over differences *within* the communities, such as "the Christians", but also take them out of their social context failing to pay attention to the *relationships* individuals and groups have developed with their social environment.

In this chapter, I argue that in order to understand the inter-religious dynamics in a Palestinian context we need more flexible notions and models of group boundaries. In fact, it is the argument of this book that, while people in Nablus are constantly involved in drawing boundaries of various kinds, these are by no means static and durable. They are continuously being negotiated, reshaped, and manipulated, depending on the historical and political context. Here I would like to examine some of the strategies that members of the religious communities use to distinguish themselves from significant others. It is my argument that the dynamics of coexistence between different religious communities in a specific geographical and political context, especially one as volatile as the Palestinian one, can only be successfully understood by analysing the strategies and practices employed by individual and group actors in their embodied and discursive form on an everyday level. What emerges are boundaries that are ingrained

into the respective group members through socialisation processes and carefully maintained through daily practice and discourse, while at the same time being constantly negotiated, manipulated and crossed. Thus a careful equilibrium is maintained and re-established when events shake the balance.

Groups and boundaries

One question that every community has to tackle in their effort to survive as a distinct group is how they deal with internal differences while maintaining a semblance of unity for the outside world to see. Several analytical concepts play into this issue, all of which have acquired some significance in anthropological discourse over the centuries. Depending on the trends of the day, community concepts such as "ethnic groups" or "nations" have caused vivid discussions, and questions of "citizenship" or "stereotyping" have received significant attention in the attempt to understand the processes through which cultural groups are created, maintained, or broken apart. At this point it seems in order to revisit some of these discussions, as they might help us clarify some of the strategies used by Nabulsis today to survive as a group or distinct groups within the community.

"Ethnic group" as a term was first used in anthropology after World War II to replace terms such as "tribe" or "race", which were increasingly perceived to be loaded and politically incorrect (Barfield 1997: 152). Yet, in many contexts the terms "nation", "ethnic group", or "tribe" were in fact used coterminously (Kottak 2005: 72). While the term "ethnic group" has lost much of its currency as an analytical concept in contemporary anthropological discourse, it is worth noting that it used to hold a prominent place in the Soviet/Russian *etnografia* tradition, and largely continues to do so. The term is generally used to refer to a group of people, who share the

same culture, especially the same language. In this sense, it is not much different from general understandings of the term "nation". The problem with these kinds of understandings is, of course, that they portray groups – be they "nations", "ethnic groups", or "cultures" – as unchanging structures with solid boundaries and that they ignore the constant flux that marks all human groups. Not only do groups undergo change from within, as when norms and behaviours are re-negotiated and manipulated, they also face constant challenges from without, such as through sustained contact with other groups that differ from one's own. By the 1960s, these concepts were seen as hopelessly inadequate "for understanding the complex relationships between cultural expression, speech, and social and political organisation" (ibid.). It was Barth's (1969) influential essay *Ethnic groups and boundaries* that eventually redefined what "ethnic group" should actually mean. He not only criticised the previously predominant analytical focus on individual ethnic groups – advocating instead an analysis of the *relationships* between groups –, but also the fixity of boundaries of human groups, the idea that "the group has a continual organizational existence with boundaries (criteria of membership) that have marked off a continuing unit" (Barth 1969: 38). Rather than being fenced in by fixed and possibly imposed boundaries, Barth (1969) argued that any semblance of boundaries is self-ascribed and therefore changeable depending on the circumstances. People, according to Barth (1969:14), *choose* to use certain markers, such as dress or language, as explicit and deliberate signs of their distinctiveness.

Similar assertions were made by Anderson (1983) in his landmark publication *Imagined Communities.* While nations, similar to "ethnic groups" are seen by their members as limited and sovereign – in other words, as distinct and bounded – they are, at the end of the day, merely imagined (Anderson 1983: 6f.). This "imagining" has historically been helped by

the developments in language and print, especially in the novel and the newspaper, media that have also played an essential role in the "imagining" of an "Arab nation". "Imagined" here, Anderson (1983) is keen to emphasise, is not to mean "false", as the idea of a "nation" has great truth value for the members of the community, and has proven to be a very powerful idea indeed. Here we come back to Barth's (1969) assertion that boundaries around a community or group are usually self-ascriptions and deliberate creations for purposes that need to be further explored.

Barth (1969: 19), in the structural-functionalist tradition of his days, suggested that the reason why people to choose boundaries around their communities is, at least in part, linked to economic interests. In his view, ethnic groups "may provide important goods and services for each other, i.e., occupy reciprocal and therefore different niches but in close interdependence". Anderson (1983: 7), on the other hand, traces the perceived "nations" to historical developments in the political arena of Europe, after Enlightenment and Revolution had destroyed "the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm".

Notions such as "ethnic group" or "nation" seem to provide a sense of stability and empowerment by emphasising deep roots in history, offering, as Barfield (1997: 153) points out, an assertion "that there is something essential or given in the distinctions between peoples", i.e. a primordial quality. More often than not, this rootedness is expressed in terms of shared descent, a topic that has for a long time been at the forefront of anthropological enquiry (Bates and Plog 1990: 329). Yet, while kin groups – the early focus of anthropological research and usually rather small-scale – trace their origins to a (real or imagined) ancestor, ethnic groups and nations add to this an origin as a group in common narratives of experience, especially of suffering (ibid.). This latter aspect becomes

particularly salient in the case of Nabulsis – different narratives of suffering interweave here to create a variety of senses of "community". It should be obvious that such powerful narratives, repeated on all kinds of occasions, create certain unreflected dispositions that orient the behaviour of community members, or, in other words, what Bourdieu (1977a) has called "*habitus*". This view already indicates the powerfulness of such processes, as people's thinking, speaking, and acting is influenced in an *unreflected* way by the imagined community they feel part of. These powerful sentiments are utilised by modern nation-states and in political situations such as that found in the West Bank, where, as Barfield (1997: 153) indicates, "the politics of everyday life accentuate the significance of certain cultural differences", whether that is from inside or outside the community. To put it differently, we have to recognise that ethnicity, or ethnic or national identity, rather than being atavistic, "has become a much more significant factor in social relations since the emergence of the nation-state" (ibid.).

I do not intend to use the terms "ethnic group" or "nation" to describe the social relations in Nablus – I prefer to use religious affiliation as the main marker –, but the analysis of the local situation can, I believe, benefit from the insights gained from the theoretical work done in this area. The strategies and processes that have been identified in the creation, maintenance, and destruction of social group boundaries can add to our understanding of the dynamics that mark the relations between Muslims, Christians, Samaritans, and Israeli Jews. What is of crucial importance in this case, however, apart from identifying the discourses of a nation-state (the West Bank is of course not a sovereign state, while Israel is), is to examine the narratives of those who are in a numerical minority and potentially marginalised. In fact, the term "ethnic group" is today often used to refer to minorities within a nation-state

context (ibid.). The nationalist discourse in the West Bank, however, is of importance, because, as Barfield (1997: 338) points out, the "national vision promoted by a ruling elite with access to powerful instruments can embody within itself the seeds of its own questioning", a process we see at work in Nablus on a day-to-day basis. He goes on to explain that if "the basis of state power becomes problematic, minorities may seek to realize their own 'national' aspirations", which, given the volatile situation in the West Bank, can be considered a very real threat to the ruling elite, be it political or religious. I will return to this aspect at various points in this book again. In fact, returning to the question of boundaries for a moment, in the situation of the West Bank not even the usually more fixed "state boundaries" are constantly changing and subject to very fierce political negotiations.

An interesting comment in this regard I heard in a Sunday service sermon in one of Nablus' churches in summer 2012. The preacher used the story of Jesus crying for the sake of Jerusalem (Luke 19:41–44) to point out that there is no contradiction between religion and patriotism (*wataniya).* He emphasised that Christians in particular should be concerned about their country (*watan*), as Jesus was, because this was the Holy Land (*al-ard al-muqaddas*). It needed protection and defence and should not be left to others. All the marks (*athar*) of Jesus' life and work were found in this homeland, and the Christians in the region were much more than the ancient stones that bore witness to early Christian life. He referred to Christians in the Holy Land, on other occasions as well, as "living stones" (*al-ahjar al-hayya)*, until this day bearing witness to the origins of Christianity. He referred to two examples of sacred sites in Nablus to exemplify his remarks: the church built over Jacob's Well (*bi'r Ya'qub)*, as well as the site where the church of St. Philippus was built. The former refers to the place where Jesus is said to have met the Samaritan

woman (John 4:4–42), whereas the latter refers to the apostle Philippus and his work in "Samaria" (Acts 8:5–25).

The relationship between "minorities" and the national elite takes on yet another facet in the case of the Samaritans in Nablus. Rather than being a simple numerical minority, they occupy a special position within the Palestinian and Israeli national narratives. Perhaps the most useful concept to analyse their situation in the context of ethnic and national sentiments is that of a "middleman minority", as I will explain in more detail later. Even though the term is traditionally applied to "ethnic groups recruited to a country by those in power to fill a gap in the *economic* or *labor* structure", it is also used to describe the "*social* position these groups occupy in society", and whose characteristics describe the Samaritans in Nablus quite well (Barfield 1997: 321; emphasis mine). In contrast to the classical case studies of middleman minorities that consider immigration a major hallmark of their position, the Samaritans are arguable the "most original" part of the population in the area: they view themselves as older than the Jews, the Christians, and the Muslims. In the course of time, however, the roles of "natives" and "migrants" changed, so that today they are still not "absorbed into the indigenous population, they lives as nations within nations, with their own distinct culture and social organisation (ibid.). And while such middleman minorities are usually regarded with ambiguity by both governments and the people, often leading to discrimination or worse, their position can also have its advantages. They often enjoy special privileges by the ruling elite and occupy certain economic, political, and social niches in the country. Yet, due to their social and political isolation, they find themselves in a very vulnerable position – once they fall out of favour, they are used as buffers and scapegoats with very little social backing. Like most of the classic middleman minorities, the only real contact Samaritans "have with the

indigenous population is through business dealings" (Barfield 1997: 322). Barfield (ibid.) points out that even though such minorities may be relatively prosperous financially, their money is considered "weak money", as it does not help them to protect themselves in times of political trouble, and that they always have citizenship problems.

The Samaritans find themselves in precisely such a position – they have established for themselves certain niches, are relatively well off and protected by two governments, the Israeli and the Palestinian, live in (physical and social) isolation, can claim two citizenships, and are more often than not viewed with suspicion by the people (both Israelis and Palestinians). What does give the Samaritans a slightly privileged position, is the fact that the Israeli government considers them Jewish (which they themselves do not do), granting them special rights and protection, while at the same time they have a protected status with the Palestinian Authority and elite (most notably under Yasser Arafat), that view them as Arabs and as a prominent example of the good neighbourly relations of the Palestinians with "Others", *even Jews* (which is how they see the Samaritans), as long as there is mutual respect. Both sides of the Israel/Palestine divide are taking advantage of the existence of the Samaritans in the area, and yet their position remains vulnerable, as they are very readily used as scapegoats by the population. While the violent discrimination against other middleman minorities does not seem to be a realistic scenario in the foreseeable future, the Samaritans are very well aware of their precarious situation and of the fact that they have to "walk between the raindrops".

Events from the second *intifada* help to illustrate the "betwixt and between" situation of the Samaritans further. As they did not fully support this uprising, just like the Christians, they were caught between the frontlines of the conflict. Both Palestinian and Israeli sides inflicted harm on

the Samaritans during those years. For instance, the curfews imposed by the Israeli army on Nablus negatively affected the Samaritans, who by then were living in Kiryat Luza, on Mount Gerizim. As Ireton (2003) reports, "they were not allowed to shop in the city and were forced to travel as far as Ariel and Holon to buy products at much higher prices". In addition to that, the curfew and roadblocks set up by the army prevented Palestinian workers to enter the village. One consequence of this was that waste was not collected and soon piled up in the streets of Kiryat Luza (ibid.). The Samaritan cemetery on the mountain top became overgrown, as Palestinian workers were unable to come and clean it. Israeli tanks destroyed the roads, like in Nablus city itself (ibid.). Despite the declared protection of the Samaritan community by the Israeli government, no services, support, or repairs were provided by the Israeli army, which even led to a spontaneous demonstration by the majority of Kiryat Luza residents against the situation, after formal complaints had been consistently ignored (ibid.).

The fact that in this conflict, the Samaritans were quite literally sitting on the fence is well illustrated by the case of one of their members, who had been injured by both Palestinian fighters as well as Israeli soldiers while in his car driving to his village (Ireton 2003). In other words, the Palestinian uprising placed at least the Nablus section of the Samaritan community in an ambiguous situation, of being neglected by, and eventually turning against at least one of their proclaimed protectors, the Israeli government.

But not only in crisis situations does the uncertain situation of Samaritans become obvious. Appeals to develop the Samaritan settlement and the archaeological site on Mount Gerizim, for instance, were similarly ignored or inadequate funding provided. And not only the Nablus community is affected. Ireton (2003) explains that "the Samaritan community in Holon are also suffering as a result of the inaction

of local authorities". Thus "housing expansion plans for the Newe Marqah neighbourhood have been delayed for almost twenty years forcing more than 20 young Samaritan couples to look for housing in nearby Jewish areas" (ibid.). Therefore, Samaritans are largely left to fend for themselves, despite the declared protection of, and respect for their community by both Palestinian and Israeli decision makers.

Despite the fact that the Samaritans in the Nablus area, and to some limited extent also the Christians, live in (self-imposed) isolation, and have established some niches for their own community in the wider social networks, I hesitate to describe the society as a plural one, in the sense that Barth (1968: 324) does. He describes a plural society as one combining ethnic differences, ecological specialisation, and the economic mutual dependence of ethnic groups upon each other. The contrasts and specialisation in the case of the Nablus area are not sufficiently distinguished to merit the term plural society. His analysis of ethnic boundaries in plural societies, however, is interesting for another reason – he claims that ethnic boundaries are most stable and lasting when the various groups occupy different ecological niches (Barth 1968: 331). If groups use the *same* ecological niche and the less powerful group is able to utilise marginal environments, they may coexist with relatively fluid boundaries (ibid.). Applying this to the case of the groups in Nablus area, with their lack of specialisation, one would have to assume that the boundaries between them are indeed very fluid and flexible.

I am equally reluctant to describe the society of the Nablus area as "multicultural", as, for instance, Raheb (1994: 129) does for all of Palestine. "Multicultural" here implies that cultural diversity in a country is something good and desirable (Kottak 2005: 75). This view encourages the practice of cultural-ethnic traditions rather than the assimilation into a dominant national culture (ibid.). This is not the place to

further engage in the current debate about multiculturalism or to reiterate its contested nature. Suffice it to mention that "multiculturalism" is contentious both theoretically and practically, having experienced countless moments of success as well as failure throughout its chequered history. Similar things can be said about "assimilation", the process of culture change that a minority undergoes when adopting the cultural patterns of the dominant culture in a country. Neither of these concepts or policies adequately describe the situation in Nablus. The existing relationships between the three socio-cultural groups discussed here – Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans – are essentially context-dependent. There are situations, in which all or most social players would describe their society as in fact "monocultural". At other points, the niches occupied by the different groups emerge quite clearly, justifying the label "plural" society. At yet other times, a degree of "assimilation" or "acculturation" can be observed, resulting in the adoption of dominant culture traits by the minority groups. And finally, there are those situations, when cultural diversity, in the "multicultural" sense, is celebrated, recognised, and respected by all or most people living in the Nablus area.

Given the context-based nature of social relations in Nablus, I am more inclined to forego any label for the society, and instead to analyse a variety of specific situations, in which social relations between the groups in question interact in one form or another, and to search for any emerging patterns. I am of the persuasion that the society and the social relations in Nablus are rather ordinary, in the sense that any culture and society contains sub-groups that at various points in history and in day-to-day life come to the fore, experience respect as well as discrimination, or are happily or proudly integrated as "one of us". What does make these groups at times different from other social sub-groups is the fact that they are generally religiously defined, with claims to territory, historical

and national narrative, and supernatural blessing. What further distinguishes the situation in Nablus from other societies with a variety of subgroups, is the existence of a significant "Other" that is equally religiously defined with equal if not more ferocious claims on territory, history, and supernatural chosenness – "Jewish" Israel.

Yet, despite the fact that I consider the inter-group relations as a common feature found in most societies, for both Christians and Samaritans in the area, how they portray themselves in the context of the "nation(s)" that exist in the territory, remains a crucial question. Having characteristics that could potentially tie them to other "nations" in the near or distant neighbourhoods – particularly their religious affiliation – gives frequently rise to suspicion amongst the majority population, here Muslims. Despite constant assurances to the contrary, both Samaritans and Christians at regular intervals see their loyalties questioned. The ethnic group in question here is "Arabs" or "Palestinians", both of which have always had rather contested boundaries (except for ardent nationalists). If language was the main criteria of defining the boundaries of this ethnic group, both Christians and Samaritans would fall clearly within its limits. One problem that arises with this conceptualisation is the fact that both groups have historically also used second languages – ancient Hebrew, Greek, or Latin – in their worship. Everyday traditions and practices also largely overlap. Even the criteria of ancestry would yield a common forefather in Abraham. In other words, how the "nation" or "ethnic group" is imagined, and where the boundaries are drawn, depends crucially on the respective political, social, and economic circumstances. In some instances, Christians and/or Samaritans are not imagined as existing within the ethnic or national boundaries in question, and, due to religious differences, portrayed as essentially, even physically, different, i.e. ethnic groups in their own right. Yet, given

their numerical minority status, the question of inclusion and exclusion becomes vital for their social, political, and even physical survival. Hence, self-portrayals, self-ascriptions are of crucial importance. It is key to understand, which situations ask for strategies of *inclusion* into the majority national or ethnic group, and under which circumstances *exclusionary* strategies are safe to play or even required. I will return to this aspect throughout the book.

One instructive example of how selves are perceived can be found in a study by Kattan (1994) among the student population of Bethlehem University (which is a Christian foundation and sponsored by the Vatican). Using a questionnaire, she tried to elucidate the attitudes of both Muslim and Christian students towards each other. She included two questions about their national and/or religious identity. When asked about their Palestinian identity, 89 per cent of the respondents felt that religion is less important than their national belonging. With regard to their identity as Arabs, the figure is 85.3 per cent. For Kattan (1994: 94) these results are "to be expected in our context as nationalism is paramount in a society under occupation". What is, however, hidden within in these figures, is the fact that only about one third of the students "strongly agree" with their national belongingness overriding their religious one. It would have been interesting to get a breakdown of these figures along religious lines, as I suspect that since the "Palestinian cause" has become increasingly Islamised, Muslims find it easier to conflate the two identities than Christians would. Having said this, it is also to be expected that, given the political significance and predominance of the nationalist discourse in the region, most respondents, irrespective of their religious affiliation, would be reluctant to express diverging views in a questionnaire delivered by their teachers.

Of course, Nabulsi society consists of more than just religious communities and their boundaries. There are a variety

of social groups, which, depending on the context, come to the fore. I would now like to take a closer look at how religious and other socio-cultural, economic, or political boundaries criss-cross society in Nablus.

Religious and class boundaries

To say that no society is entirely made up of equals means stating the obvious. One of anthropology's and sociology's main concerns, as I have mentioned earlier, has been to theorise the creation and maintenance of different groups, categories, or classes of people within one society. While many of these attempts to understand social difference are grounded in fairly static notions of groups and classes and the respective differences between them, Bourdieu in most of his work insists that social class be analysed as a *multidimensional* and *relational* theoretical construct. I have no intention of belabouring Bourdieu's complex thinking about class distinctions yet again, as others have done this very successfully before (Swartz 1997). Unless required by the analysis of my data, I will assume that the main outlines of Bourdieu's theoretical constructs are known to the reader and refrain from going into further details. Suffice it to note that Bourdieu's structuralist-constructivist approach to the analysis of social classes presumes that cultural practices were the markers of class distinctions that lie behind them.

While I am hesitant to speak of "social classes" in the Nabulsi context of relations between religious communities, there indeed exist social groups that can be referred to as classes. I have again and again, in day-to-day life as well as in my work environment at the local university, witnessed and heard about the perceived gaps between residents of different areas. Most people are very keen to emphasise perceived differences between those living in Nablus' newer residential

areas, those living the Old Town of the city, those residing in the refugee camps, and finally those hailing from the surrounding villages. They construct a discursive as well as practical hierarchy between these groups with certain characteristics attached to them respectively. This is expressed, for instance, in marriage patterns, as I will explain again later, where parents are very keen to arrange the marriages of their children to "suitable" partners, i.e. of the same social class or geographical region. There is the perception that social values in the rural areas are more conservative, and perhaps more "authentic" Palestinian, than in the urban areas. As in most societies in the world, residents of rural areas have a reputation of being "simpler" than urbanites, who portray themselves as more "civilised". The local university has a reputation of being to a considerable extent populated by students from the villages of the northern West Bank, therefore having a certain "down-to-earth" atmosphere. The university in Birzeit, on the other hand, has a reputation of having an "urban", even "Westernised" climate. Within Nablus itself, there are crucial lines between different areas of residents, some having the reputation of – being rather "posh" – for instance, Rafidiya – others as the centre of resistance and trouble – for instance, the Old Town – yet again others as being right at the bottom of civilised life – for instance, the refugee camps – with all the essential stereotypes attached to them.

While these groups and classes are not the focus of this book, it is essential to keep them in mind, as they at times criss-cross the lines between religious communities. This applies less to the Samaritans, who through their religious exclusivism largely form a class of their own, and only in part to the Christians, who are not found in the refugee camps nor in the Old Town, but in villages and various areas of Nablus itself. The differences are, however, marked between Muslims of diverging origins, to the extent that some could be regarded

as closer in outlook and behaviour to Christians and/or Samaritans than to fellow Muslims of a different background. This is significant for this study in as much as the "Muslims" I am talking about here are largely of urban origin and from the equivalent of a middle class background. This makes the Christians, Muslims, and Samaritans of this book relatively homogeneous groups, yet it largely excludes – by practical omission – those from the refugee camps and villages. For them, and perhaps a later research project, Bourdieu's analysis of social class relations would be very useful.

What makes Bourdieu's ideas potentially useful for understanding the inter-religious relations in the Nablus area, is the fact that distinguishing cultural practices between them do indeed exist. Furthermore, Bourdieu himself has used the concept of social classes often rather loosely, referring at times to a position in productive relations, at others to a specific groups such as women, or again as an instrument of cognitive and social distinction (Swartz 1997: 153). In the Nablus context the latter two meanings are closest to the situation on the ground. Indeed, for Bourdieu other stratifying factors, such as gender, place of residence, or religion, are usually inseparable features of class, at times even constitutive of class (Swartz 1997: 154). What is important about this notion of class, regardless of its precise signification or boundaries, is that Bourdieu believes, as Swartz (1997: 145) has pointed out, that in a highly stratified social world, "individuals and groups struggle to maintain or enhance their relative standing within a hierarchically structured social space". This struggle is often expressed through cultural practices, a notion that helps us comprehend much of the socio-cultural dynamics between the religious communities of the Nablus area. It is, however, also crucial to remember that Bourdieu's view of class struggle is not entirely constructivist – for him, social inequality or differences are not just theoretical constructs, but rooted in objective structures of

the unequal distribution of what he calls different kinds of "capital". In the Nablus context, these differentiating practices and inequalities are not only found with regard to religious communities, but notably so also concerning the rural/urban divide, as well as the refugee/original population differences. There are, in fact, many "others", from which a "self" would want to be distinguished. To all Bourdieu's (1987) argument that levels of stratification applies that social groups are essentially contested identities that are maintained or constructed through a struggle over what is the legitimate view of their social world and its divisions.

One of the most important factors in this struggle about the legitimate interpretation of reality is the distribution of different kinds of capital in society. Bourdieu distinguishes between at least four types of capital, economic (money and property), cultural (cultural goods and services including education), social (networks and acquaintances), and symbolic (legitimation). While in the Nablus context there certainly are differences in the distribution in the first three kinds of capital between different parts of the population, it is symbolic capital that appears to be most relevant with regard to the distinctive practices between members of the religious communities. Bourdieu (1977b) does in fact argue that symbolic systems, such as *religion*, fulfil three functions: cognition, communication and integration, and social differentiation. Especially due to the latter function, symbolic systems also serve, according to Bourdieu, as *instruments of domination*. This is so, because, as Swartz (1997: 83) explains, the dominant symbolic systems in a society "provide [. . .] distinctions and hierarchies for ranking groups and legitimation of social ranking by encouraging the dominated to accept the existing hierarchies of social distinction". In other words, symbolic capital is crucial for the exercise of power and the maintenance of hierarchies. Creating and sustaining distinctions is, therefore, one

of the many strategies to perpetuate the social structure and order.

While the notion of symbolic capital is certainly helpful to analyse the Nablus context, there is one problem with Bourdieu's thinking – his main focus has been on the *dominant* culture, not on those of the thus *dominated* groups in society. His only reference to potentially subordinate groups is in his claim that they share in the patterns of the dominant system, or "a set of basic perceptual schemes" (Bourdieu 1984: 468). While this logic of exclusion and inclusion, which Bourdieu's notion of domination through symbolic capital implies, is quite likely shared by all members of society to a certain extent, it cannot fully explain the dynamics between religious communities in Nablus. Later on, I will employ a different set of concepts to obtain a "bottom-up" view of the relations between dominant and dominated, and thus to complement Bourdieu's ideas. Whereas Bourdieu is certainly right to claim that the cement of class relations is to be found in the legitimation of domination provided in symbolic systems, I would also argue that, at least in the case of Nablus, strategies of *resistence* against such legitimation have to be taken into account to fully explain the dynamics of social relationships.

At this point, it is worthwhile dwelling a little longer on the idea that symbolic systems are supported by *both* the dominant *and* the dominated. Bourdieu refers to the power that symbolic systems grant to certain groups as "symbolic power", that is as legitimating power or "worldmaking power" (Bourdieu 1987: 13). This power denotes the ability to impose "the legitimate vision of the social world and of its divisions" upon all members of society, i.e. the dominant and the dominated (ibid.). It receives consent even by the dominated, because it creates an element of what he calls "misrecognition", i.e. the denial of economic, political or other interests in certain relations and behaviour on the side of the dominant groups.

Symbolic practices help to disguise interest as disinterest, so that the former remains misrecognised. In other words, as Swartz (1997: 90) puts it, "symbolic capital is a form of power that is not perceived as power, but as legitimate demands for recognition, deference, obedience or the services of others".

While for Bourdieu, such symbolic pursuits are to be found in philanthropy, science, religion, and the arts, I would, for the case of Nablus, also argue that the "Palestinian national cause" is being used by those in dominant positions to impose their ideas and worldviews on everyone. Because the struggle for this cause is generally interpreted as "selfless" and "disinterested" (other than the interest in the common good), it may serve to disguise other unequal relations and interests. In fact, Swartz (1997: 91; emphasis mine) expresses this in a similar way while talking about philanthropy: "[it] functions to legitimate particular economic interests by converting them into forms of symbolic recognition for the *collective good*". He (Swartz 1997: 92; emphasis mine) further notes that "symbolic capital is a 'sort of advance', extended by the dominated to the dominant as long as the dominated find it *within their interest* to accord recognition and legitimation to the dominant". He refers to this advance of trust as a "collective belief" (ibid.). As I have indicated earlier, this belief in the collective good of the Palestinian cause is indeed shared by the majority of Nabulsis, regardless of religious, class, or other backgrounds, and with great frequency invoked on official and semi-official occasions. The one belief that cuts across religious and other divides is that all Palestinians must be united and (at least temporarily) forget about any existing or imagined frictions or differences. As I have outlined earlier, this appeal to unity – against a common enemy – can be interpreted as a very powerful ideology, maintained by "symbolic labour" by specialists and leaders, and used to disguise and legitimise economic, political, and social interests of those in power. It will also become

evident that it is within the interest of those in the minority in Nablus to "accord recognition and legitimation to the dominant" with regard to the national cause.

That this recognition also has its limits, however, will also become clear later on. And it is in this aspect, as I have mentioned earlier, that I feel Bourdieu's idea of symbolic capital does not fully explain social reality. In Nablus, we also find a significant amount of *de*-legitimation, of *recognition* of personal interests, and *resistance* against this ideology, the symbolic capital of the elite. In other words, we can assume some kind of *counter*-ideology among the minority groups. Employing Bourdieu's idea again, we should, in this case, find another kind of symbolic capital or processes, whose main purpose is to establish differences and distinctions. The logic of inclusion and exclusion into the various social formations is based, as Bourdieu (1984) argues, on binary oppositions. As I will show later, such binary oppositions are readily and frequently used in the Nablus context to demarcate boundaries between "us" and "them". Bourdieu (1984: 468) provides a list of such adjectives – high/low, spiritual/material, fine/coarse, light/heavy, free/forced etc. –, yet, one the most significant markers of difference in the Nablus area is the distinction between somebody being respected and sincere (*muhtaram*) or mean (*la'im*).

As Bourdieu (1987: 14; emphasis mine) pointed out, symbolic power is "the power to *make groups* and to consecrate or institute them". In fact, it can be argued, that group existence and identity are dependent on the exercise of symbolic power. I have described some of these processes earlier. At this point I would like turn to another element of the process of group formation and the drawing of boundaries between them. Where there are groups and boundaries there will be marginal areas, and these marginal areas harbour dangers for the existence

of the groups themselves. Ideas and fears such these can be witnessed in Nablus as well.

Dangerous margins

If we portray Nabulsi society in majority-minority terms then a possible underlying idea is that the minorities are at the margins of society, not only in numerical terms. And indeed, it can be observed that neither Samaritans nor Christians play crucial social, political, or economic roles. In their majority, Samaritans and Christians are at best middle class, not being big economic players, and they emphasise that they are (or have become) generally apolitical. In other words, from a majority perspective, they can indeed be considered marginal.

If Mary Douglas' time-honoured analysis is correct, then "all margins are dangerous" (Douglas 2002: 150). If stability and order is the aim of a given social structure then it becomes "vulnerable at its margins" (ibid.). In Douglas' analysis this danger and vulnerability takes the form of pollution and purity respectively, which, she argues, are key concerns in every society. The aim, it can be said, is to keep the inside "pure" and free from any pollution. While these ideas have been criticised, especially for methodological errors, they offer a valuable perspective on the situation of religious communities in Nablus. Obviously, ideas of purity and pollution are, in a cross-cultural comparison, most frequently applied to the human body and the fear of contamination especially through food, yet they are equally relevant for a national or ethnic context. In this context, purity takes various forms: cultural, linguistic, religious, political. Such ideas, as Barfield (1997: 385) points out, are "powerful social markers, rules, and motivations that determine with or from whom one can legitimately eat, accept food, marry, have sex, and associate". I will take up this theme again in a later chapter. The result of such ideas is a moral order

with absolute exclusionary boundaries and relative rankings of classes of purity (ibid.). This is most evidently expressed in the South Asian caste system, but can, to various extents, be observed in most societies in the world. In the Nabulsi context, there are various levels of "impurity", ranging from the personal, to the religious and the communal.

One important underlying idea in the Nabulsi setting, it seems to me, is that purity is essential for the survival of the Palestinian nation in the face of political and military occupation. Loyalty to this construct is demanded, surveilled, and questioned on a regular basis. On a political level, this has of course been translated into a nationalist ideology, but it can also be witnessed on an everyday level. There are, for instance, frequent debates between Palestinians about political activism, here in the sense of having to take a stand and speak out in the name of the people and a potential state. The question that arises in such discussions is "why don't you . . .?" Then there is the idea that Palestine is a Muslim nation (*al-falastin al-muslima*). I have also witnessed derisive remarks about Palestinians who speak English or any other non-Arabic language: they are seen as "showing off", or as "trying to be better than us". Especially for the young, there is a strong emphasis on teaching them traditions, be that crafts, dancing, or other customs. Against the backdrop of occupation, there is a considerable amount of social pressure to remain "pure", to resist foreign influences and corruption. At the same time, the political situation also gave and continues to give rise to potential pollution, especially in the shape of those who migrated or were forced to move abroad.

As I have mentioned above, the loyalties of Christians and Samaritans are frequently questioned for their perceived ties to outside forces. It is in this sense that they may be seen as polluting and dangerous to the nation. Douglas has distinguished between four different kinds of pollution, not all of

which are relevant for the Nabulsi context. The first danger, she explains, is the one pressing on external boundaries. The second danger hails from transgressing internal lines of the system. The third danger lies in the margins of the lines. And the final danger stems from internal contradictions (Douglas 2002: 151f.).

The first fear relates to anything that comes from outside or below the existing order, which could be applied to the fear of "Westernisation" in the Palestinian context, or indeed proselytising between the religious communities of Nablus. The themes of conversion to another religion and outside marriage come into play here. Members of all three religious communities have expressed to me their strongly felt aversion to, even fear of, such intrusions.

The second danger refers to the difference between ideas of pollution and moral taboos. Douglas argues that, where there are strict moral lines, pollution ideas are not necessary. The latter come into play when such lines are "precarious" (Douglas 2002: 172). The issue of morality is indeed a prominent one in the Nabulsi context and shared by all religious communities. While most of the moral lines are common for Christians, Samaritans, and Muslims, they are constantly employed for drawing lines between "us", as the moral superiors, and "them", as the morally deficient ones. One idea that emerges from this reasoning is the corrupting potential of "the Other", be they Christians, Samaritans, or Muslims. I have heard members of all three religious communities comment on the moral deficiencies of adherents of other religions, and they expressed the conviction that Palestine would be a better society without their respective morally corrupting influence. While from a minority perspective, this "influence" is perceived as the *status quo* that could potentially reversed through the minorities' morals, the Muslim majority view is indeed one of pollution and danger from the margins. Given the common view

that the survival of the Palestinian people against an external enemy (the Israeli occupation) depends crucially on internal solidarity, this danger of internal corrupting influences can indeed be perceived as quite real.

The third danger mentioned by Douglas appears less relevant for the current context. The system at war with itself refers to internal contradictions of the various ends that individuals are encouraged to pursue (Douglas 2002: 173). I would relate this quite closely to the ideas mentioned above: a system, such as the Palestinian one, where various socio-cultural and religious groups live side-by-side, does, almost by definition, include internal contradictions. In the Nablus context, this recurrently takes the shape of moral debates.

The fourth danger refers to the fact that ideas of purity tend to be an enemy of change. As Douglas (2002: 202) points out: "Whenever a strict pattern of purity is imposed on our lives it is either highly uncomfortable or it leads into contradiction if closely followed; and if not observed, hypocrisy". This ties back to the first and second dangers, which, if taken to the extreme can indeed foster an overly strict pattern of purity. In the case of Palestine this arguably applies to nationalist ideas and the political situation. Due to the ongoing crisis of occupation, nationalist ideas have become progressively more forcefully expressed. As I will explain again later, the various attempts to resist the occupation, especially the two *intifadas*, have become increasingly framed in not only nationalist, but also religious terms. This kind of purity, often portrayed as the solution to the political dilemma and strictly policed, seems for many to become uncomfortable. Because this struggle has in recent years been increasingly framed in Islamic terms, Christians and Samaritans feel excluded or alienated from the cause. They are not only living the contradictions between this kind of enforced purity and their own day-to-day reality, but they are also the ones who often accuse the

majority population of hypocrisy. This contradiction results from trying to be "holier than thou" and/or patriotic, while at the same adapting to the changes that the political and economic situation provide. Similar to the first fear, anything that threatens this national-religious purity is perceived as dangerous to the survival of the people and its future.

By way of example, I shall mention briefly an incident that occurred in summer 2012 during a departmental meeting at the local university. The meeting was attended by department staff and one female student, as is the tradition in the university. When discussion turned to a new changed curriculum that would possibly alter some of the courses required by the university of all students, such as English, IT, or Palestinian history, the student pointed out that the course "Islamic culture" should perhaps be changed: "My friend is Samaritan, and since there are Christians and Samaritans in this country, we should perhaps teach some about this as well". Two members of the department pointed out to her that "the identity of the university is 'Islamic', so if we want to change this course, a university requirement, we would have to change the identity of the university". In other words, even if there is awareness of religious diversity among some members of the majority, it is frequently emphasised that Muslims are in the majority, and that, therefore, the identity of the country should be and will be Muslim. In my reading, this and similar incidents speak to the perceived danger in the margins, the fear of pollution of the carefully maintained Muslim purity.

What we can understand from this discussion about the concepts of purity and pollution in the Nablus context is that the religious communities living, as it were, in the margins of society are perceived as dangerous, especially to the nationalist cause. This obviously gives rise to the conviction that dangerous elements must be kept in check, limited, separated, so that their polluting influence does not become too

overpowering. It is in this sense that internal lines are drawn between the pure and powerful, on the one hand, and impure and marginalised, on the other. While this could technically refer to anyone who does not fully subscribe to the nationalist cause in word and deed, it is particularly salient for the three religious communities in Nablus, since the nationalist cause has become Islamised. Bhaba (1994: 134) has put this situation of flexible boundaries depending of the situation in the following way: "[. . .] the boundaries of the national culture are open so long as the voices of dissent remain individual and closed when that culture is threatened by collective dissension". In other words, some internal discord can be tolerated, as long as it does not take on noticeable dimensions, in case of which it would be perceived as danger and lines between "us" and "them" clearly drawn.

In this context, we must also mention discrimination against those, who are marginalised or perceived as "dangerous". Discrimination is, almost by definition, directed by majorities against minorities, be they sexual, ethnic, social, religious, or otherwise. This is not the place to go into further details about the concept and practice of discrimination, suffice it to note that I use the term in a rather common-sensical way: I understand it here as the distinguishing treatment of individuals based on their membership – or perceived membership – in a certain community; it refers to both verbal and practical behaviour that causes physical or emotional injury to members of that community and limits their social, political, and economic opportunities. One reason for discriminatory behaviour could arguably be the fear of those groups, often marginalised ones. In the Nablus context, narratives of discrimination are typically related by members of the two minority communities.

It appears that Samaritans nowadays experience less discrimination, possibly because of their protection by the Israeli

government and army, but also because of their remote place of residence on Mount Gerizim. In higher education, for instance, the opposite seems to be true: the local university has reserved special places for students of the Samaritan community, a kind of positive discrimination that does not exist for Christians. Historically, however, the Samaritans have certainly had their fair share of discrimination, most evident in their evacuation of their houses in the old city of Nablus, their traditional place of residence for centuries. While there are diverging narratives about this event by Muslims and Samaritans – one arguing that they left, because they did not want to live there any longer and were given land and houses on Mount Gerizim by the Israeli government; the other claiming that Muslims refused to sell houses in the old city to the growing community, so that they were forced to leave (Schur 1989: 131) – it does indicate that there were some misunderstandings and possibly discrimination against the Samaritans to make such an incisive move necessary. In fact, Schur (1989: 131f.) describes so much enmity between the Samaritans living in the old city and their non-Samaritan neighbours at the time, that they not only gradually left their residences, first to the north-western slope of Mount Gerizim, near an-Najah University, and then to the mountain top at Kiryat Luza, but were also subjected to systematic discrimination by the municipality and local residents. He explains that "in order to prevent the setting up of any permanent settlement, the municipality of Nablus shut off, in 1974, both electricity and water supply", and that "terrorists placed a bomb, which failed to go off, under the car of the High Priest" (ibid.).

As for the Christians, they have a certain repertoire of stories of discrimination against their community and individual community members. On the official, public level, of course, grievances of discriminatory treatment of the minority communities as a whole are rarely, if ever, uttered. As I will

explain in the following chapter, the leadership of the minority communities sings from the same hymn-sheet as the Muslim majority. In this public version of inter-religious relations discrimination is not an issue. And indeed, there generally is freedom of worship and religious assembly. What is more interesting for this discussion here, however, is less the public transcript as what goes on behind the scenes. There, discrimination, especially at the workplace, is a theme that is frequently belaboured. There are the rather vague stories that opening a shop as a Christian in Nablus is a risky, if not pointless project. On many occasions, I heard that such an endeavour would be useless, since "Muslims would not buy in our shops". In other words, there is the widespread perception that economic boycott was a very real kind of discrimination. I find it difficult to judge the truth-value of this accusation, as I have no substantial evidence for such a boycott. I know Christian shop owners, whose businesses are frequented by Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans alike. And in the crisis that crippled the economic situation in Nablus at the time of my research I have seen numerous shops open and close for want of customers.

I heard the story of a Christian hairdresser, who related an incident to me, when his religious identity was unknown. He was working in a hairdresser's salon together with a Muslim colleague. Once, he told me, an obvious quite orthodox Muslim customer entered the salon to have his hair cut by the Muslim hairdresser (by coincidence, not by choice). This customer had a rant about doing business with Christians and warned his hairdresser to do anything of that sort. The Christian hairdresser was busy with another customer at the time and, being good friends with his Muslim colleague, they simply exchanged glances, but remained silent. It appears from this incident that there are indeed Muslims in Nablus, who have considerable prejudice against Christians (and Samaritans) and have no scruples to put these into practice.

In a case of sexual misconduct of a local Christian man, which I will discuss in more detail later, his shop was attacked with Molotov cocktails and the graffiti sprayed onto the shop front read "death to the Christians". In other words, it appears to be quite well known, which businesses are owned by Christians and Samaritans. Perhaps as an act of self-defense, Christians and Samaritans also regularly and deliberately do business and shop among their own community. Whenever there is a choice between a Muslim and a Christian or Samaritan craftsperson, businessperson, or shop owner, preference is given to the latter, even if their services are inferior or their prices higher.

In terms of employees, there appears to be similar discrimination, if the stories I heard were true. Once, for instance, I spoke to a Christian bus driver, who was working for a major Nablus bus company. He told me that he was facing a lot of problems in his work because of his religious affiliation, being the only Christian in the company. His wage would, for example, be lower than that of his Muslim colleagues (3,000 shekel for a position with considerable responsibility compared to 5,000 shekel for those who have less qualifications, but the necessary connections, *wasta*). Furthermore, he would have frequent arguments with his Muslim employer, who apparently tried to convince him that Islam was the better religion and that he should convert. This latter part of the conversation seems to be a very common theme between Muslims and Christians (it is almost impossible to become Samaritan). I personally had this experience on a number of occasions at work and among friends and neighbours. While I am not aware of any local Muslims having converted to Christianity, there are countless examples on Christian TV, particularly TV stations that seem to be sponsored by the West. I am, however, familiar with a number of cases, where Christians converted to Islam, particularly women, who married Muslim men. It is this constant pressure and the ubiquity of the theme in daily

discourse that can cause a lot of psychological and emotional discomfort, which can be classified as discrimination. In the case of this bus driver, this kind of discrimination is added to the more practical kind, resulting in distinct sense of bitterness and frustration, if not anger.

As a final example I shall quote a middle-aged Christian woman, whose daughter had studied accounting and graduated as one of the best in her year. She said she had applied to every possible bank in the country, without success. She eventually emigrated to the United States. Her mother explained to me the reason for her problem was the family name, which betrays their Christian affiliation. It is generally known, which family names are Christian, which Muslim, and which Samaritan. "She applied everywhere, but once they see her family name, that's it. They prefer to give jobs to Muslims", she said. Furthermore, it was an issue of *wasta*, which the family lacked. In fact, I heard a very similar story by a young Christian woman years back in Jordan. It is not entirely clear here, which reason was the decisive one in not being a offered a position despite a good degree: the family name or lack of *wasta.* Both seem possible. The problem of *wasta*, however, is a much more far-reaching one, and Muslims complain about it just as much as non-Muslims. Yet, even *wasta* has a religious dimension to it, since members of the minority communities tend to have less powerful connections than all but the most disadvantaged Muslims.

Apart from the business world, there is a sense among members of the minority communities that they have to be particularly careful in any transactions or everyday relationships with others. They say that they would be either disadvantaged or cheated or exploited if they are not constantly on alert. If one bought land among Muslim landowners, they would steal from it or destroy it. Business people would take advantage if they knew someone was from a minority. Once I went to

buy some clothes with a Christian young woman. The shop owner, obviously a Muslim, asked where we came from (from Nablus or elsewhere), which family, and whether we were Muslims. I remained quiet and let my companion do all the talking as my looks betray my foreign origin. She responded politely that we were from Nablus, lied about her family name and claimed we were Muslims ("*sali 'ala-nnabi*", pray to the Prophet), hiding her cross pendant beneath her blouse. I do not know whether he believed her, but when I asked her later, why she had done this, she replied that this was necessary to get a good price. Another example is a Christian self-employed counselor, whose family name is also very obviously Christian. His business card reads only "Abu Ibrahim" in an attempt to hide his Christian origins. When customers call him on his mobile phone, he always answers with *"as-salamu 'alaykum*", a greeting that is never used between Christians themselves and is reserved for Muslims. When I asked him, why he did these things, he replied that otherwise he would not get any customers. Betraying his real religious identity would mean his ruin.

While I have no hard facts and figures for the extent of discrimination against members of the religious minorities, I assume that there is at least a grain of truth in such narratives. If all was well there would be no need to relate such stories. Perhaps some are embellished or used to mask one's own failure to succeed, but they are too frequent to be neglected and too often used to teach the young of the religious minorities some lessons about careful conduct to be of no consequence. The kind of discrimination described here can be read as an effort to keep those in the margins in check or actively threaten them. It can be interpreted as a strategy of keeping the margins of society pure, by limiting the opportunities of those, who are considered dangerous for the common good or otherwise. Labeling theory takes precisely this position by

explaining that discrimination takes as its starting point the mental categorisation of minorities, including stereotypes, and by describing social, religious, or ethnic difference as deviance from the norm.[2] The result of these ideas is the devaluation and stigmatisation of marginalised groups, which, if translated into practice, can be classified as discrimination. Furthermore, there is the time-honoured idea of scapegoats, who are blamed for social, economic, or political problems that are not of their making. Again this can often be observed when different ethnic, religious, or social groups compete with one another for resources and rewards. The relatively powerless are generally the recipients of such behaviour, since they have limited means of resistance. It is arguably an underlying fear of those groups that drive discriminatory behaviour, which would support the idea of the fear of "dangerous margins".

One other way to keep those in the margins in check and to draw lines between "us" and "them" is by creating discursive images of "them" that are very different from the ones used for "us". These patterns of speech are very common in Nablus, as they are elsewhere, and they frequently turn into firm sets of beliefs about the "Other".

Stereotyping the "Other"

While stereotyping plays an essential part in day-to-day social interactions, it has only relatively recently received attention in anthropology and other social sciences. Anthropology had, in fact, its own fair share of stereotyping, when in the context of World War II, so-called "national character studies" were conducted in an effort to "discover basic personality characteristics of the peoples of modern nations" (Haviland 1981: 149). Needless to mention that these studies were conducted from a distance without reference to fieldwork on the ground, and to some extent reproduced existing stereotypes about a

people, an approach that has been severely criticised. Rapport and Overing (2007: 391) define stereotyping as "attributing to all members of a category or class identical features", which makes it an essential strategy for the creation and imagination of a "nation" or "ethnic group" that is said to share major characteristics. Stereotypes themselves are described as "relatively rigid and oversimplified conceptions of a group of people in which all individuals in the group are labelled with the group characteristics" (Wrightman 1977: 672; quoted in ibid.).

Stereotypes can, of course, be portrays from without and from within. Using stereotypes about oneself in key moments of encounters with others helps to create a sense of unity, boundedness, and belongingness among those pictured as "us". Employing stereotypes in discourse about others can equally serve bonding purposes, in the sense that the "Other" is portrayed as different from "us", thus drawing a clear line between the two groups. This function of stereotyping in the process of drawing national and/or ethnic boundaries, is described by Rapport and Overing (2007: 392; emphasis mine) as forming "a discursive and conceptual *fortress* in which groups can *barricade* themselves, universally convinced of the safety, rectitude and respectability of their own traditions while at the same time aroused into taking prejudiced (but self-fulfilling) responses not towards real others but towards masquerades and phantasms".

More often than not, social scientists have perceived stereotyping in a psychological vein as misguided coping mechanisms, or "social pathology" (ibid.). While there is in all likelihood some truth in such assertions, this shall not be the focus or the assumption in this study. Whatever the cognitive and psychological basis of stereotyping, analysts agree that stereotypes are learned cultural practices, forming an integrated part of people's worldviews and, therefore, of a person's *habitus.* All approaches to stereotyping, furthermore,

emphasise the "factually incorrect, over-generalised and prejudicially rigid nature of stereotypes" (Rapport and Overing 2007: 393). The sociological approach, which is of most interest for the present study, examines the reasons why a group of people uses and believes in stereotypes. Stereotyping, it is said (ibid.), forms an autonomous discourse, which is largely independent of the characteristics of those "others" it refers to. Rapport and Overing (ibid.) refer to it as "part and parcel of a group's 'identity rhetoric'", whose purpose it is to construct group characteristics, to bolster group solidarity and integration.

While most conceptualisations and explanations of stereotypes carry, as I have mentioned above, negative evaluations, Rapport and Overing (2007: 394) also offer a positive appreciation of the functions of stereotyping. They point out that stereotypes, more often than not, point inward, and do not necessarily serve the vilification of the "other". They provide a sense of being and belonging by emphasising and realising the distinction between self and other. In other words, stereotypes furnish the individual "with comforting shibboleths of self" (ibid.). With regard to group boundaries, which are a focus of the present study, Rapport and Overing (ibid.; emphasis mine) indicate that stereotypes can be used by individuals "for cognitively *mapping* and then *anchoring* themselves within a conventional and secure social landscape". It is in this almost spatial sense that stereotypes "afford bearings from which to anticipate interaction, plot social relations and initiate knowing" (ibid.). In other words, stereotyping is about *positioning* the self within the social landscape. It is a "means simultaneously of conceptualising great flux and multiplicity [. . .] a shorthand way to order" (Rapport and Overing 2007: 397). It is in this sense that I see stereotyping and the portraying of self and other as essential strategies in the drawing of boundaries between groups.

The positive functions of stereotyping is summarised very neatly by Rapport and Overing (2007: 395), which is worth quoting in full:

> [. . . the stereotype] is a source of consistent, expectable, broad and immediate ways of knowing of sociocultural worlds, a ready means by which to embody and express a multitude of complex emotions, and a shortcut to generalities, to future possible regularities and uniformities. Such a foundation is very necessary not only as a bulwark against indeterminacy and unpredictability, but also as an encouragement towards action [. . .]

It is worth emphasising once again that people's capacity to use stereotypes to *embody* and *express* cultural values and emotions, and to assist in *anticipating* social interaction coincides very neatly with Bourdieu's conceptualisation of *habitus.* Or as Rapport and Overing (ibid.) put it, "to stereotype is to partake of a sociocultural discourse", it is "to evince enculturation into a set of regularly used and possibly widely shared practices". And yet, contrary to the notion of *habitus*, stereotypes, as Rapport and Overing (ibid.) rightly point out, remain *exterior* to the individual, as he or she can not only *adopt* stereotypes to make sense of experience, but also *adapt* and manipulate them.

At the same time, stereotyping is also a crucial strategy in Scott's "hidden transcript", at least in its verbal expression. Stereotypes actually belong into the grey area between hidden and public transcripts. Since the uninhibited expressions of the hidden transcript cannot go public unsanctioned, subordinate groups have to find subtler ways of expressing their discontent. Using stereotypes about the other gives them an opportunity to not only elevate themselves and their own community, but also to denigrate the others without much fear of sanctions. Scott (1990: 137) calls this a "veiled discourse of dignity and

self-assertion within the public transcript". This is the area of "rumor, gossip , disguises, linguistic tricks, metaphors, euphemisms, folktales, ritual gestures, anonymity" (ibid.). Such disguised forms of discourse are plentiful in Nablus, especially rumours and gossip. Without wanting to go into any further detail, I shall just mention that this latter also constitutes a major element of social control *within* the respective communities, and it is particularly women, who dominate this area of discourse.

The disguise alluded to here takes essentially two forms, as Scott (1990: 139) points out: "those that disguise the message and those that disguise the messenger", i.e. either something is said in, perhaps, a sarcastic tone, which ridicules the content of what was spoken; or something is expressed anonymously, in general terms, such as in stereotypes. As Scott (1990: 142) explains, gossip and stereotypes, "almost by definition, [have] no identifiable author, but scores of eager retailers who can claim they are just passing on the news". As a result, should such stereotypes be challenged, "everyone can disavow responsibility for having originated it" (ibid.). Furthermore, Scott (ibid.) clarifies that gossip (and stereotypes) consist of "stories that are designed to ruin the reputation of some identifiable person or persons". This applies to Nabulsi society as well: there is gossip about individuals, which can easily destroy a reputation and, therefore, future prospects of social, political, economic, educational, or nuptial kinds; then, and this is of greater interest for the argument of this book, there is gossip about groups of people, whether they refer to geographical origin (village, refugee camp, city), or to religious community.

As for the content of gossip and stereotypes, it is mainly "a discourse about social rules that have been violated" (ibid.). In the Nablus context, this mostly takes the form of perceived moral corruption or, on the flip side, moral superiority,

especially, as I will explain in a moment, in terms of sexual behaviour, honesty, and generosity. The basis for such gossip and stereotypes are perceived or claimed common standards of behaviour, otherwise they would make no sense. The claim among all religious communities, the "Golden Standard" so to speak, would be sexual chastity, honesty, and generous hospitality and giving. These attributes would make for an "honourable" (*muhtaram*) person. What the stereotypes and the gossiping do about this standard, is to describe the essentialised "Other" as lacking in one or several of these attributes. It is also immediately evident from this that such gossiping and stereotyping reinforce internal rules and norms. If the "Other" is described as deficient, members of their own community are simultaneously reminded of their own high standards and of the duty to uphold them. Nobody wants to be derided and debased in such a way. This is particularly important for minority communities, as they lack political, social, and often economic power to ignore gossip and stereotypes.

Given the central significance of stereotyping for the drawing of boundaries between groups, as I have just discussed, it is of course in order to provide some examples of the stereotypes employed in the Nablus context. One of the most prominent ones is about the physical appearance of Samaritans, as I have mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Due to the fact that their number had shrunk so dramatically up until the twentieth century and to their strict endogamy the incidence of various forms of disability among the community is proportionately much higher than among the remainder of the population. This appears to be "common knowledge" among all the Nabulsis I have spoken to. During one of my first conversations with a young Muslim man from the city, he pointed to a family passing by our table in a café: "These are Samaritans", he explained without much ado. Upon asking him how he knew, he held his hands behind his ears and

pushed them forward to indicate a physical defect. "They look different, you just recognise them". An older Christian woman equally quoted the Samaritans as the first example, when our conversation touched on birth defects as a result of marriage between close relatives. Even if the people I spoke to knew next to nothing about Samaritans and their religion and traditions, this was the one "fact" that was known to them all.

What can be seen in this example, then, is the application of some features – here physical defects, undoubtedly true in some cases – to an entire population. In this case, the stereotypical feature makes a whole group not only stand out and seemingly identifiable, thus imagining a physically different "Other"; it also carries an element of moral superiority, as the cause of such defects is frequently identified as the "ignorant" and "backward" tradition of marrying close relatives. Therefore, referring to Samaritans as "disabled" is an exercise, frequently encountered, in drawing boundaries between a "healthy" and "modern" *self* and an "ill" and "backward" *other.* Given that marriages between (close) relatives are relatively common among the rest of the population as well, including the concurrent incidence of disabilities, it is also readily conceivable that the use of such a stereotypes provides a sense of security and belonging, a glossing over similar imperfections among one's own community. It creates an imagined map of physical appearance, which at least to an outsider is not easily discernible. In fact, the physical evidence of this imagined difference rarely shows, since the Samaritans have moved beyond the narrow boundaries of Nablus city itself. And as the political and social position of the Samaritans is frequently perceived as ambiguous – especially with regard to their link with the Israeli government – the stereotype of physical defects provides non-Samaritan Nabulsis with a sense of order by being able to put the Samaritans "in their place", and thus guiding their

behaviour towards them. This is one of the examples of how people quite literally embody stereotypical differences.

On the other hand, there are stereotypes about the imagined promiscuity of the Muslim majority. A popular topic among Christians, as I will explain in more detail in a later chapter, is the fact that Muslim men have religious sanction to marry up to four wives, whereas Orthodox Christians not only just marry one, but also have no opportunity to obtain a divorce. Regardless of the scholarly controversy about the "four-wives-rule" in Islam, many Christians in Nablus are quick to apply this to *all* Muslims, pointing to actual incidences of polygyny known to them as evidence for the general rule. In their eyes, then, *all* Muslims (have the opportunity to) take four wives, often for assumed material rather than romantic reasons, which in turn sheds a negative light on Muslims' moral standards, as they are seen as not being able to control their physical desires and not being content with one wife. Or, perhaps better put, by using a stereotype such as omnipresent polygyny, many Christians aim to portray *themselves* as morally superior or even more "civilised", if monogamy is regarded as a "progression" in the evolutionary timeline of marriage relations. In other words, it affords those Christians who employ it with clear-cut boundaries between their own selves and the Muslim other, anchoring them in their own moral community. In a world, where divorce, serial monogamy, polygyny, cohabitation without being married, and extramarital affairs are prevalent, the use of the stereotypical polygynyst does indeed provide a sense of order and stability, by which the community's own norms are constantly reaffirmed to the speakers. And again, the stereotype about a relationship to one or several wives, has an obviously physical component in sexual relations, as pre- and extra-marital sexual intercourse continues to be rather strict taboo in Nablus society in general. Thus, the difference

between Muslims and Christians (and the monogamous Samaritans for that matter) is also embodied.

Most people, however, are also sorely aware of the stereotypes that exist about them, and they frequently try to put them right. The issues that are perceived to be misportrayed are often addressed in encounters with the respective "others". While there are some minor issues that are often discussed, such as the fasting practice of the various religions (with many Muslims assuming that only their religion has a period of fasting like Ramadan and is, therefore, much harder on its adherents than, for instance, Christianity), there also exist some seriously misleading stereotypes between members of the various communities. One of these "big" misunderstandings concerns the relationship of the Samaritan community and religion to the Jewish religion. Under the current circumstances this is of course a precarious association, as for the majority of the population in the area the "Jews" are the occupying force, hence an enemy. How such issues can be addressed became evident in a lecture-cum-film event at a local university, where the presenters were Samaritans and the audience in its absolute majority Muslims. About this event I noted in my fieldnotes in early 2011:

> [The lecture was] organised by the University and the Samaritan Legend Association (*jam'iya al-astura al-samiriya*), an association founded in 2009 solely for the purpose of educating the local public about the Samaritan community. [. . .One of the first speakers was the president of the association introducing their activities]. He indicated that there was a lot of misunderstanding and stereotyping around.
>
> [. . .] Then there was another leader of the association and he spoke about the history and traditions of the Samaritans, with PowerPoint presentation in the

background. He was keen to emphasise the 3,000-year old history of the Samaritan community, making it the oldest religion in the region. [. . .] He explained the Biblical history, before Jews and Samaritans split, how they were all *Bani Israil*, and how the Jews are the descendents of two of Jacob's sons, Yahuda and Benyamin, and the Samaritans the descendents of the other ten sons. [. . .] There was one slide on the "five pillars" of Samaritan belief, the belief in one God etc., and he dwelt on the fact that for them Mount Gerizim was the holiest place, not Jerusalem as for the Jews. He explained that in the Torah, Gerizim is mentioned 13 times, whereas Jerusalem isn't. He also said that Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem was built 400 years after exile, and asked why the Jews decided to ignore this gap as well as the Holy Scripture and make Jerusalem their focus. He was very keen to emphasise the differences between the Jews and the Samaritans, probably being very well aware of the very common misconception among fellow Nabulsis that Samaritans are "Jews". He also mentioned the difference in Scriptures – the five books *only* for the Samaritans, the Jews added the legal and prophetic texts of the OT to it. He also explained the laws of the Samaritans, the Ten Commandments, which also included Gerizim as holy place. [. . .]

He spoke about the language, and read out a couple of verses (the *fatiha*) of Scripture and translated them. He explained that this was their language of worship, not actually calling it Hebrew [. . .]

He then mentioned that Prophet Muhammad knew very well to differentiate between Jews and Samaritans (there must have been a couple of millions at his time), as he wrote a letter to them, honouring them and granting them safety. Apparently a very different attitude from the one he had towards the Jews. [. . .]

This event can be interpreted as a conscious effort to redress stereotypes about the Samaritan community. The assumption that he was speaking to a Muslim audience is further corroborated by the fact that the speaker made frequent comparisons, and pointed out similarities between Samaritans and Muslims, such as in questions of purity, prayer practice, or language. It appears that in this case, everyday stereotyping had increased to such a level and taken on a threatening force, that members of the thus misportrayed community decided to take action against it. While such action can often end in violence, this particular community or association chose an educational path.

On a day-to-day level, therefore, stereotyping plays an important part in shaping the relations between communities and their individual members. It has to be remembered though that stereotypes are generally used when the thus identified "Other" is not present, with events such as the Samaritan lecture being an exception. The question that thus arises is whether stereotyping not only serves as a strategy to distinguish a *self* from an *other*, but also as a means of subverting power relations in Nabulsi society.

What I have attempted to show in this chapter are some of the ways in which the various communities, religious or otherwise, in Nablus draw lines between themselves and others. I have indicated how such boundaries are maintained, raised, and, above all, manipulated and negotiated. In other words, no social boundaries are static, but undergo constant reshaping, be they between religious communities, social classes, or the nation and its outsiders. Given that boundaries are essential for a sense of belongingness to certain groups, it is also not surprising to find that the margins, the boundaries themselves, are often seen as danger zones, as is the case in Nablus. What emerges in the Nablus context against the background of this discussion is the existence of certain social

and religious groups, which, depending on the situation, draw ever-changing lines between "us" and "them". One successful way of distinguishing between selves and others is, as I have shown, through stereotyping. At times, stereotypes that are repeated with great frequency become part of general or folk knowledge, and therefore appear to mark immovable boundaries between groups. In what follows I shall expand on this issue of "making others" further in an effort to arrive at a more realistic picture of what group relations in Nablus look like.

3

DISTINCTION: THE MAKING OF "SELVES" AND "OTHERS"

I was talking with a male university student about questions of lifestyle and what young people, in this case young men, were doing in their spare time these days. I asked whether he, a Muslim, had any non-Muslim friends to go out with. To my surprise he said he did not know, because "religious affiliation doesn't matter". During his time in school he had Christian and Samaritan classmates, but unless he explicitly knew about their religion he would not be able to tell the difference. He added one small qualification: Samaritans sometimes do look differently as a result of inbreeding.[1] It must be said, of course, that this particular student was not religiously observant, so religion of any description did not matter highly for him. Yet, I was struck by his assertion that religious affiliation is not evident at a mere glance, not even after some years of friendship. Others would contradict his perception, and the case is certainly slightly different for women. Furthermore, I have come across considerable ignorance among Nabulsis about the religious traditions of their compatriots, an ignorance that showed patterns, however, as I will explain later. Yet, this and other conversations made me curious about how indeed the

members of the different religious communities in Nablus saw each other and how they construct self-images to distinguish themselves from others.

One of the most decisive influencing factors on community relations on the micro-level in Nablus has arguably been the occupation of the area by Israel. Since the foundation of the state of Israel, inter-community relationships have become largely determined by the continuous presence of a religiously defined "Other", against whom "selves" in Nablus are constructed. Against the backdrop of the Israeli occupation – embodied in soldiers and settlers – and the Jewish self-definition of this Israeli "Other", religion becomes at the same time important and insignificant in the Nablus context. On the one hand, a strong Palestinian nationalist rhetoric infuses most aspects of the lives of everyone living in the town and has historically served (and largely continues to do so) as the umbrella under which all social and religious groups could rally. It is in this context that the differences between religious communities within Nablus are frequently being downplayed in public discourse, as I have explained earlier. On the other hand, the ambiguous position of the Samaritans – acknowledged as "Jewish" by the Israeli government, but not considering themselves "Jews" – has created a need to constantly draw religious boundaries, particularly against the Israeli "Other".

This state of affairs becomes evident in cases of mistreatment of Palestinian Christians by Israelis. Popular stories in this regard are those about how Christians suffered to the same degree as their Muslim compatriots during the wars with Israel. Masalha (1999), for instance, examines the Israeli "Operation Yohanan" of the 1950s, which advocated the transfer of the entire Arab population of the region (of what Zionists hoped to become greater Israel) abroad, particularly South America. In this context, the inhabitants of three Christian Arab villages in Upper Galilee, Iqrit, Kafr Biri'im, and al-Mansurah, were

ordered to evacuate their villages in October 1948, initially only for a period of two weeks (Masalha 1999: 199). Masalha (ibid.) further reports that "the army had initially wanted to drive the villagers of Kafr Biri'im, Iqirt and al-Mansurah (as well as Jish) across the Lebanese border, but this order was modified and most of them were transported to the Arab village of Ramah, and were later scattered throughout several Arab villages in the area". Two years later, after the end of the fighting, the villagers wanted to return to their old homes, yet the Israeli government refused to allow them to return. Consequently, "the evacuees appealed in July 1951 to the Supreme Court, which ruled that there was no legal obstacle to their return to their villages (ibid.). The government's reaction to this ruling was interesting: it ordered the villagers eviction in accordance with the 1948 Emergency Regulations-Defense Areas. When the villagers appealed again in December 1951 to the Supreme Court, the response was even harsher: the village of Iqrit was bombed and destroyed in its entirety, and the surrounding land confiscated as "abandoned property" (Masalha 1999: 199f.). Obviously this story is not unique for the war of 1948 and its aftermath. What is, however, special is the fact that it happened to Christian, not Muslim, Palestinians. A narrative such as this is used by Christians as well as some Muslims to confirm the status of Christians as "one of us" in the struggle for independence. The experience of suffering, it seems to say, does not know religious boundaries. Against the greater "enemy" (Jewish Israel), all Palestinians are in the same boat. This inclusion in the historical narrative of suffering is important for any Palestinian, as these stories continue to be related until today, lest the younger generation forget. Stories such as this play a crucial role in defending Palestinian Christians against any accusations of being favoured by Israel. Samaritans, on the other hand, have a hard time finding any comparable narratives.

That this was not a one-off event or accident becomes evident in narratives of contemporary suffering. There was, for instance, a series of violent attacks on Church property in and around Jerusalem. Bannoura (2012) reports that the latest attack, like many of this kind, is to be attributed to "Israeli extremists", most likely Jewish settlers, as the defiled church is located close to an illegal settlement. The perpetrators hurled Molotov Cocktails, stones, and rubbish at the church, and although nobody was injured, the material damage was considerable. Graffiti, such as that found at the Franciscan monastery and the Latrun Christian monastery in the vicinity of Jerusalem, is usually directed against Christians and Jesus Christ. Bannoura (2012) ends his article by looking at the broader picture: "Extremist settler groups are responsible for numerous racist attacks against the Palestinian people, their lands and their holy sites. Several mosques were torched, and several Christian and Islamic graveyards were desecrated". Indeed, incidents of defilement of mosques by Jewish settlers are not uncommon around Nablus and elsewhere. Attacks on Christian property is less common, arguably because there is a lot less of it in the West Bank than Muslim property. What is important about events such as those reported by Bannoura (2012) is that they contribute to a sense of inclusion of Christians in contemporary animosities and suffering. They become part and parcel of the national narrative and sentiments, thus including Christians inevitably in them, at least against an external "enemy".

The Palestinian nationalist discourse, however, also has its tricky aspects for Christians. Its increasingly Islamic overtones have placed Christians and Samaritans into a defensive position, succinctly put by a Samaritan leader as having to "walk between the raindrops". One instance, where the positioning of religious selves in the Palestinian context becomes particularly evident is the participation in and attitudes towards the

two *intifadas* or resistance struggles. While both Christians and Samaritans told me they strongly supported and participated in the first one in the late 1980s, there is a lot more ambiguity with regard to the second one in the early 2000s, as I will explain in more detail later.

Given the small numbers of the two religious communities, the question of survival is paramount and often determines strategies of behaviour. It becomes clear that the negotiation of boundaries between Nabulsi religious communities is significantly influenced by the presence of two overpowering, religiously defined "Others", Israel (seen as "Jewish") and Muslims. It is also against this background that distinctions *within* the minority communities need to be explored. Among the Christians, the tension between reaffirming the unity of the different denominations, on the one hand, and the need to distinguish between them is ever present.

In this chapter I first take a closer look at the public transcript and how this is constituted and maintained in the contemporary Nablus context. I then examine the work of some Muslim writers describing inter-religious relations from an historical and majority perspective. Both parts are intended to highlight some of the strategies and practices employed by Nabulsis to craft a public narrative of inter-religious relations. This story, as I have argued previously, and as will become evident in this chapter, is one of harmonious and stable relations between Muslim majority and Christian and Samaritan minorities.

Making public selves

One of the reasons behind this study was my puzzlement at the obvious divergence of how members of the different religious communities in Nablus speak to and about each other in public, on the one hand, and what one hears behind closed

doors, on the other. I was reminded of the situation of Malay peasants studied by Scott (1990: 17; emphasis mine): "Anyone who regarded the *calm surface of political life* in 'Sedaka' as *evidence of harmony* between classes would simply have been looking in the *wrong place* for political conflict". Examples of this harmonious official discourse abound. On one occasion – the celebration of the Orthodox Christmas in January 2011 – I attended the church service in Rafidiya. In my fieldnotes I note:

> The service as such was rather unremarkable, but like all the other attendants I was asked to stay behind for coffee in the church hall and so I did. It was the usual get together of the members of the congregation, waiting for the two priests (the local Orthodox priest and another one from Beit Jala) to enter, wishing each other *kul sana wa inta salim*, and being served coffee and sweets. All the other priests and ministers from the other Nabulsi congregations were also present. After the usual blessings, prayers, and small talk, the priest asked us to stay behind and await a delegation from the municipality, which would come to pay their respects. The same announcement had been made on Christmas Day in December in the Anglican church of the Good Shepherd. It seems that this was common practice for the city's leaders to look after their "flock" on special occasions. And indeed after a short while, representatives of the police and armed forces entered the hall, followed shortly afterwards by a rather large delegation from the municipality. More chairs were brought in and the Christian participants moved from the front rows to make room for the guests of honour.
>
> Then followed five speeches. First, there was one member of the first group of guests to arrive. He started

his speech in clearly Islamic terms, with reference to Prophet Muhammad, and emphasising the common religious roots of Islam and Christianity, and how Jesus was revered by Muslims as well. In fact, he used the word *masih* for Jesus, which is rather unusual, as Muslims do not consider Jesus the Messiah. The second man to speak was a founder of a new association, which apparently aims to improve the relationships between Samaritans and Muslims and Christians in the city. Samaritans were not present. Then we heard a woman representative speak, and she, too, emphasised the good relations between Christians and Muslims in this country. Like most of the others, especially also the local Orthodox priest, she repeatedly stressed the fact that both Christians and Muslims are Palestinians, and that national unity is paramount in the current situation. She then referred to the events in Egypt and Iraq, which had taken place shortly before, and during which a significant number of Christians in both countries were either killed or injured by a Muslim mob. She commented that while she understands the fears this must create amongst Christians here – and indeed it did – but assured the listeners that such a reaction was impossible here. Admitted, the political situation in Palestine is different from of Iraq or Egypt, but one cannot bank on "age-old" relationships as a guarantee, as Christians in both Iraq and Egypt have equally been there since the beginning of Christianity. What does make the situation arguably a little better for Christians in Palestine is the existence of a common "enemy", which makes national unity a matter of survival.

Then we heard the mayor of Nablus speak, in the same vein, but he used a rather nice metaphor to get his message across. He said that people here don't have to build a "house of mutual understanding" or

interreligious dialogue, as this was already in existence. The building was there, he said, we don't need anything new. Thus far the usual talk about good brotherly relations between Christians and Muslims. But then he was realistic enough to say that occasionally the building did show cracks, and that these need patching up. In other words, the relations between Muslims and Christians are not without problems all the time, just like the woman speaker admitted, but that there were the occasional tensions, which, however, could not make the building collapse. At this point, the Anglican minister intervened with a comment, saying that we should leave it up to the municipality to do the repair work, which caused general amusement. The local Orthodox priest also spoke about the need for national unity, but he also said that the role of the teachers was incredibly important for Muslim-Christian understanding. He addressed the religious leaders – priests, ministers, imams, shaykhs – who teach in the churches and mosques, the teachers in schools and universities, and generally anyone, who is in charge of educating the next generation, asking them to ensure that the young grow up with no distorted images and sermons of hate and distrust. He indicated that sometimes the opposite was the case, and young (and not so young) people learn the wrong things from their religious leaders (mainly in the mosques he seemed to imply). Over and over again, he re-emphasised this responsibility and the fact that the Palestinians are "one people" regardless of their religious affiliation. This seems to be a special concern of his, as this was not the first time I had heard him say this.

This is one example of how on public and official occasions – such as religious holidays – the "brotherhood" and essential

equality of all members of the three communities in question is lauded and highlighted. This public discourse is generally marked by a strong emphasis on unity and the absence of tensions. Mutual understanding and respect are belaboured again and again by players of all communities. The occasion described above was, in fact, slightly out of the ordinary, since some of the speakers actually pointed to the existence of occasional "cracks" in the "building of brotherhood". At another public event, such an admission was entirely absent: in summer 2009 I attended the opening ceremony of a photo exhibition about Samaritan rituals and customs at the university in Nablus. The exhibition as such was a rather small affair in the university library, yet for the opening the organisers had summoned some well-known political figures. It started with the Palestinian national anthem and what followed I describe in my fieldnotes:

> The ceremony began with the honorary guests walking into the lecture theatre and sitting on the podium – the mayor of Nablus, the president of the university, the Samaritan High Priest, and two ministers of the Palestinian Authority. In the first row in the audience three other high ranking Samaritans (in priestly dress) as well as the priests from all the local churches were seated . . . The ceremony was opened by a young man in a shiny grey suit and 50s hair style and startlingly blue eyes – a leader of the Samaritan youth organisation that had recently been established in an effort to promote understanding of Samaritan beliefs and culture.
>
> The first speaker was the male minister [. . .] who emphasised very strongly the role of Samaritans as citizens of the Palestinian homeland (*watan*), and how they are fellow Palestinians like their Christian and Muslim brothers (sic!). He explained how they have been an

essential part of Palestine's past and will help to shape its future. He also distinguished quite clearly between them and the occupying forces, "the Jews", and took the opportunity to emphasise the need for a Palestinian state that houses the three faith communities, Christians, Samaritans, and Muslims.

[. . .] There were two Samaritan speakers, leaders of the youth organisation [. . .], and the Secretary of the Samaritans. They thanked the organisers, especially the university, and confirmed their commitment to the community, and emphasised the importance of living together (*ta'ayush*) and cooperation (*ta'amul*). They painted a rather rosy picture of how this living together in the past and present has been very successful and would also be the way forward in the future. They also explained that they all had to learn from and about each other, and how this exhibition helps in this. Contrary to the minister, they also referred specifically to Nablus as their "beloved city" (*madinatuna al-mahbuba*). The minister referred to Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state, whereas the Samaritans Nablus (i.e. Mount Gerizim) is the more important, because holy, place.

We then listened to a "choir" of 11 Samaritan boys, aged between around 8 and 14, and all dressed in their worship dress (white robe and red fez). They sang some ritual chants in ancient Hebrew [. . .], alternating between a precentor and the whole group. [. . .] The audience seemed rather impatient and ungrateful, because rather than listening in the expected awe, they soon started talking, even the dignitaries in the front row. The chants also showed who in the audience was Samaritan, as several people started singing along. [. . .]

The last speaker was the woman minister, a Christian from Bethlehem. [. . .] Her speech was less about the ideal

> and the beautiful words of coexistence etc., but instead about practicalities of economic development, in which all have a part to play. After that we went across to the library to see the exhibition opened.

These two incidents show several things. One is the official story about inter-community cooperation that is repeated over and over again on a variety of official and semi-official occasions. This is done equally by members of all three communities in question. When one reads between the lines, however, then we can, secondly, also find the occasional hint at existing misunderstandings and tensions. The official story can reasonably be interpreted as a nation-building exercise, in Anderson's (1983) understanding that nations are constantly in the process of being constructed, with nationalist projects seeking to inculcate in the people a sense of a national community. Glossing over diverse cultural or religious traditions within this thus imagined nation, one strategy is to refer to and remember a common past. The Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims of Nablus do indeed make frequent reference to such a peaceful past on official occasions, a stability and harmonious coexistence that was only disturbed by the arrival of an Other, with whom all of the three communities have religious, if not political issues – the "Jews". For the "national project" of Palestine – whose status as both a state and a nation remains contested at least politically – it is crucial that differences between communities are downplayed. It is quite easily conceivable that internal dissent and tensions causes a fear of disintegration of this "nation", making a future state even more unfeasible than it at times seems under current circumstances. Hence the need to repeatedly emphasise the unity of all "Palestinians" as a prerequisite for the survival and success of the nation, and therefore the (future) state. This is also the area, where danger lurks in the margins, as I have explained earlier. The

survival of the project "Palestinian nation" depends crucially on internal agreement and the defence of its borders (literally and metaphorically) against its significant Other, the "Jewish" state of Israel. Any suspicion that members of the two religious minorities may be disloyal to this project leads to sanctions in order to curb the danger.

What constitutes the boundaries of this "Palestinian nation" is of course a more complex and highly controversial question. At a minimum, the concept would include those people living in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip – and this seems to generally be the notion inferred in the official portrayals and efforts alluded to above. It is the state of affairs – tensions or cooperation, be it politically, socially, or religiously – among the population in the West Bank that appears to most strongly impact on the external perception of the "state of the nation". However, the "Palestinian nation" could, and arguably does, potentially also comprise refugees and emigrants of Palestinian origin, or those residing in what is today the state of Israel. While this émigré community includes members of all the three religious communities in question, any tensions between them abroad are either not perceived as significant (for the national project or in a general sense), or differences fall by the wayside, as in the diaspora they are generally *all* seen as "Palestinian" or, more generally, as "Arabs" by the host populations. These difficulties of drawing conclusive boundaries around what constitutes the "Palestinian nation" – also much emphasised by many Israeli decision makers – are a further indicator that creating an image (for the outside world) and a sense (for the population themselves) of unbreakable unity and internal stability are crucial for political survival.

What the two instances described above, however, also show upon careful reading, is an awareness among all that not all is well. Listening to unofficial stories, behind closed doors, a significant amount of resentment, disagreement, and prejudice

becomes obvious. I have just tried to explain why this is usually not publicly aired, but will return to the "unofficial story" again later. What is interesting to note here, is that people in authority on those occasions made carefully worded reference to the existence of "cracks in the building of the nation". The Samaritan's reference to a "Golden Age" of past cooperation as *model* for the *future*, rather than the current state of affairs, can be read as an expression of at least mild dissatisfaction with the present. Equally, the not so covert remarks during the Christmas celebration about the "cracks in the building", the inter-religious tensions and confrontations in neighbouring countries – both made by Muslim politicians – or about the frequently unsuitable teaching by religious, academic, and civic leaders – by the priest – make it sufficiently clear that most players are aware of the *ideal*, rather than *real*, nature of the oft-cited unity and harmony among the religious communities. It could reasonably be argued that the Christmas event was only a semi-official occasion, where the majority of people knew each other on a personal basis, including the respective leaders. This increased amount of mutual familiarity, and the more informal nature of the occasion, made this mild criticism possible without repercussions. As Scott (1990: 14) put it, the line between formal and informal occasions is indeed a zone of constant struggle and is negotiated between the more and the less powerful. And it is typically the more powerful participants that define a situation as formal or informal, hence allowing more or less criticism to surface. The opening of the exhibition was such a formal event, including the presence of the press and of officials from a national, not just a municipal level. Hence, the virtual absence of any hints of misunderstandings. At any other official, political, events that include a national, and potentially international audience, this story is repeated almost without fail.

Two patterns seem to emerge from this – one is how the discourse of harmony reflects majority-minority relations; and the second one concerns the constitution of the audience. On most occasions, formal and informal, the Muslims I have met seem to genuinely not be aware of any tensions or problems with regard to members of other religious communities. From the majority venture point, any dissatisfaction or discrimination perceived by members of the minorities, generally remains covert and does not rise to a surface where it could be noticed. Of course, there is a significant minority within the Muslim majority, who can be considered the cause of any perceived tension – those with serious prejudices against the minorities –, yet, for most Muslims I have met a quite genuine ignorance appears to apply. In fact, this ignorance often extends to the actual *existence* of those minority groups, let alone their customs and traditions. It seems that the majority position affords a quite comfortable location, from which to view the state of affairs as relatively unproblematic, at least in religious terms. This point is similarly made by Khare (1984: 97) for the case of the Indian caste system, in which the subordinate groups are generally closer observers of the powerful than vice versa, as close observation and knowledge translates into a vital survival skill. The reference of the mayor of Nablus to the "cracks" could be linked to either his political position that makes him more aware of problems in the population, or his familiarity with those present, or his quite perceptive personality.

When we consider the (potential) audience of any interaction and talk about religious communities and national unity, another event could shed some light on the significance of those listening. A Christian woman in her early 50s was, at a family event, complaining about the perceived partiality of international organisations towards Muslims when it comes to

providing benefits for the general population. Quite forcibly she expressed her view that Christians are generally neglected by international donors or organisations, or even discriminated against. In the course of the conversation, she related an event, during which she was invited to speak to some representatives of such international organisations. Being aware of her point of view, her sister, who worked for an international organisation, very strongly made the point that she was *not* to talk about any perceived injustices and instead to emphasise the equality and unity of all Palestinians. Needless to say that this woman was very disgruntled with the attitudes and what she saw as cowardice of her fellow Christians. Yet, at the same time she did heed her sister's advice. Scott (1990: 12), in his discussion of public discourse, equally refers to the "theater of unanimity, loyalty, and resolve [which] is intended to impress an audience". He further contends that the "strength of the sanctions deployed to enforce conformity depends essentially on the cohesiveness of the subordinate group and on how threatening they view the defection" (Scott 1990: 27). While I am not aware of the threatened sanctions against this woman had she spoken out, her reaction seems to indicate that the mechanisms of enforcing conformity did work quite well.

On another occasion I was present when a British volunteer – a middle-aged lady supporting the farmers in one of the surrounding villages for a couple of months – visited a local Christian family. Being a practising Christian herself and regularly attending Sunday services in one of the Nablus churches, she intended to find out a little more about the situation of the Christians in Nablus. About this encounter I wrote in my fieldnotes of summer 2010:

> Over lunch Christine was asking Nadia the usual questions – what work Christians do here, what's the relationship like to the Muslims, are they treated equally by

the Jews, is there discrimination, and about the church buildings and the history of Rafidiya. Nadia's answers were also nothing new, at least not for me – Christians have no work, they don't work for the government (the government "doesn't want to employ them"), they are only relatively wealthy because they own land and houses. But of course, that they are selling it, in order to make a living and pay for the education of their children. So, when asked about the future of the Christians here, there came the bitter answer "there is no future", in the sense that the Christians are all leaving and they're surely dying out. [. . .] We also talked about the impact of Hamas, and Nadia said that Christians are rather worried about this. [. . .] it's the fundamentalists that are the cause for concern, they are the ones who tell off their friends for "sitting with the Christians". [. . .]

[Then] Christine was getting ready to leave, announcing that she wanted to tell folks in her country (Britain) about the situation here. Suddenly Nadia exclaimed, "don't tell them what I just told you, don't tell them about the Muslim mothers or the PA or the problems, because we want to have good relations with the Muslims". She was clearly worried about upsetting the balance, even on this small scale. So Christine asked her what she wants her to tell people back home, and Nadia explained that she should say that they live in harmony with each other, that there are no problems, and that they are good neighbours. Christine then got ready to leave and wanted to write down their names, so she could remember, and Nadia emphasised again that she shouldn't repeat any of what she had told her.

That the compliance with the majority narrative of harmony – instilled often by members of one's own religious community

– is also to some extent driven by an element of fear of repercussions is easily conceivable. The minority situation does make some careful balancing of personal and communal interests necessary, especially when, as is the case with Christians and Samaritans in the region, there is a history of questioning one's loyalties, as I have mentioned earlier. Events such as those in Egypt or Iraq only serve to show, in the eyes of many local Christians, that their situation is indeed a precarious one and asks for careful strategies to ensure personal and communal survival. Paying lip service to national unity and harmony, that is just as often felt as it is criticised, appears to be a small price to pay for relatively secure living.

A final example should make this point sufficiently clear. In summer 2012, a satirical film about the Muslim prophet Muhammad of relatively poor quality was released on the internet. The word spread quickly among Christians, especially as it was rumoured to have a Palestinian Christian author. In the conversations I witnessed, Christians expressed grave concern about this, bemoaning the "stupidity" of the film maker, as it was feared that Muslims in the country would take their wrath out against them. The incident appeared to echo the events in Denmark (and elsewhere) after the publication of the infamous Muhammad cartoons in 2005. The authorship of this film was of crucial significance, as it had the perceived potential to save or destroy the local Christian community and its relations with the Muslim majority. A little later it was rumoured that the film maker was an Egyptian Coptic Christian, news which some locals received with a sigh of relief. After a few days it was said that the film was shot by a Jew, which was by all those concerned perceived as very good news indeed. It seemed to have saved the fragile construction of Muslim-Christian relations in the country. Before this was known, however, a local Christian, now residing in the United States, wrote in a Facebook comment (in Arabic, translation

mine): "I watched the insulting film about the Prophet (a very disgusting film) and in my own name and in the name of all Christians, we don't accept anything like this, and whoever made this film, they only made it to sow discord (*al-fitna*) and hatred between the Muslim and Christian brothers".

Apart from the obvious attempt to mend fences, what I found quite striking about this short message is the use of the word "discord" (*fitna*) to describe the potential harm done to Christian-Muslim relations. I have heard this term a number of times mentioned by Christians in relation to potential or real threats to the peaceful relations with the Muslim majority. Before this, I was only aware of this term in Islamic religious contexts, when discord between different fractions threatened the historical unity of the Muslim community or nation (*umma*). The use of this term by minority members thus indicates not only that they have adopted Muslim terminology, but also that the fear of dissonance and discord within the community is very real indeed among all concerned. Given the current political situation, this is easily conceivable. It is arguably for this reason that both majority and minorities subscribe to and participate in the "public transcript" of harmonious inter-religious relations in the country.

Even after a couple of weeks had passed, rumours continued to be rife. I happened to overhear a conversation between two Christian women about the same topic, and one of them related that while the filmmaker was indeed a Coptic Christian, the *sponsor* was Jewish. The other woman added that it was indeed striking that all the actors in the film were "foreigners" (*ajanib*), i.e. Westerners, which, in her reading, confirmed the idea that it was not the work of an Arab but in all likelihood that of an (American?) Jew.

Most of this echoes Scott's (1990: 4) "public transcript" that denotes the discourse in the face of the powerful. He maintains that generally "the public performance of the subordinate will,

out of prudence, fear, and the desire to curry favor, be shaped to appeal to the expectations of the powerful" (Scott 1990:2). While I am hesitant to label Samaritans and Christians in the Nablus context as "subordinate" in the sense of being powerless, they are certainly *numerically* subordinate and less powerful than the Muslim majority. The public transcripts I have outlined earlier seem to be good examples of their performative character. While the discourse "offstage", or behind closed doors, may be seen as more genuine, the public transcript is "put on" by all those involved. Scott (1990: 11) explains that "if subordination requires a credible performance of humility and deference, so domination seems to require a credible performance of haughtiness and mastery". On official occasions that involve members of all religious communities in the Nablus area and beyond, there is indeed often a sense of Muslim "generosity" towards those in the minority – in all likelihood going back to the Islamic idea of *dhimmitude*, the protection of certain population groups under the umbrella of a Muslim state. This can be seen as the public performance of the powerful, as Scott (ibid.) outlines: "the necessary posing of the dominant derives not from weaknesses but from the ideas behind their rule, the kinds of claims they make to legitimacy. [. . .] An elected head of a republic must appear to respect the citizenry and their opinions". Hence the constant reference to unity, harmony, and respect by the mainly Muslim political leadership. This public transcript of inter-religious harmony is, according to Scott (1990: 18; emphasis in the original), "the *self*-portrait of dominant elites as they would have themselves seen". And while it may be stretching the evidence too far to talk about "humility and deference" in the Nablus context, there is a significant amount of acquiescence to the official story of protectionism and unity.

In the case of Nablus, this protectionism, on the one hand, and the harmony between religious communities, on the

other, is well reflected in what one of Ireton's (2003) Samaritan correspondents claim. This elderly man expressed severe skepticism about the proclaimed selfless respect and protection for his community. Instead, he believes that "the PNA want to show the world that they have 'Jews' among them who they treat well and so could be expected to extend magnanimity to Israelis who would fall under the sovereignty of a Palestinian state". In this reading, this rhetoric is part of a public transcript, arguably for an international audience. This respondent further explains that the status of a religious minorities in the Middle East is uncertain, which is difficult for outsiders to understand. He claims that in order to understand how difficult the situation of minorities is in the region, one "must be a member of a minority" (ibid.). As an example for these difficulties, he refers to the Christians in the area, who were "hundreds of thousands" during the British Mandate, but left because of a sense that their freedoms and opportunities were severely restricted. Claiming that there had been 10,000 Christians living in Nablus during the British Mandate, and pointing to their current limited numbers, he uses this minority to exemplify the difficulties religious minorities face in the so-called Middle East (ibid.). The only reason, why Samaritans have not met a similar fate (although they were nearly extinct at the beginning of the twentieth century) is arguably their religious determination not to leave their "holy land".

The public transcript in Nablus, of which the rhetoric of protection of and harmony with the religious minorities are an essential part, contains, according to Scott (1990: 45) several key elements: they contain "affirmation, concealment, euphemization and stigmatization, and finally, the appearance of unanimity". He explains affirmation as a strategy to confirm existing patterns of domination, for instance through certain events, such as national holiday parades. National events are indeed staged and performative in character in Nablus, and

there is strong pressure to participate or at least pay lip service. Yet, the affirmation of power relations is also reflected in small gestures and rituals, such as greetings or the need to perform services for free for the dominant. Frequently, such rituals are designed to convey the impression of being powerful without having to resort to force (Scott 1990: 49). There is, however, also another side to such stage plays, as Scott (ibid.) explains: "The performance of mastery is ostensibly staged for the impression it makes on subordinates, but it stiffens the spines of the rulers as well". The powerful know just as well as their subordinates, that in front of the latter they have an impression to maintain. It can be assumed that they are equally concerned about losing face, albeit without the fear of severe sanctions that characterises the performance of subordinates. In the Nablus context this applies to class differences as well as those between members of religious communities. While there might be a strong sense of disagreement, moral corruption, or injustice among the religious minorities, they generally still lavish the powerful (in their majority Muslims) with the usual niceties and euphemisms. It, thus, always strikes me, when Christian acquaintances of mine speak to their Muslim neighbours, friends, or colleagues in the most respectable and warm tones, yet, once they are gone, they start cursing them and their religion as well as describing them as debauched in one way or another.

Another part of the public transcript performed by the powerful is concealment, which means that they put on a show that approximates the ideal they have created and that hides any imperfections or double standards. This does not mean, however, that violations of the public ideal are not known among the subordinates. What matters, as Scott (1990: 51) maintains, is that "such behaviour not be openly declared or displayed where it would publicly threaten the official story". In the Nablus context, this kind of strategy is particularly

salient in the area of morality. While the majority (as well as the minorities) maintain a public image of being morally, especially sexually, pure and impeccable, there is a wide range of stories about the bigger and smaller sins of powerful, here Muslim, individuals. Like in the case of affirmations mentioned above, what develops from these double standards, is what Scott (ibid.) calls a "double culture" – there is the official, public culture, which is "filled with bright euphemisms, silences, and platitudes and an unofficial culture that has its own history, [. . .] its own biting slang, [. . .] its own humor, its own knowledge of shortages, corruption, and inequalities". There is certainly an element of this "double culture" to be found in Nablus – the official story and standards, on the one hand, and what is often referred to as "the truth" about the Other.

Again similar to what I have already described above is the strategy of using euphemisms to make certain aspects of power sound less ugly. A euphemism is used, as Scott (1990: 53) explains, "to obscure something that is negatively valued or would prove to be an embarrassment if declared more forthrightly". Here we enter perhaps the area of *dhimmitude*, the idea that the "People of the Book" are protected by the Muslim majority, which, in another reading, could be interpreted as dominance or even oppression, as it includes (in the historical precedent at least) a form of tax and limitations of behaviour. This defended and referred to by Muslims, while at the same time often derided by the minorities. Another euphemism would possibly be the ubiquitous *wasta*, or "connections", that are essential for achieving things in the region. Literally the term means "intermediaries", i.e. people that can speak or act on behalf of others. This, in and of itself, does not necessarily have negative connotations, and indeed, I have heard many people use it in a positive sense. These are usually people, who do have connections and know how to use them to achieve

what they want or need, be that a job, a place at university, coupons for free petrol or food, permits to travel, or anything else that matters. It is easily conceivable that *wasta* need to be influential to act on someone's behalf, ordinary people usually do not do the trick. Given that the majority population is Muslim, and that most people in influential positions are Muslims, it is clear that the religious minorities generally lack powerful *wasta*, at least from their own communities.[2] Hence, it is not surprising that the most biting criticism of this practice comes from members of the religious minorities as well as other disenfranchised groups in society.

The flip side of euphemisms are stigmas, i.e. the power to stigmatise those who criticise the public use of euphemisms or any other official practices. There are different categories of stigmas in the Nablus context, such as "collaborators" or "criminals" for political opposition. There is, however, also the religious level, on which members of minority religious communities, their religion, or their practices are labelled "heresies" or "unbelief" or similar (Scott 1990: 55).

Finally, there is the aspect of unanimity that marks the public transcript. This means, as Scott (ibid.) put it, the public transcript "create[s] the appearance of unanimity among the ruling groups and the appearance of consent among subordinates". Bhaba (1994: 134) similarly explained that nationalist ideologies are ideologies "of *unisonance* as Benedict Anderson [1983: 132–3] describes it, a contemporaneous cultural cohesion connecting its national subjects through the undifferentiated simultaneity of an 'aural' imaginary". As I have emphasised this aspect several times at earlier points, I will not go into further details here. A good example to illustrate the element of unanimity would be the incident described earlier about the student asking for a change in the required university course "Islamic culture" to take into account religious minorities and the response that the identity of the university

(and by extension the identity of the country) was "Islamic". Her dissident voice was immediately muffled in what was a meeting of (except for my own presence) exclusively Muslims. Suffice it at this point to note that speaking about diversity – be that of a religious, class, or geographic kind – was generally not encouraged in the Nablus context. This was particularly the case, as I have observed, if the audience was exclusively or largely Muslim. In front of foreigners, it often appeared more beneficial for the self-image of Palestinians to emphasise that the Muslims take good care of and live peacefully with the members of the religious minorities in their midst.

The effort to create this unison voice of the public transcript becomes apparent on the national level in the Nablus context, as I have explained earlier, where a story of cohesion and shared beliefs is vital to the survival of the idea of Palestinian statehood. While this story used to be told and fought for in nationalist terms, regardless of religious affiliation, it has, in recent years, become increasingly Islamised, i.e. framed in Islamic terms. Thus, Palestine is described as "Muslim" on official occasions (*falastin al-muslima*). Especially in the face of a common political enemy – Jewish Israel – it is crucial to maintain an image of cohesion and an absence of internal conflict. This is where the effort to reconcile Hamas and Fatah factions in the Palestinian political leadership (as well as on a popular level) comes into play. This story of unity largely excludes Samaritans and Christians, who, in their majority, support neither Hamas nor Fatah. Their voices of dissent, however, must not be heard in the official narrative.

The shift in focus in the national story is indicative of Christian and Samaritan attitudes towards the national project and politics in general. As I have mentioned earlier, Christians probably more so than Samaritans participated in the first *intifada*, including members of their communities being killed or imprisoned. One of the local priests told me

stories about members of his congregation fighting during the first *intifada* and being imprisoned, of young boys throwing stones together, regardless of religious background. He said that he had supported that uprising, because it was fought in the name of the nation, the people. The second *intifada*, however, was not supported by Christians and Samaritans, as this one was framed in Islamic terms. As a consequence, they not only felt excluded by the majority, they were also unwilling to put their efforts or even lives on the line for something they did not subscribe to. This latter uprising was, therefore, largely fought without active participation from the religious minorities.

Another feature of public transcripts, according to Scott (1990) is that they may become self-perpetuating. If the performance of public transcripts requires the wearing of masks, then there is, says Scott (1990: 10), a danger that the faces of those performing will grow to fit that mask, which may help us explain the similarities that exist between the religious communities. In a long term perspective this means that "the practice of subordination [. . .] produces, in time, its own legitimacy" (ibid.). Given the long history of inter-religious relations in the area – more or less peaceful at different times – one might assume that the effect of fossilising masks may have indeed set in, legitimising and embodying the power relations between Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans. The fossilisation of masks is no mean feat, especially, as Scott (1990: 28f.) points out, because "a convincing performance may require both the suppression or control of feelings that would spoil the performance and the simulation of emotions that are necessary to the performance". What has to be controlled is what Scott (1990: 37) calls "a natural impulse to rage, insult, anger, and the violence that such feelings prompt". In the case of the Christian woman mentioned above, the existence of precisely

such strong emotions can be quite clearly discerned. It must have taken a very strong will, or the threat of serious sanctions to control her anger in this situation.

Scott's (1990) analysis is furthermore useful in explaining the *discrepancy* between the hidden and the public transcripts, which, he claims, is a relatively reliable indicator of the impact of domination. He has found that "the greater the disparity in power between dominant and subordinate and the more arbitrarily is it exercise, the more the public transcript of subordinates will take on a stereotyped, ritualistic cast" (Scott 1990: 3). If we take the incidences mentioned above as evidence, then there seems to be a relatively clear case of disparity in power between Muslims, as the (powerful) majority, and Christians and Samaritans as minorities. It does, however, also become clear that the conditions in Nablus, and perhaps in Palestine in general, do not come near some of situations and circumstances described by Scott (1990) as examples to elucidate his ideas of public and hidden transcripts. The inter-religious relations in Nablus are often tense and carefully balanced, but they are a far cry from the slave-master relations in the antebellum United States or the medieval feudal societies of Europe. The discrepancy between hidden and public transcript in Nablus speaks of a degree of domination and discrimination, but also of a political situation that requires national unity and harmony against an external enemy.

Having extensively dealt with the creation, maintenance, and participation in the public transcript in the Nablus context, I would now like to return to the issue of images of the "Other", or stereotypes about members of religious communities. I have alluded to some of the contemporary stereotypes earlier, but would, at this point, like to digress into historical descriptions in an effort to understand how the images of the religious minorities have or have not changed over the years.

Seeing the "Other": Descriptions of Palestinian Christians

As a first approach to the question of how Nabulsis see each other I consulted older and more recent books on the history and culture of Nablus and the surrounding areas. How did they describe the religious differences of their inhabitants? This question becomes particularly significant keeping in mind the audience to which most of these treatises are directed – in their majority Muslims. If we assume that one of the authors' purposes is to educate their readership, the representation of events or characteristics becomes highly relevant to our understanding of how Nabulsis see each other, especially from the majority perspective. The majority-minority relationship is also borne out in the fact that most books of this nature do not contain much information about *Muslim* origins and traditions, assuming that a Muslim reader would arguably be familiar with these.

In a general history of the Jabal Nablus region, Nimr (1961: 37ff.) describes the origins and traditions of both the Christians and the Samaritans living in the area. The first thing he notes about the Christians is that they are Arabs of different tribes (Nimr 1966: 37). Zajel (2004) supports this view by explaining that "the Christian families of Nablus are descendants of this family [Hassouneh] which originated from the Arabian peninsula and Yemen (from the Ghasasina tribe) and emigrated in the 10 century AD". While the statement that Palestinian Christians are Arabs might seem obvious, it is very significant when considered in the light of probable readership. The author obviously deemed it necessary to tell his audience that Christians are no different from the Muslims in the area when it comes to ethnic origin and affiliation. In terms of "blood" Christians are just as much part of the nation of Arabs as most other people in the area. This emphasis

might spring from a desire to rectify the occasionally held perception that Arab Christians are a "fifth column", allies of the "West" if not foreign themselves. That Nimr considers this a *mis*perception becomes further evident, when he writes that the Christians in the region are Greek Orthodox, "i.e. Eastern", who were killed or expelled by the Crusaders when they invaded the country (ibid.). Again, given that the Crusades had been and continue to be seen as landmark events shaping the relationships between Muslims and Christians, this seems a significant remark. It is as if to say to his audience "they are like us, they suffered like us", and indeed, when Muslims regained control of the region, the Eastern Christians did return. This echoes furthermore with Scott's (1990) concept of the public transcript, one of whose characteristics it is, as I have explained earlier, to be a self-portrait of dominant elites and to be impressive, to affirm and naturalise the power of dominant elites (Scott 1990: 18). This public transcript does, according to Scott (ibid.), also involve some concessions to the presumed interests of the subordinates, and it "must make out an ideological case that they rule, to some degree, on behalf of their subjects". Describing Christians as Arabs, thus turns them into subordinates of the same blood and origin, legitimising in a sense the "brotherly" domination over or "protection" of them.

The historical account continues by describing Christians' return to a protected status, and when 'Umar Agha an-Nimr began industrialising the area, he asked many Christian entrepreneurs from various regions to come to Nablus. When a British consul visited in the mid nineteenth century he reported that there were around 2,000 Christians living in the town. They practised a variety of professions, such as goldsmiths, blacksmiths, and carpenters, yet traders there were very few among them. In other words, apart perhaps from blacksmithery, which is commonly practised by marginalised

groups in society, these were respectable professions. Yet, their exclusion (self-imposed or prohibited) from trade also shows that, in a city like Nablus, an economic centre where trade played a major role and was a pathway to wealth, Christians were prevented from attaining powerful economic positions, a situation that has not much changed until today. They were also, according to Nimr (ibid.), very skilled farmers with land in Rafidiya, Tubas, Burqa, Nisf Jubail, and az-Zababdeh, villages that largely continue to have Christian populations. In short, it seems to me that this author is at pains to portray the Christian Nabulsis in a positive or benevolent light, emphasising their being "one of us", their being respected citizens.

The following section in Nimr's (1966) book is devoted to the different Christian denominations (*madhahib*[3]), which is another area of great ignorance, not only among Muslims in the area, but also among Christians in Europe, for instance, who are, however, not his intended audience. He reports that most Christians in the Jabal Nablus area were Greek Orthodox (*ar-rum ash-sharqiyin*) of the Eastern Church, after whom appeared a minority of Catholics (*al-kathulik*) of the Western Church, known as Latins (*al-Latin*) (Nimr 1966: 37). This latter appearance, Nimr describes as being due to a clash between As'ad Sarufim and the Patriarch, so that the former changed his religious affiliation to become a Catholic and baptised his children, followed by relatives and a number of other families (mentioned by name). They bought a piece of land and in 1868 built a church on it called *Deir al-Latin* (the Latin Church). After that they were formally recognised and joined the Greek Orthodox in the Administrative Council (ibid.).

A number of aspects emerge from this brief account. First, Nimr uses the word "*Kathulik*" to initially describe the Catholics, who refer to themselves as "*Latin*". "*Kathulik*" in the language and traditions of today is used to refer to Greek

Catholics, who are not mentioned at all in Nimr's account, as they appear rather late in the history of the city. Whether this is due to a confusion and mixing up of terms on Nimr's part or whether the "Latins" were indeed initially called "*Kathulik*" is unclear, yet some of my respondents claimed that it was the same term, going back to a translation of the word – Catholics – in most European languages to describe the "*Latins*". Secondly, it seems again that Nimr goes to great length emphasising that even the Latins are not an import from the "West", but emerged from a clash between a local man and a Greek Patriarch.[4] Finally, he mentions that they purchased the land for the church building from a Muslim *shaykh*, implying that there was no resentment among the population.

The final denomination Nimr mentions is that of the "Protestants" (Nimr 1966: 38). English and German Protestants converted a number of families (all mentioned by name) and in 1900 bought for them a piece of land for a church and a school and another piece of land for the "Evangelical Hospital" (*mustashfa al-irsaliya*). All of this is located west of the Old City of Nablus, where it continues to be found today. It was later endowed to the Arab Protestant community. Here, again, a couple of points stand out. First, the word used here to describe the hospital, *irsaliya*, is not what it is referred to today (*al-mustashfa al-injili*). Whether this is a mistake or has changed since its foundation is unclear to me, yet most people today would not recognise it under that name. Secondly, while Nimr mentions the foreign origin of the Protestant denomination, he is also adamant to emphasise in his final sentence that they are "Arab Protestants", i.e. that any foreign influence stood only at its inception and that the community is now entirely "Arab".

The penultimate section in Nimr's (1966: 39ff.) chapter about Nablus' Christians concerns itself with inter-religious

relations, between the Christian minority and the Muslim majority in particular. He sets out with a reference to the often quoted, and "well-known" "contract of 'Umar bin al-Khattab", the second Caliph. In this document the Christians of the area are guaranteed certain rights and protection as *ahl adh-dhimma* (people of protection). Rather than, as is usually done in works dealing with this document, referring to the *ahl adh-dhimma* as "Christians" in a non-distinct manner, Nimr calls them specifically "Greek Orthodox". By doing so he clarifies that the contract and the protection was specifically addressed to the local Christian community, not "world-Christianity". While there is considerable merit in this more global interpretation of the term, Nimr seems to be more concerned with the relations on the ground, with his continual emphasis on local Christians being "one of us". In support of his view he quotes a *hadith*, which says that "what is ours is theirs, and what stands against them stands against us" (Nimr 1966: 39). 'Umar's contract and the *hadith* he makes directly responsible for the fact that the Christians of the Jabal Nablus region enjoyed equal rights with Muslims.

He reiterates their being part of certain Arab tribes sharing everything with them, joy, sorrow, food, and that the local (Muslim) leaders (*umara'*) trusted them completely and involved them in their affairs. What follows gives us a crucial hint as to why Nimr is so keen on portraying Muslim-Christian relationships in such a positive light: the Patriarchate in Istanbul had placed the Christians under the aegis of 'Umar Agha an-Nimr, the governor of Jerusalem at the time (ibid.). In support of his claim that the Patriarchate trusted the Agha, Nimr reproduces two original letters, one by the Greek Orthodox Patriarch Cyrill, and one by a Christian tribal leader, both addressed to the Agha.

This benevolent guardianship of a Muslim nobleman over the Christians in the area is further illustrated by an incident

mentioned in a footnote. Nimr reports that 'Abd al-Fattah Agha an-Nimr defended his Christian secretary in front of a group of disapproving Muslims, who wanted to see him replaced by a Muslim secretary. Wisely the Agha responded that this secretary was there to look after his administrative affairs and welfare (*masalihi*), and not to lead him in prayer (*imam li-salati*). This episode is rather reveiling – on the one hand, it explains why the author of the book, a descendant of the said Agha an-Nimr, is so gracious towards the Christians in the area; on the other hand, it provides a glimpse of some of the resentment undoubtedly present among some of the Muslim population against Christians at the time. The Arabic word used here to describe the Muslims' reaction (*istahjan*) means to "consider wrong or improper, to condemn or reject", thus a fairly clear-cut and strong sentiment.

A slightly more ambiguous situation than the picture presented by Nimr is furthermore indicated by the report by the British Consul, who visited the area in the mid nineteenth century and apparently indicated "trouble or unrest" between Muslims and Christians. Nimr is adamant to emphasise that the two letters he reprinted are "clear and irrefutable" evidence that the Consul's sources of information were wrong or unreliable. At this point he provides evidence from Christian and Muslim Elders, who affirmed amicable relations, and refers to (Muslim) mothers who admonished their children if they called Christian children names and who, when a Muslim holiday fell on a Sunday, said that this holiday was particularly blessed. He ends this passage by referring to the belief that God gave everyone a specific religion, implying that there should be no strife.

This section of the book represents a highly suggestive depiction of Christian-Muslim relations in the area. Although written in the twentieth century and referring to past centuries, it mirrors the situation in the twenty-first century. What we

witness today, just as it seems to have been the case in the past, are the efforts of the political, social, and religious elite to affirm benevolent relations and mutual understanding. At the same time, we get a glimpse of what is going on on a day-to-day basis, on the ground, of the bickering that so frequently marks human relationships, in this case couched in religious resentiments. Individual advantages and disadvantages are thus portrayed as discrimination on the basis of religion.

Lahham (1999: 24), a Palestinian Christian himself, in his discussion about Muslim-Christian relations in Palestine analyses this state of affairs quite lucidly. After briefly defining the pillars of his understanding of "relationship" – coexistence, dialogue, discussion, and defence – he examines the state of "coexistence" of Muslims in Christians in Palestine today, claiming that, in general, it can be described as "good" (*jayyid*). There are, however, several levels of this coexistence that need to be analysed separately: the official or governmental level, at which there are no problems (*la tujad mushkila*), as the law is clear and equality comprehensive (ibid.). On an intellectual level, he says, both Muslim and Christian, there are likewise no problems, as this thinking is governed by reason, broad horizons, good relations, and moderation. On the popular level, i.e. in an ordinary "Palestinian street" (*ash-shari' al-falastini al-'adi*), he finds that there is great inequality (ibid.). As evidence of this disharmony he refers to personal experience and the feelings of "ordinary Christians", when they deal with this Muslim "Palestinian street". The reasons for Muslims' cautious and suspicious behaviour and attitudes, Lahham is quick to explain, are ignorance and erroneous ideas (*afkar maghluta*) about Christianity and Christians. The way he sees things, "ordinary Muslims feel they cannot cooperate with Palestinian Christians with complete ease or trust, i.e. as a 100 per cent Palestinian, and this in the name of the Muslim faith, i.e. for his being Muslim" (Lahham 1999: 24–5).

The underlying reasons for this mistrust, he claims, must be sought in a lack of education in the two biggest institutions, education and training, and preaching in mosques (Lahham 1999: 25). Educational methods and curricula, he explains further, do not encourage Muslim students, especially those who do not mix with Christians in school or at work, to consider Palestinian Christians as brothers and fellow citizens, their equals in everything regardless of their religion. Neither does preaching and religious edification encourage the necessary discussion of the topic (ibid.).

For Christians this lack of appreciation as fellow Palestinians is a sore issue. It is a theme also picked up by Hana (1999), who not only emphasises that Palestinian Christians are just as much "Arab" as their Muslim neighbours, but also looks into the future saying that a Palestinian state can only be built successfully, if Muslims and Christians indeed act as *one people* (Hana 1999: 51f.). He reports that some people maintain Christians were not an original element (*'unsur*) of Palestine or the "East", and rejects this view outright (ibid.). It is almost surprising that he has to reiterate a well-known historical fact, namely that Christians were in Arab lands long before Muslims arrived on the scene. To counteract this historical amnesia he reminds his readers at various points that local Christians are one people, are an original part of the Arab nation (*umma*), speak one language (Arabic), have one culture and one history, have the same meanings and the same national ambitions. Furthermore, Hana explains, that both have equally suffered under the Crusaders, and that the loathsome occupation (*al-ihtilal al-baghid*) does not distinguish between mosque and church, a Christian and a Muslim quarter, a Christian and a Muslim youth, and that they are all suffering from this occupation to the same extent (Hana 1999: 52, 55).

Lahham (ibid.) continues to expound on how the situation could be remedied. What Palestinian Christians would like to

see is that those who attend Palestinian schools actually learn that Palestinian society is diverse and that their Arabness (*'aruba*) throws them into one and the same melting pot (ibid.). It is interesting to note that Lahham (1999), like Nimr (1966), emphasises the fact that Christians are *Arabs* like their Muslim neighbours, thus creating a tie of kinship, a blood tie that should be stronger than the divisions of faith. From the mosques' loudspeakers the Christians would, according to Lahham, like to hear a sermon along the following lines, and I quote in full (ibid., emphasis mine): "Oh Muslims, the Christians of this country are your brothers (in their *Arabness* albeit it not in their faith), *what is yours is theirs and what stands against them stands against you*. They are *not involved in what the West does* in political terms. They have their religion and you have your religion. You and they are in the same national, political, and social boat (lit. "trench", *khandaq*), you have one and the same history and the same destiny". In these demands three aspects stand out, as they are also what Nimr (1966) is so keen to highlight: Christians' Arabness, their independence from the West, and the quote of a *hadith* as a religio-historical precedent of how Muslims should treat their Christian neighbours. In other words, both authors eagerly defend the view that Palestinian Christians are really no different from Palestinian Muslims and should therefore be treated equally. Lahham, of course, writes this from a minority perspective, whereas Nimr writes from the angle of the benevolent protector (of the intellectual kind, as Lahham put it).

The episode of the Christian secretary reported by Nimr (1966: 39) has its twenty-first century versions, when employment of Christians or shopping at Christian-owned shops is considered by some as "improper" if not "un-Islamic". It is, however, also clear that these views – blaming religious affiliation for everyday tensions – were and continue to be held by a minority, albeit a seemingly growing one in the current

climate. Nimr's reference to mothers is equally revealing, as this appears to be reflected in contemporary practice as well – based on my own observations and anecdotal evidence it would appear that women tend to be less confrontational in religious matters than men are. For them, the evaluation of neighbourly relations is more often based on character and "dignity" rather than religious affiliation.

The distorted views that many Muslims apparently hold about Christians, and that lead to attitudes such as the "impropriety of Muslim-Christian cooperation" mentioned above, are due to a variety of reasons, the most significant amongst which is, according to Lahham (1999: 26) ignorance. He picks out four issues in this regard: the relationship between Palestinian (or generally Arab) Christians and the West, the minority-majority mentality, religious education in state schools, and the Islamic "awakening". The first issue, the relationship between Arab and Christians and the "West" that is "Christian" in name, particularly when it comes to history, politics, and morality, really bothers (*yaz'aj*) Palestinian Christians (ibid.). This view is echoed by Hana (1999: 51), who insists that in the past cooperation between Christians and Muslims had been good, especially in the fields of philosophy, medicine, and sciences, and that, as a result of this harmonious relationship, the "East" had witnessed a flourishing of their civilisation. In other words, success came through *internal cooperation*, not an alliance with *outside* forces, i.e. the "West". This strong sentiment of Christians rejecting any association with the "West" is confirmed by my own observations – one of the things that has been continually emphasised by the Christian I worked with, was that they are "very different" from people in the "West", not only in religious, but also in cultural terms. The reason for this strong and continued emphasis must be sought in the views frequently expressed by Muslims past and present – accusing their Christian neighbours of being "allies"

of the West, and hence responsible for any misfortune. It is, however, also interesting to note that such feelings were persistently expressed to me, a "Western Christian". Given that some "Westerners" draw similar conclusions about their closeness to Christians, rather than Muslims, of the area, it should come as no surprise that a resentment of this view should have become deeply ingrained in Palestinian Christians' thinking. Lahham (ibid.) quite forcefully distances himself and his fellow Christians from the wars that the "West" has led in the past, or colonialism, or the politics of today concerning the "Palestinian issue" or the Middle East in general.

The second aspect that Lahham highlights as a bone of contention is the minority-majority mentality (*'aqliya al-akthariya wa al-aqalliya*) (ibid.). The problem with the notion of "minority", he explains, is that it was coined in the past (the Islamic *dhimmi* system, the Ottoman *millet* system, or the Western concept of minority) and are not applicable to the situation of Palestinian Christians today. What he, speaking for all Palestinian Christians, rejects, is the idea that the "minority" is in need of protection, patronage, respect of their feelings, forgiveness, freedom of worship, a special social structure, or even special benefits (Lahham 1999: 27). Palestinian Christians, according to Lahham, accept, albeit grudgingly, that they make a minority of not more than 3 per cent of the entire population, yet they believe that a proportion in numbers is one thing, and rights and duties something else. Just by being Palestinian 100 per cent of the rights should be granted and 100 per cent of the duties placed upon them. The dignity of a citizen should be based on him or her being a human being (including their faith), not on the "amount of their people" (ibid.). Lahham suggests that rather than using the term "minority" (*aqalliya*) one should say that Christians are few in number (*'adaduhu qalil*). The problem with thinking in terms of minority/majority is that it influences people's behaviour:

Lahham points out that those in the majority are easily led to feel that they are stronger, that they misjudge the feelings of those in the minority, and that they consider the minority too weak to raise their voices (ibid.). On the other hand, this way of thinking may lead those in the minority to feel threatened in their identity and their secure existence, and thus take refuge in asserting this through exaggerated conduct by which they hurt the feelings of others in turn (e.g. when Christians put up crosses on the roofs of their houses in Bethlehem (ibid.)).

A third problem and cause of ignorance, according to Lahham (1999: 28) is the previously mentioned education in state schools. There is neither freedom nor equality in the instruction of Christian religious education in state schools, which is currently non-existent. Christian children are allowed to leave class during Islamic religious instruction, yet no equivalent instruction is offered. This is relegated to "Sunday schools" (which take place on Fridays).

Finally, Lahham (ibid.) points to the "awakening" (*sahwa*) in the Islamic world that has an impact on all areas of life and which makes Palestinian Christians rather uncomfortable. Palestine is no longer "Arab", but has, according to Lahham, become "Arab Muslim", Jerusalem, even Palestine itself, have become an "Islamic endowment" in the language of this new trend. "God's religion" is Islam, the West is carrying out "new Crusades", and the enemies of the Islamic community (*'a'da' al-umma*) are unbelievers (*kuffar*) and polytheists (*mushrikun*). This particular problem is quite clearly confirmed by my own observations. While most of the Christians I worked with had little or no quibbles with ordinary Muslims, they were very ambiguous about this new Islamic vigour that has for some years if not decades had an impact on society, especially in Nablus, which has been described as anything from "conservative" to "a hotbed of fundamentalism and terrorism", depending on the political standpoint of the commentator.

Christians feelings about this trend range from plain fear to mockery and cynicism. And while Nabulsi Christians were generally proud of being socially and morally "conservative" – more so than their brothers and sisters in Bethlehem and Ramallah, as they were fond of emphasising – they were very afraid of the prospect of an "Islamic" state. In this regard they frequently pointed to the situation of Christians in the Gaza Strip since Hamas had taken the political reins. In fact, most of the Gazan Christians had left.

The results of these problems are highlighted by Hana (1999: 53), who observes that Arab Christians face many challenges, such as a sense of desperation and hopelessness, introversion and isolation, resignation, and finally emigration. What exactly the reasons are for an increased emigration of the Christian population shall not be belaboured here again, as this has been done quite extensively by Sabella (1999). Despite drawing this depressing picture, Hana is, however, also quick to point out that what some people claim about the "oppression" of Christians by Muslims is imprecise and wrong (*ghair daqiq wa ghair sahih*). In fact, he turns this argument on its head, claiming that the only aim of such speech is to drive a wedge between Christians and Muslims and their national unity as one people (ibid.). His strategy, in other words, is to seek fault with *external* actors, who are seemingly keen to ruin the existing harmony of Christians and Muslims in Palestine. Any crisis in their relationship Hana puts down to external interference (*tadakhulat kharijiya*), coming from those who are not interested in the welfare of the Palestinian people or its national unity (Hana 1999: 55). And yet, similar to Lahham, he adds a caveat to blaming external forces: "we" also carry responsibility for any disharmony, through words and sermons, which trigger angry religious sentiments on one side against the other (ibid.). This responsibility he, like Lahham, pins down to Christian and Muslim "men of religion" (*rijal ad-din*),

men of thought, science, and culture. They should not leave the stage to those who spread rumors (ibid.).

In other words, what we see here yet again, is the view that some hate preaching seems to be going on, that religious leaders carry responsibility for hostile sentiments, and that education from above could remedy the situation. The question that arises then, is why – if the religious and political elite have for an apparently long time seen "no problems" in inter-religious relations, and have been convinced that harmony not only is essential, but also that it largely exists – has this elitist understanding not trickled down to the entire population? It seems quite obvious that there is a (perhaps broadening) gap between the perceptions at the top and the situation on the ground, and that a top-down approach is either ineffective, or in fact practically nonexistent. At a superficial glance it might seem that the so forcefully defended harmony in the upper echelons, expressed in ardent speeches by all sides on countless occasions, does not translate into practice, for reasons that have to be further explored.

Nimr (1966: 45) ends his exposition of the Christians in Nablus by a description of their traditions and customs. Comprising merely half a page, this is a surprisingly short section. He mentions that the Christian leaders wore black turbans (*'ama'im*) like those of the Copts. Ordinary people, however, did not differ from their Muslim neighbours, neither in appearance nor customs. Their women folk wore veils like Muslim women (*tatahjab*), they abstained from eating pork and did not consume alcohol, just like their Muslim compatriots. Nimr describes them as "loyal" (*mukhlisin*) in their relationship with Muslims and had no contact with foreigners except consuls. They even used the *Hijri* calendar rather than the Gregorian one in their letters and affairs, as was exemplified by the letter of the Patriarch mentioned earlier. The only difference between Christians and Muslims in the area then was in their creed and worship (*'aqida wa 'ibada*) (ibid.).

Having read Nimr's description of the Christians customs, it becomes quite evident, why this passage is so short – if they are indeed like Muslims in everything they do, there is no need to describe these traditions any further to an intended Muslim readership. He just finds it worth emphasising again that the Christians' relationships with their Muslim neighbours was much stronger than those with foreign Christians. The elitist angle, from which this book appears to be written, is evident again in Nimr's reference to leadership behaviour. The customs of the "common people" are made in a rather generalising fashion and it remains unclear what his sources of information are in this regard. However, anecdotal evidence and my own observations confirm that the Christians of Nablus do indeed not consume pork and little if any alcohol (arguably due to a lack of availability), that they consider themselves as very conservative, both socially and religiously, and that at least in church many women continue to veil.

The other "Other" in Nablus are the Samaritans, although their situation is slightly different from that of the Christians. I would now very briefly turn to one description of this "Other", in order to show that many of the strategies used for portraying Christians are similarly used for the depiction of Samaritans.

Describing Samaritans

It must be said at the outset that much of the writing and publicity about Samaritans has been done by Samaritans themselves. Particularly since they opened a research institute in Holon in 1981, the Institute for Samaritan Studies, established and run by Benyamin Tsedaka, increasing efforts are put into researching Samaritan history, religion, and traditions. In an interview with Ireton (2003), he explained that after having cooperated with Israeli academics for more than fifty years in researching

Samaritan history and language, he still found it "very difficult to raise the Samaritan profile internationally despite the efforts of several people from Holon and Kiryat Luza". Furthermore, he claimed that due to the shortage of Samaritan academics (beyond first degree) the community has very little influence (ibid.). So, the research institute in Holon was founded to address this lack. Yet, even earlier, in 1969, Benyamin and Yefet Tsedaka founded the bi-weekly newspaper "A.B." (Schur 1989: 133). Through channels such as these, Samaritans have been able to shape their own image in the eyes of a diverse public. Other studies were done by European and American scholars, yet they appear to be largely interested in the ancient history and religious dogma of the community.

For our purposes here, it is more instructive to examine the writings of two local Muslim writers, who describe the Samaritan community living in their midst. One is by a lecturer in the Faculty of Shari'a at the national university in Nablus in cooperation with a local Arabic teacher. The other one is by a lecturer in history at the local open university. The first consists of a traditional introduction to Samaritan history, the likewise traditional pillars of Samaritan faith, religious law, and a final section on contemporary social issues. The first three chapters represent the typical approach to studies about the Samaritans. Indeed, they also mirror what Samaritans themselves tend to tell their Muslim audiences during lectures, presentations, conferences, or exhibitions. The themes of those chapters reflect local interests, but also those of the authors. Given that one of the authors is a teacher of Islamic law, the focus on dogma and religious law are easily understandable. They do, however, also reflect a general interest I have found among many Muslims in other people's tenets of faith, rather than their day-to-day lives. In this sense, the book caters particularly to a Muslim audience. What shines through in those two chapters is a respect for and appreciation of the strict

religious rules Samaritans should adhere to. Commenting on the oneness of God, for instance, the authors point out that "it appears to the observer that the Samaritan belief in one God is identical with the Islamic belief in Him, or it resembles it to a great extent" (Shraida and Ghaurani 1994: 49). The sanctity of Mount Gerizim is compared to that of Mekka usually "Mecca" for Muslims, and great emphasis is placed on the fact that Jerusalem holds no holiness for the Samaritans as opposed to the Jews. Other pillars of Samaritan faith, such as the belief in angels or prophets are meticulously compared to the Islamic equivalent thereof.

What is, however, of more interest for the current study is the section on contemporary social issues. In this chapter, the authors begin with a description of the Samaritans' historical homeland, placing them squarely into different parts of the region. They list the names of Palestinian towns and villages that were once inhabited by Samaritans (Shraida and Ghaurani 1994: 108). By doing so, they grant that the Samaritans have the oldest historical right to this region, compared to other religious communities, and that they have nowhere else to go. This is one way of telling Muslim readers that the Samaritans in their midst are legitimately in this region and should be respected.

The section on demography contains the well-known list of names of formerly Samaritan families that have converted to Islam. The authors emphasise particularly the history of the Ya'ish family, a very prominent Nablus Muslim family with Samaritan roots (Shraida and Ghaurani 1994: 111). In other words, Samaritan families and tribes become in this way not only firmly embedded in the regional kinship system, but they are also confirmed as the ancestors of many of today's Muslim families.

Two other aspects of everyday social life are used to portray Samaritans as "one of us". The first refers to their dress and

appearance, which is described as being like "the dress that Nabulsis and other people in the country wear" (Shraida and Ghaurani 1994: 113). This echoes very nicely with what has been said about Christians earlier. The second aspect concerns their language. While the first observation of the authors is that the Samaritans speak ancient Hebrew, the second sentence reads that "all Samaritans speak Arabic with a Nabulsi dialect at home" (Shraida and Ghaurani 1994: 114). This, again, is a very efficient way of teaching the readers about the sameness of "us" and "them", with "us" being in all likelihood Muslims of Nablus or elsewhere, and "them" obviously being the Samaritans.

The other book consists of a section on the religious history and origins of the Samaritans, one on the Samaritan creed, one on religious law, one on customs and traditions, one on family and social relations, and a final one on the Samaritans' educational and cultural situation.

The historical depictions of the "Other" have shown a number of points, which echo the situation of inter-religious relations in the twenty-first century. They reflect the efforts of the elite to portray a picture of peaceful relations grounded in history. This is particularly the perspective of the Muslim majority, who, in Scott's (1990) reading, have an interest in relating a public narrative of stability and harmony. But it is also reflected by the minorities' elite, who represent their members on public occasions, and, in the name and for the benefit of their communities, have an interest in proclaiming peaceful relations. Another parallel is the need to convince or educate the proportion of the (Muslim) population with little knowledge or interest in the religious minorities in their midst about these groups. It is quite obvious today, as it probably was in the past, when the accounts discussed above were written, that there is a considerable part of the Muslim majority that is ignorant or misinformed about the religious minorities

in Nablus. The strategy of grounding peaceful relations in history is a time-honoured one. In a society that places great value on the past, in both religious and socio-political terms, such as the Palestinian one, this strategy might prove successful. At times, these attempts on the part of Muslims reach as far back as the time of the Prophet Muhammad and the Rightly Guided Khalifs, when the ground rules of inter-religious relations were laid (Abu-Munshar 2012). In the Palestinian context, as I have outlined earlier, this strategy becomes particularly salient with regard to the people's history of resistance and suffering. It does, however, speak volumes that such affirmations are constantly necessary, whether in written or spoken accounts – it suggests that the situation on the ground, the day-to-day interactions do not always mirror this narrative. That this interpretation is a reasonable one is suggested by the fact that members of both the minorities and the majority communities frequently engage in a discourse that digresses significantly from this public transcript.

I have alluded to the hidden transcript earlier, as a discourse that takes place "offstage". It includes the ways, in which both minorities and majority speak about the "Other" in their absence, such as stereotyping, but also swearing, cursing, and ridiculing. But of course, the hidden transcript is more than just speech, it comprises all manners of behaviours and practices, which form an essential part of this study. Some of these practices will be the focus of the following chapter.

4

GENDERED TABOOS: MARRIAGE, HOSPITALITY, AND DRESS

A middle-aged Christian woman was telling me how she married off her four children, two sons and two daughters. She, as the mother, was a crucial force in the process of finding suitable partners, as is a very common tradition in the region, regardless of religious affiliation. Arranged marriages (*zawaj taqlidi*) appear to be the norm rather than the exception. She had very good relations with her Muslim neighbours, and one particular Muslim neighbour she called a "close friend", whom she would frequently visit and receive as a visitor in her house. This Muslim neighbour, at some point, asked her to give one of her daughters to her son in marriage. She relayed that conversation to me and her obviously very upset and serious response seemed to have been "I'm sorry, but we don't do that. If you give me one of your daughters for my son, you can have her, but you don't do that either". She must have been very sure of the reaction; she would not have offered her daughter otherwise. On another occasion, another Christian woman related a conversation with a relative who had emigrated to the US and asked about Christian women marrying Muslim

men in Palestine. The very forceful answer seemed to have been: "No way do we [Christians] do that, and neither do the Muslims give us their daughters. They even *kill* them, should they marry a Christian!". Indeed, one of the strictest taboos between Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans is the giving away in marriage of the daughters of the community. Of course, there are religious norms behind these attitudes – Muslims and Christians are said to "inherit" their religion from their fathers, and Samaritan women become "affiliated with the husband's family upon marriage, carrying his family name" (Ayash 2003: 96; translation mine), i.e. any children of a mother with a different religious affiliation would be "lost" to her religious community. In everyday conversations, however, people much more frequently point to the potential practical difficulties that might ensue from such a cross-denominational liaison: efforts to convert the woman, difficulties with in-laws, raising the children, or not being able to practise one's religion.

It is important to note at the outset that marriage traditions are actually very similar in all three communities under discussion. Wedding and engagement ceremonies are very similar and are often attended by friends with different religious affiliations than that of the couple[1]. Ideas about the function of marriage in an individual's and society's life differ very little. There are some religio-legal issues, where the three communities differ in terms of divorce and polygyny, yet the social aspects of weddings and marriage are very much alike, regardless of religious affiliation.[2] These similarities will not be explored at this point. What is more important for my argument here is the role marriage rules play in setting and reinforcing boundaries between communities.

In this chapter I would like to examine not only marriage patterns, but also another two areas, in which the drawing of boundaries and the maintenance of distinctions between the

Nabulsi religious communities – despite the equalising rhetoric – becomes evident: the offering of hospitality, particularly the sharing of food, and dress codes. Especially the two latter areas are obvious examples of how social boundaries become embodied. The focus of this chapter is the gendered nature of group boundaries. Like others before me, I argue that boundaries between religious communities are drawn largely across women's bodies. While men are implicated in all three areas of boundary maintenance discussed here, it is women who tend to be the main actors or those acted upon.

Endogamy rules as borderlines

Intermarriage between members of the three religious communities remains a rare phenomenon. Rules of endogamy are perhaps most stringently applied within the Samaritan community as I will outline in a moment. As I have just mentioned, while Muslim men are religiously allowed to marry Christian women, both Muslim and Christian communities guard their women very strictly, with threats of social ostracism and the frequent re-telling of "horror stories" surrounding mixed marriages used as devices to enforce the ban. I once visited a Christian woman, now advanced in years, who had married a Muslim man and moved away from the rest of her family. This woman, together with her offspring, was severely ostracised by her family of origin on the account that she married 'out of sorts'. She was neither visited by them nor, as I found out, when I spoke to her brothers, mentioned in their conversations. Only on relevant occasions was she referred to as the 'odd one out', the one who went against the conventions, and of course, she served as an excellent example to the young of what one should *not* do – "the poor woman is not allowed to practise her religion and is not treated well by her husband's family; and of course she lost her own family". One of her brothers' wife

interestingly also had a sister, who had married a Muslim. This woman had acted against the family council and was subsequently left by her husband ("*dumped her*" – *tarakha* – as it was usually referred to). Although now regretting her decision to marry outside her religious community, she continued to be shunned by family members. Her sister said she would let her visit or stay with her, but her husband was adamant that this would bring ill-repute upon his family. Cases such as these were the usual point of reference for older women to warn younger women and girls of the consequences of not following the community's marriage rules.

This relatively clear boundary was also reflected in Kattan's (1994) study of Bethlehem University students. One set of her questions focused on the Muslim and Christian students' closeness towards each other. While they generally appear to respect and feel close to each other, regardless of religious affiliation, less than a quarter of the students agreed with the idea of religious intermarriage. In fact, only about one tenth of her respondents strongly agreed with it. Kattan (1994: 93) comments on this finding that this "is to be expected as this is, more or less, a social taboo". Unfortunately, like with all her other findings, she again does not differentiate between Muslim and Christian students' views on the matter. It would also have been interesting to know if male and female students hold different attitudes in this question, as I suspect they would, judging from my own observations.

Before reflecting further on the rules of endogamy, I would like to briefly examine the issue of marriage in general. As Borneman (1996) has illustrated, the paradigmatic status of marriage as descriptive object has been assumed to be central and unquestioned within anthropology until the 1950s. This was followed by a loss of interest in the subject for about thirty years, until it was subjected to criticism, mainly from a feminist perspective. There is no need to reiterate the details

of these developments at this point. Suffice it to note that marriage used to be understood almost exclusively in terms of reproduction, i.e. in its narrowest biological sense (Borneman 1996: 220). Marxist critiques later focused on material aspects of marriage alliances, whereas feminist analyses often emphasised the deleterious effects of marriage on married women (Borneman 1996: 225). Borneman (ibid.) himself suggests to understand marriage as "a privilege that operates through a serious of foreclosures and abjections, through the creation of an 'outside'". In his own research on the role of marriage in nation building in post-war Berlin, he found various official (state-sanctioned) and unofficial types of marriage. The former were used as strategic devices for exclusion, "for the regulation of the nation internally and for the demarcation of the nation from outsiders" (Borneman 1996: 230).

In their response to Borneman, Yanagisako and Collier (1996: 236; emphasis mine) point out that feminist anthropologists have had a similar focus: marriage was seen as playing a central role "in subordinating wives to husbands by *rendering alternatives to marriage untenable*". This has been similarly put by Moore (1988: 128) and others, who confirm that the state tends to promote a particular form of 'family' and marriage. From a Marxist perspective, such control of marriage forms is driven by the desire to control means of production and property. Others have argued that what is at stake here is the control of the means of *reproduction*, i.e. women (Meillasoux 1981). This latter approach has of course undergone thorough criticism, which I have no space to reiterate here.

Most of this seems to fall into the marriage-reproduction category – the link that Borneman (1996) criticised so strongly –, yet it speaks to many people's own understandings of the issue. The majority of people I spoke to in the Nablus context have very clear ideas about the purpose of marriage being reproduction. A marriage without children is generally seen

as useless. Childlessness is considered a tragedy, and the notion that it could be the couple's choice to remain child-free is, for most people, unthinkable. Muslims, moreover, frequently quote a saying of the Prophet indicating that "marriage is half of our religion". Furthermore, people hold very strong ideas about what a "proper" marriage should be and the state sanctions such forms of marriage. What is important for the discussion here, however, is the role of religious institutions and communities in this matter. They set very clear boundaries of what is an acceptable form of marriage and what is not. Most of the Churches, for instance, would demand the conversion of a partner with a different denominational affiliation before the wedding ceremony can take place. Similarly, spouses with a different religious background will find it difficult to be married unless one partner converts to the religion of the other. As there is no civil ceremony, no state registry for marriages, wedding ceremonies can only be conducted by religious institutions. Marriages are thus exclusively sanctioned by the respective religious communities.

This exclusivity practised by the respective religious leaderships is echoed in people's own understandings and discourse. The arguments used to justify such exclusions might be slightly different – more theological in nature by the leadership, more social by ordinary people – yet the result remains the same: inter-religious (at times inter-denominational) marriage ties are very strongly discouraged. The means to achieve this goal are also divergent: the leadership of the religious communities can, of course, refuse to conduct the wedding ceremony, thus rendering a relationship "illegal", whereas people employ strategies of gossiping and story-telling to teach their fellow community members, especially the young, about the negative consequences of such "improper" alliances. These anecdotal consequences range from psychological stress and disagreement between the spouses, to the question of raising children

in one or the other religious tradition, to the most extreme, and frequently practised, form of punishment, social ostracism. The theme of "abandoned wives", who have nowhere to go after their husbands have left them, appears with great frequency, especially in Christians' stories. In Muslims' anecdotes the theme of "crimes of honour" (*jara'im ash-sharaf*) is employed regularly to illustrate the deathly consequences of any "improper" alliance. This does, of course, apply not only to inter-religious marriages, but to other liaisons as well, which are deemed unacceptable and dishonourable by the woman's family, leading to her death in an effort to restore family honour. Having said this, many urbanised Palestinians find this practice "uncivilised" and condemn it in the strongest terms. Needless to mention that "crimes of honour" are equally rare as are "abandoned wives" in real life. Yet, these means appear to be quite successful in instilling endogamy rules into the respective community members.

Endogamy – the rule that one must marry someone from one's own social group or defined category – is, of course, a very well-known anthropological concept. Peoples and Bailey (2000: 125) describe the purpose of endogamous rules as to "maintain social barriers between groups of people of different social rank". This aim of exclusiveness is achieved in two ways: endogamy reduces the social contacts and interactions between individuals of different ranks, while at the same time reinforcing ties within the endogamous group; then there is the symbolic significance of endogamy, as it emphasises the exclusiveness of the endogamous group by preventing its "contamination" by outsiders (ibid.). Most frequently, Indian castes are cited as examples of endogamous groups: here the idea of pollution is most strongly expressed in the taboo on physical contact between them.

In the rather different context of colonial rule in different parts of the world, Stoler (1991) discusses how boundaries

between colonisers and colonised were drawn to a significant extent across women's bodies. While this debate does not directly speak to marriage, it problematises sexual behaviour between members of the two social groups. This, in turn, has an impact on the notion of acceptable marriages, as sexuality is seen to have its only legitimate place within the confines of married relationship in the Nablus context. And while the situation in Nablus or Palestine is not one of colonisation – I disregard Jewish-Israeli settlements in this debate about inter-religious relations as contact is minimal and not relevant to the discussion – the region has historically seen its fair share of population influx, often in religious terms. Thus, Samaritans were once the majority, indigenous population, now living in a numerical minority situation. Christians, starting out as a minority, have, after a period of being the majority, again turned into a minority. Muslims, from this perspective, come closest to the description of being "colonisers", as they first arrived from the Arabian Peninsula as outsiders, gradually intermarrying with and converting the indigenous population. It is against this historical background of shifting populations that we can perhaps better understand, how inter-marriage, or the lack thereof, contributes to the drawing of boundaries between communities.

One of the themes that emerge from the reports of and discourse about colonial living is that of the 'Black Peril', the perceived threat to the colonial system posed by colonised men. This threat, as Stoler (1991: 67f.) explains, was not only political (the fear of rebellion), but also sexual. As a result, "European women needed protection because men of color had 'primitive' sexual urges and uncontrollable lust, aroused the sight of white women" (Stoler 1991: 67). For the practical consequences of such fear it is insignificant that the actual incidence of sexual attacks on white women was minimal. What is important is that the mere perception of threat led to

increased policing of women's behaviour (as well as of surveillance of colonised men of course).

This pattern appears to echo with the situation in Nablus, where control over women's behaviour with male strangers tends to be tight. One of the main reasons frequently given is that they might become the victims of sexual assault. While there is nothing particularly unusual about this argument, it receives new significance in the Nablus context, since this threat is regularly and squarely placed on the shoulders of men from the respective other religious community. In Christian discourse, the danger emanates clearly from Muslim men – "Christian men don't do that sort of thing" – whereas Muslims often accuse Christians of having lax sexual morals.

A classic "I told you so" moment arose in the summer of 2010, when a Christian man was caught with indecent pictures of himself and women other than his wife on his mobile phone. The leadership of all Christian denominations in town made a concerted effort at damage control, very much aware of the dividing potential of the incident, in fact calling it a religious *fitna* (discord or trial). They called for congregational meetings, invited Muslim leaders, and eventually negotiated a move of the accused abroad. At the same time the emotions of Muslims ran high. The man's workplace was attacked over night as well as grafiti sprayed on the wall outside calling for his death. The news spread all over the West Bank in no time, so that a couple of days later a Christian acquaintance of mine was asked in Ramallah whether he had heard about what the Christians in Nablus were up to. The condemnation was total, it was portrayed as an emblematic example of Christian men's immoral behaviour. It turned out that all the women pictured were Muslim, and that in fact he had longer-term affairs with each one of them, indicating consent of the women. While this aspect did not figure in Muslims' discourse about the incident, it became another marker of difference for Christians:

Christian women would of course not do that sort of thing. In other words, similarly to the colonial context discussed by Stoler (1991), fear of the male Other is used in the Nablus context to control women's behaviour and to thus reaffirm boundaries between communities, which is eventually translated into marriage rules.

This discourse about sexuality and marriage is, of course, only part of a much larger picture of morality. In the colonial contexts analysed by Stoler (1991), the moral themes that were constantly re-emphasised stemmed from a distinct notion of European middle-class respectability. It meant a "restatement of what was culturally distinct and superior about how colonials ruled and lived" (Stoler 1991: 80). At its core there was the "reassertion of racial difference that harnessed nationalist rhetoric and markers of middle-class morality to its cause (Stoler 1991: 81). While morality in the Nablus context is neither racist nor nationalist, there are similarities that are striking: the respectability of the members of one's own religious community was paramount in daily discourse, as was the moral superiority of the community and the reassertion of religious difference between Self and Other. And another aspect bears similarities: that these strategies contained obvious asymmetries between men and women. As in the colonial context, men of the Nabulsi Muslim majority may, as a general rule, marry women of the Christian minority. In Stoler's (1991: 85) words: "Sexual relations might be forbidden between white women and men of color but not the other way around". In the Nabulsi context, this applies to Muslim women and Christian men, as the incident mentioned above indicates.

If we replace Stoler's "coloniser" and "colonised" by "majority" and "minority" (in the sense of power relations, not necessarily numbers), we might arrive at a better understanding of the role of marriage rules in inter-religious relations in the Nablus context. She explains that the "exclusionary politics of colonialism

demarcated not just external boundaries but *interior frontiers*, specifying *internal conformity and order*" of the respective communities (Stoler 1991: 85; emphasis mine). As indicated by the incident described above, Stoler notes that discussions about "acceptable sexual behavior and morality emerged during crises of colonial control precisely because they called into question the tenuous artifices of rule *within* European communities and what marked their borders" (ibid.; emphasis in the original). In other words, the boundaries between communities tend to be manufactured and maintained along a variety of lines, sexuality and marriage being one of them. It is when things "go wrong", when something unforeseen happens, something that disturbs the usual order of things, that the boundaries become most visible, questioned, and may eventually shift. In the Nabulsi context, however, such a shift does not yet seem to have taken place.

From a majority perspective, the mixing between Muslim men and Christian minority women does not only make religious, but also political sense. This, again, bears similarities to the colonial context. When such unions were condoned by the colonial rulers, this was against a backdrop of aiding the long-term settlement of the colonisers in the colonies (ibid.). Although I have never come across this argument explicitly when inter-religious marriages were discussed, Christians in other contexts frequently referred to Muslims' suspected aim of "taking over" the country and "eliminating" Christianity in it altogether. From this point of view, marrying women of the minority population would only be one strategy of many to this end.

On the other hand, the colonial minority-majority relations can also be applied in the reverse in the Nablus context: just as Europeans used to be in a numerical minority, so are Christians in Palestine. From this perspective, Christians appear to have a similar desire to draw a *cordon sanitaire* around

their community and every individual and family. Stoler (1991: 87) observes that Europeans had to defend their prestige (and position of power) through "the conventions that would safeguard the moral respectability, cultural identity, and physical well-being of its agents". Hence, the Christian need to render inter-religious marriages a strict taboo. And as in the colonial context, it is *women* who are charged with this protection of identity and respectability (ibid.).

The situation of the Samaritans is slightly different with regard to marrying non-Samaritans. The endogamy rule used to be absolute, no Samaritan man or woman would marry outside their community and remain a Samaritan. Should such a case occur, relations were usually cut off entirely with the respective individual. As I have indicated earlier, this rule is often blamed to be responsible for two things – the decrease in numbers in the Samaritan community in the area (to just above 100 at the beginning of the twentieth century), on the one hand, and the increase in disabilities among them, on the other (Ayash 2003: 98).

Faced with these problems, the Samaritan leadership decided to slightly relax the strict endogamy rule: around ninety years ago, the first five Jewish women were converted to Samaritanism and married into the community. Around thirty years ago, another twenty-five Jewish, five Christian, and three Muslim women were allowed to marry Samaritan men on condition of conversion. Ayash (ibid.) explains that the Samaritan leadership use a text from the Samaritan tradition to justify the reciprocal marriage between Samaritans and Jews. Just as in the Christian and Muslim case, this applies largely to Samaritan men marrying Jewish women, as I mentioned earlier. The condition for such a union is, as I indicated above, that the Jewish woman lives with the groom's family for six months to learn the customs and traditions of the Samaritan community. This period of learning is followed by

an examination by the High Priest, who might grant her the permission to marry a Samaritan (ibid.). After the wedding, the previously non-Samaritan wife is furthermore neither permitted to stay with her own family other than for brief visits, nor to sleep in their house or to eat from their food (Ayash 2003: 99). While Ayash (ibid.) mentions that a Samaritan woman can equally marry a non-Samaritan man on the same conditions, I am unaware of such a marriage sanctioned by the community.

In a conversation with the Samaritan High Priest in charge of the museum on Mount Gerizim, he explained that the non-Samaritan women recently married to Samaritan men were not from the local community, but from abroad, and they turned out to be much stricter now about their new religion than the original Samaritans themselves. In other words, the boundary between Samaritans and the local Christians and Muslims in terms of marriage relations remains absolute. The gendered nature of Samaritan prescriptions about exogamy – the marriage between Samaritans and non-Samaritans – also becomes immediately obvious. While Samaritans usually employ a rational explanation of this rule in terms of numbers, it also fits the Muslim, and to a more limited extent Christian, rule that men can "marry out" while women cannot. Arguably, religious and cultural traditions overlap in this case quite considerably, despite the rational number argument.[3] Ayash (ibid.) points out that Samaritan and Islamic religious law are very similar in this matter: Muslims (he refers to men *and* women) are allowed to marry non-Muslims on condition of conversion. He mentions the case of one Samaritan man in the village of an-Naqura, north of Nablus, who married a Muslim woman from the village after his conversion to Islam (ibid.). It is, however, also interesting to note that while Samaritans tend to present themselves as relatively open in this question, they put the blame for a lack of exogamous marriages on Jews.

According to Ayash (ibid.), it is the Jews who oppose reciprocal marriages, since they consider the Samaritans (like any other non-Jews) unbelievers or "Goyim". Jewish Scriptures mention that a marriage between a Jew and an unbeliever (man or woman) is invalid, conversion not being considered an option.

It is worth noting that the rule of "marrying one's own" is often not only framed in religious, but also in class-terms. Hoodfar (1997: 52ff.) explains that in Egypt especially less educated women of the lower social classes "were skeptical of marrying up", i.e. men of higher social standing, considerable wealth, and/or more highly educated. This view must be considered as being formed by parents and society, since young women generally have little experience of relationships with men of different classes (or with any men for that matter) before marriage. Men usually share this view. The conviction that "marrying one's own" is the best available option in marriage is further reflected in the idea that marrying relatives is a guarantor for success of a marriage. Hoodfar (1997: 55) found that all but four women in her anthropological study in Egyptian households "said that it was best for women to marry kin because their economic status and background are known, leaving little room for deception". Another advantage of kin marriages was seen in the hope that "should there be a problem between the groom and the bride, the families would try to help patch up the differences" (ibid.). In Nablus, this pattern runs across geographical class lines: most people perceive considerable, if not insurmountable differences between those living in Nablus' newer or newest quarters, those in its Old City, those residing in the surrounding villages, and residents of the various refugee camps, as I have outlined earlier. The story of a young Muslim woman from a refugee camp, employed at one of the local universities as a teacher, illustrates these attitudes. She got to know a young man from a village close to Nablus and they intended to

get married. Their families, however, strongly objected, citing a variety of reasons, ranging from religious-moral (alcohol consumption) to geographic (refugee camp origin). This resistance would have discouraged many others, yet the two insisted on their relationship being a sound one, and after a couple of years of negotiations and the death of the young woman's father, they were eventually allowed to get married.

As a consequence of such considerations, marriages are frequently arranged by the parents of the prospective couple. While young people often talk and dream about romantic love as the basis or the beginning of a married relationship, they would hardly ever marry against their parents' wishes. In fact, they more often than not leave it up to their parents to choose a suitable partner, who fulfils the conditions mentioned above. Many of the young people themselves express the conviction that their parents know them better than they would themselves and are in a much better position to find a suitable partner for them. The words of one of Hoodfar's (1997: 62) respondents is emblematic for this view: "Here one does not marry a person, but a family. Therefore marriage is much too important to be left in the hands of two kids who have lost their heart to a pair of beautiful eyes or nice hair, who think life is like love films they see on television".

This is not the place to go into further details about the processes of getting married in a Middle Eastern context, as others have done that quite extensively before (see Hoodfar 1997; Singerman 1994, 1995; Watson 1994). Suffice it to note that the situation I found in Nablus and the West Bank with regard to contemporary marriage patterns and preferences is generally very similar to the findings of other scholars in other countries in the Middle East. What is, however, rarely discussed in previous studies is the cross-religious dimension, despite the existence of, for instance, Coptic Christians in Egypt. Even only a brief glance at the issue from a denominational perspective

reveals the vital importance of marriage patterns as markers of group distinctions. And as I have mentioned above, in the Nablus and Palestinian contexts, it is very obvious that the religious endogamy rule is clearly gendered. Especially Muslim men have (theoretically) little objection to marrying a Christian woman, as this is sanctioned by their religion and the children resulting from such a relationship would be considered Muslim, "inheriting" their religion from their father. Usually, the expectation would be for the woman to convert to Islam. Especially if the couple and their respective families are not religiously practising then the conversion is simply a matter of form and not practically relevant for their day-to-day lives. If the Christian wife proves unwilling to convert, often considerable pressure is put on her by the husband and/or his family, especially since the raising and education of the children is generally seen as being largely the wife's domain. A non-Muslim mother is usually not believed to be able to raise her children as "proper Muslims". In a climate that has increasingly been marked by religious discourse, symbolism, and practice, the pressure on bi-religious couples has grown, and the religious factor in the choice of spouse has received renewed significance.

Christian men are less likely to marry Muslim women, even though the children resulting from such a relationship would be considered Christian. For one, Muslims tend to be equally reluctant to let their daughters marry non-Muslim men. Secondly, Christians are generally very well aware of their minority situation, making it incumbent on *all* members of the community to ensure survival and purity of the group, especially by marrying spouses with the same religious affiliation. Despite these differences between Muslim and Christian men in choosing members of other religious communities than their own as spouses, there is one aspect that is at the heart of any discussion of the matter – women. Whenever

cross-religious marriages are the subject of debate, it is *women's* roles that are discussed, not *men's.* The question becomes one of "giving away or losing our daughters". And as I will explain in a moment, the perceived threat to the community is generally clothed in horror stories about what happened to women, who did not comply to the unwritten law of religious endogamy.

Bourdieu, while not explicitly talking about marriage, recognised the significance of gender for the relationship between social classes or groups. In *Distinction* (1984: 107–8) he claims that "sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness of lemon is from its acidity: a class is defined in an essential respect by the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions". On the other hand, gender of course also creates social divisions *within* social classes, a fact that is usually very strongly emphasised by feminist scholars and activists, constructing a social group called "women" that cuts across all other social divides. How exactly gender contributes to the constitution of social classes, or to cutting across them, is not clear from Bourdieu's analysis. What is important to note is that, whatever the precise significance of gender in the construction of social classes or groups, social class remains a 'constructed class', both by the people involved and the researchers who study them. It is in this sense that gender becomes a constructive force in the creation and maintenance of social difference. In the Nablus context, the differences between religious groups, minimal as they may be, are fiercely upheld through norms such as the endogamy rule, which is more strictly enforced for women. In this way, the daughters of the community become the guardians of the groups "purity", while at the same time being seen as the "weakest link" and in need of being constantly reminded of the significance of their compliance. The latter view echoes with the feminist analysis of gender domination as justified by an ideology of the "weaker sex".

It is quite interesting to note that in this instance, the dominant-dominated relationship does not play out in the way it often does in other situations of class differences. As Bourdieu (1990: 147 ff.) points out, families of the lower classes often go to great lengths to "marry up" their daughters, i.e. into a family of the upper classes or aristocracy. At least in the past, such boundaries were also carefully maintained, and while women could "marry up", men usually could not. One of the main reasons for this was of course related to inheritance rules and the keeping hold of family land. Marriage was a strategy in maximising resources and ensuring a family's economic independence (Bourdieu 1990: 151). In the Nablus context, the men of the dominant class, if we want to call the Muslim majority community that, appear to be quite willing to "marry down", yet the dominated minority group seems to have little intention to let their daughters "marry up". In theory, there could be many advantages to "marrying up" for Christian families, as the Muslim majority group has access to more resources, or, in Bourdieu's words, more capital, than the minority group. The continuous enforcement of the endogamy rule appears to suggest that it might actually be a strategy of resistance.

Finally, there is yet another aspect of marriage that marks differences – the wedding itself. It is expected that the wedding ceremony be a lavish affair taking place in one of the many big halls that can be hired in Nablus for this purpose. While the complaint that weddings are very expensive, sometimes too expensive to be immediately affordable, it is common among members of all religious communities (except perhaps the most wealthy ones), the ceremonies differ. Samaritan weddings tend to be internal affairs that are not attended by members of the other two religious communities. They shall therefore not be taken into greater consideration here. Christian and Muslim weddings, on the other hand, are different and are frequently

attended by members of the other religious communities. Christian weddings are mixed gender-affairs, whereas Muslim and Samaritan weddings are gender-segregated. At Christian weddings a full meal as well as alcohol is served, at Muslim weddings there is only juice and chocolate.

These differences have various consequences for inter-religious relations. Firstly, Muslims (of the non-radical kind) tend to enjoy invitations to Christian weddings, among other things because of the food and the gender-mixing. Christians, on the other hand, tend to be rather derisive about invitations to Muslim weddings – being used to go as families and couples; they do not appreciate the gender segregation, and the fact that Muslim weddings are "cheap" (as there is no meal) is considered a significant blemish on their reputation of generosity. Perhaps it should be mentioned here that guests invited to the soiree are expected to give the couple money, usually on a *do-ut-des* basis, which, at least in part, is intended to make up for the couple's expenses. Christian weddings tend to be more expensive because of the food and alcohol (always depending, of course, on the number of invited guests). Most Christians, therefore, end up having more expenses than "takings", which is seen as an essential differences to Muslim weddings that are said to even out in the end. A sense of injustice arises for those Christians who invited Muslims to their weddings and are invited in return. As books are kept about the donations, they are expected to return the same amount. If one received one hundred shekel (around £20 at the time of research) for a wedding with meal and alcohol and, therefore, have to give one hundred shekel for a gender-segregated wedding, a glass of juice and a bar of chocolate (if one subscribes to this materialist interpretation of the donation), then Christians definitely feel short-changed.

Having said this, this state of affairs also offers a welcome motive for drawing boundaries between "us" and "them" and

for the derision of the "other", especially for Christians. Muslim weddings are seen as a reflection of their lack of enjoyment (they are much shorter than Christian weddings and gender-segregated) and, what is even more damaging, their lack of generosity. Generosity is of course one of the most essential values the majority of Palestinians subscribe to, and it is something promoted in the public transcript. If the dominant group can be shown to not live up to their own standards, this becomes a small, but vital victory for the minority. It is in this sense that wedding ceremonies become another "battle-ground" for drawing inter-community boundaries.

I would now like to expand on the theme of food alluded to in this latter part and explore in which ways it can be further used to differentiate an "us" from a "them".

Borders that run across the plate

It was Easter time in Nablus. As tradition requires, Christian families were visiting each other during the week after Easter Sunday. This, of course, is the same tradition that Muslims follow after their religious holidays. During these visits Christians are offered hard-boiled coloured eggs, chocolate eggs, coffee, and *ma'moul*, the semolina biscuit filled with either dates or nuts. *Ma'moul* takes forever to make and women spend long hours in the kitchen, usually helping each other, to make them. They take much pride in their work and there is a lot of competition about who makes the best ones. When my (Muslim) students asked me about Christian Easter traditions – they knew about it as I had taken a day off – I explained these things to them. The first comment from one of the students was instructive: "What? You make *ma'moul*? The same as *our ma'moul*?"

This incidents speaks of a number of things. First of all, of course, of the ignorance that exists among Muslims (here,

university students) about their fellow Palestinians of a different faith. Yet, it also signifies the importance of food as a borderline marker. *Ma'moul* was considered by this student as '*ours*', i.e. Muslim food. Most Palestinians have a vague idea that other religious communities have other rules about food and drink. First and foremost, of course, they are aware of the Muslim prohibition of pork and alcohol and the respective permission in Christianity (and Samaritanism with regard to alcohol). Probably informed by this awareness, some things are considered exclusively "Muslim" (or "Christian" or "Samaritan") even though they are not.

Ma'moul, however, is also used as a borderline marker by Christians. The biscuits can be made either using special shapes (one for the nut-filled ones, another one for the date-filled ones), or by indenting them by hand using forks. The latter is, of course, a lot more time-consuming. Most Christians make them by hand, explaining that not only do they taste better, but done this way they also represent the crown of thorns worn by Christ when he died. One Christian woman, who had just spend four hours in the kitchen making six kilograms of the sweet treat, gave a plateful to her Muslim neighbour, explaining to me that "they love these, they don't know how to make them the way *we* do".

While competition about the best food appears to be a very common feature of everyday life in Nablus, especially among women, it is quite striking, how a biscuit can indeed be made into an exercise of drawing lines between "us" and "them". Easter provides another food-related borderline marker: the colourful eggs. This element is quite well-known among Muslims, and they frequently ask their Christian friends or colleagues to bring them some of these eggs after Easter. This request is usually answered gladly, since most Christian families have a surplus of hardboiled eggs after Easter, which they do not want to eat themselves. For some, however, these eggs

also have religious significance – symbolising the empty tomb of Christ and the resurrection – and they refuse to eat them or give them away for others to eat.

Like the eggs, other food items are also often shared with members of other religious communities after religious holidays. Samaritans, for instance, are quite well-known for their Sukkot, or "Feast of Tabernacles" tradition, when they decorate the ceilings of hut-like structures (*sukkah*) in their houses with fresh fruit. Similar to the Christian Easter traditions that have pagan origins, *sukkot* festival is at the same time a harvest festival and a reminder of the flight of the ancient Israelites from Egypt through the desert dwelling in fragile huts. One Christian trader told me that he always gets some of this fruit after the festival from one of his Samaritan customers. I did get the impression that, while there is certainly a lot of good will in this sharing and exchanging after religious holidays, it also bears a hint of "you don't do this as *we* do it" and often applies to surplus goods.

During the Muslim fasting-month of Ramadan, there is another food item much appreciated by everyone, regardless of religious affiliation: *'atayef*, small filled and baked pancakes. While technically available all year round, they are particularly popular during Ramadan and, as one Christian woman once remarked: "I only like *'atayef* during Ramadan". While Christians are generally rather unappreciative of the customs and changes to everyday life during Ramadan, the special food items that are made and sold during this month rank very high on their list of favourites. Most Christians would wait until Ramadan comes along to buy the pancakes and make *'atayef.* In other words, Ramadan triggers conflicting emotions and practices among many non-Muslims: a distinct frustration with the practicalities as well as a love for its culinary aspects.

One instance, when surplus is *not* shared, is after the Samaritan festival of Passover, which commemorates the

exodus of the ancient Israelites from Egypt. During this very well-known and spectacular festival on Mount Gerizim, observed by thousands of foreign spectators, dozens of sheep are slaughtered and burnt in pits. A Christian woman was telling me about a conversation she and her husband had with a Samaritan about the surplus meat they had after festival. "Such a waste! They are not allowed to eat the meat, but when we asked them to give us some of it, they said they have to destroy it completely and nobody is allowed to eat of it".

When it comes to hospitality and food consumption, it can be argued that is the Samaritans who stand out as most exclusivist amongst the three religious communities in Nablus. Their religion prescribes very strict food regulations – stricter than those in Judaism they say –, and to which they commonly adhere quite rigorously. As a consequence of these rules, most Samaritans refuse to eat most of the food prepared by non-Samaritans, who would be ignorant of the preparation rules. Since they are not allowed to eat the meat cooked by non-Samaritans – even if it is *halal* or *kosher*, i.e. religiously clean – they can generally only eat vegetarian, even vegan food outside their homes, when at work, or in town on some business. This includes the ubiquitous *hummus*, *falafel*, and *foul*. One incident shows quite clearly, how awkward and at the same time crucial these regulations can be. In 2009, there was, like every year since, a summer camp organised specifically to bring Christian, Samaritan, and Muslim children together. One of the organisers told me that on the first day, sandwiches were delivered for the children's lunch. These would be either vegetarian or *halal*, with the assumption that this would suit everybody's needs. As it turned out, the Samaritan children refused to eat them, and instead brought their own home-made sandwiches. As sharing food is arguably a very important social experience for children, particularly at this inter-religious summer camp, it must have left the impression on

these children that Samaritans are indeed "other", unwilling to eat "our" food. Unfortunately, I was unable to speak to any of the children personally, but it is easy to imagine the educational effect of such an event.

The idea that food and social relationships are a mirror of each other seems to have ethnographic parallels elsewhere: Janowski (1995: 87) says about rice meals in Sarawak (East Malaysia): "[. . .] to be able to eat rice produced by *one's own* co-resident family group [. . .], rather than eating rice produced by *others*, is vitally important to the maintenance of prestige, described as 'goodness'" (emphasis mine). She further explains that rice is generally consumed in a specific place and by a particular group of people, which in turn "structures" society: "[. . .] the cooking and eating of rice meals represents what it means to belong to one hearth-group [. . .]. The rice belonging to a particular hearth-group is always cooked at its own hearth and hearth-group members practically always eat their rice meals by their own hearth" (Janowski 1995: 93). I referred to the festival-staple *ma'moul* which should be homemade, as a sign of prestige. And while "hearth-group" here certainly refers to a smaller unit of relatives, the idea shows parallels with the eating habits of the religious communities in Nablus, especially the Samaritans. If we view food like *ma'moul* as a, quite literally, vital substance that is produced by, "flows from", and is an essence of a particular household or group, empowering the giver (more so than the taker) to create, maintain, or sever relatedness, then this gives us an indication of women's power in the make-up of social structure.

This idea also offers an explanation of the emphasis on "home-made" food, which is better than that of others, be they from another family or religious community. While sometimes it was seen as a sign of prestige to offer purchased food, which not everyone could afford, there was a tendency for women to proudly present their home-made products or

produce (such as fruit from one's own trees), and for men to praise (or deride in anger or annoyance) their mother's or wife's home cooking. If something was offered that was made by someone else, it was usually explicitly mentioned – either to direct possible praise to the right person, or, as I suspect, to receive praise for one's own, which is supposedly better than the "strange" food offered.

The religious communities in Nablus are marked by further food boundaries. With regard to Muslims this relates, of course, particularly to the taboo of alcohol and pork consumption. While in other areas of Palestine these taboos are more frequently broken – with Ramallah being usually cited as the main example – Nablus is considered to be a largely "dry" city. Interestingly, this applies to large parts of the Christian population as well. Yet, on occasions, Christians (and Samaritans and some Muslims) enjoy a drink, mainly *'araq*, but also wine, beer, or whisky. As it is very difficult, if not impossible to buy alcohol in Nablus, the drinking population has to go to some length to obtain alcoholic beverages. There are several quite well-known sources for them. One is from another city, such as Ramallah or Bethlehem, where alcohol is freely available. The village of Zababdeh, north of Nablus and home to a significant Christian community, is another source. Often, friends or relatives travelling there are asked to buy provisions. The same applies to those travelling abroad, passing through the airports' duty-free shops. Then there is homemade wine from those who grow grapes. And finally, there are the Samaritans, who make and sell alcohol. Some of them make their own *'araq* and sell it upon request. The only problem with this source is that most of the Samaritans, including their shops are on Mount Gerizim, which is in Zone C, i.e. controlled by Israel. This meant, until summer 2012, that any Palestinian wanting to go there would need a permit to pass through the checkpoint and a car with an Israeli (yellow) number plate.

In other words, it used to be off-limits for many, but those who are able to go usually took orders and filled their boot with bottles. Another solution, often sought by Christians, was to ask a Samaritan they know to bring them a bottle of something when they next came to town. In this sense, inter-religious cooperation worked quite well and one community, the Samaritans, were able to fill the gap opened by the political and religious situation, so that the religious food/drink boundaries can be stretched. After the checkpoint was removed in summer 2012, the way to Samaritan alcohol resources became open for anyone.

Having said this, alcohol consumption is indeed very limited among the population of Nablus in general. Even though Christians and Samaritans are religiously allowed to drink alcohol, they do so very sporadically, usually on special occasions, such as weddings or religious holidays. This is in no way comparable to the alcohol consumption of, for instance, European Christians. Similarly, pork has become an almost ubiquitous taboo. While the Christians of Bethlehem and other places did in the past raise pigs for consumption, this has now largely abated. In Nablus, unlike in Bethlehem or Ramallah, pork is not readily available, and Christians have frequently commented in my presence that they detest pork. This could, of course, easily be explained as an adaptation to the minority and economic situation in Nablus: rather than risking confrontation and discussion about the consumption of pork or alcohol, it is rejected as a matter of taste, not religious law.

One area where the religious practices of one religious community dominates the others is fasting. All three religious communities have prescribed periods of fasting. They differ in length – from one to forty days – and nature – abstinence from food and drink for 24 hours, or from sunrise to sunset, or abstinence from certain kinds of foods for the entire period.

During the fasting month of Ramadan, Nablus presents a public image of a "fasting city", i.e. nobody seems to be smoking, eating, or drinking during daytime hours. This applies to Christians and Samaritans as well as to Muslims. While it is not a crime to break this fast in public, the etiquette of good-neighbourly relations and respect for those who are adhering to the fasting rule requires that nobody is seen smoking, eating or drinking in public. Of course, it is quite well-known that not every Muslim adheres to the fasting rule and Christians and Samaritans are religiously not required to adhere to it. As a consequence, people have developed numerous strategies to circumvent the rules, ranging from smoking in a car parked in a quiet alleyway, to eating or drinking behind closed office doors, or smoking at the back of shop whose owner is similarly not fasting etc. Despite these manoeuvres there is a strong sense amongst all in Nablus, that Ramadan is the fasting month and that it is stressful. And indeed, as an elderly Muslim man told me, even if one wanted to break the fast, it is difficult, as most of the time there will be someone around who is fasting, be that at home, at work, or in public, and they would not want to hurt their feelings by eating or drinking in front of them.

As I have elaborated elsewhere (Droeber 2005) on the reality of Ramadan in Jordan, which resembles that in Palestine, I will not go into any details here. What is, however, interesting to note is the perception of injustice among some members of the religious minorities. During the most important fasting period of Christians – the forty days of Lent –, for instance, they are required to abstain from any animal products, which makes sharing food with non-Christians, as well as the fasting itself, a quite exhausting experience for many. There is a widespread sense that "while we have to stick to the Ramadan rules out of respect for those fasting, nobody cares about hurting my feelings when eating in front of me during Lent".

In fact, most Muslims I have spoken to knew fairly little about Lent, neither when it was, nor what it implied. Whenever I explained it to them, the common reaction was that "this is even more difficult than Ramadan!" Samaritans tend to keep themselves to themselves very much during their religious holidays and fasting periods, so their sense of injustice might not be as pronounced. Yet, it becomes clear that when it comes to fasting, the boundaries between the religious communities are fuzzy at times – during Ramadan – and tight at other times. The majority-minority relation here dictates that the minorities are generally expected to respect and follow the majority rules, at least in the public eye, while the reverse is not required. This clearly reflects the inherent power imbalance between the religious communities.

Another food related area, in which this time women largely control the maintenance and manipulation of boundaries, is hospitality. Social relationships are created, maintained, manipulated, or cut off by offering or refusing to provide hospitality and by the subtle ways in which it is offered. This crosscuts religious boundaries much more often than, for instance, class boundaries. And even within one's own religious community or family hospitality is a significant strategy of relationship and boundary formation. In Nablus society, regardless of religious, class, or geographical differences, there exists a set of hospitality rules that dictate quite clearly what should be offered when, to whom, and in which order. Mistakes are noticed and commented on, as a friend of mine had to learn the hard way. Of Palestinian origin, she was raised abroad and after marrying a local man had to learn these hospitality rules from her in-laws. Once, she mistakenly offered coffee before fruit and was promptly told off by her mother-in-law when she returned to the kitchen. Obviously this strict pattern is not only open for mistakes, but also lends itself to manipulation and the expression of discontent without uttering a single word.

Visiting patterns as well as behaviour can be considered a mirror of the degree of closeness of social relationships. During and after religious holidays, the visiting pattern is almost solely intra-religious. Inter-religious visiting on these occasions takes place only on an official level, as I have described earlier, or consists merely of what etiquette requires. On such occasions, the length of the visits and what is offered – only the necessary or more – reflects the closeness of the relationship. Perhaps it should be noted at this point that hospitality customs in Nablus are slightly different from those in Europe, for instance: only on very rare occasions do people help themselves to food or drink when visiting, even with family. It is the duty of the hostess (or her children) to pass around the trays of food or glasses and cups and to make sure every visitor takes a piece. There are usually no second helpings, only if people know each other very well and the atmosphere is familial. Once everybody has taken what was offered, the trays are again removed and after a short while something else is brought in. These customs indeed place full control over hospitality, and therefore over social relations, into the hands of the hostess.

The watered down version of hospitality consists of what "duty" (*wajib*) requires, even within one's own extended family, as I have witnessed: usually not longer than fifteen minutes or as long as it takes to drink coffee and receive the sweet that is special to the occasion. While the usual protestations are expressed ("It's still early, why are you leaving? Stay a little longer!"), they are mere window-dressing and nobody insists once an excuse, or reason, for the departure is given. At the other end of the spectrum, there are visits lasting more than an hour with several rounds of offerings and strong insistence that one must take everything that is offered, and more.

It must be noted at this point that hospitality and generosity are crucial socio-cultural values in Nablus and Palestine,

which can make or break an individual's or family's reputation. In terms of public image, therefore, it is also essential to offer generous hospitality to the "right" people. Again it is largely in the hands of women to influence this reputation. And indeed, I have often heard women of a variety of backgrounds remark on the generosity and honour, or, on the contrary, on the stinginess, of a certain woman. This was particularly significant for women of a different religious community, in the sense that typically one would not expect generous, hospitable, and honourable behaviour from a woman with a different religious background.

What can be deduced from this discussion of the sharing or not sharing of food between and within religious communities is that the act of *providing* food gains new significance as a tool of power and control in the maintenance, creation, or manipulation of boundaries. While the receiver could theoretically reject the offer of food or drink, etiquette would put limits on this freedom. Equally limited is, as we have seen earlier, the freedom of the hostess, yet theirs was the power to determine, with whom they wanted to share which food and – as an extension of this – with whom they wanted to be related. Only then was the receiver in a position to ascertain the extent of that relationship, by accepting much or little of the substance offered.

What has become evident is that food has crucial symbolic significance in the Nablus context, reaching far beyond the sustenance of the body. While this is probably true for most cultural contexts, it acquires special importance for the inter-religious relationships in Nablus.[4] Food and drink in Nablus serve at least two socio-cultural and symbolic purposes: as tools for the creation, maintenance, manipulation, or severing of ties of relatedness between individuals and groups as well as a means of instilling a sense of belonging, of religious and

cultural identity in the consumers, therefore of drawing lines between "us" and "them".

Distinguished and distinguishing fashion

One final area of maintaining distinction through certain taboos and patterns of behaviours, are the struggles over dress. Again, this is an issue that mainly concerns women, not only because they are arguably more interested in fashion – which is evident in the excessive number of women's clothes shops –, but also because religious rules as well as socio-cultural norms are a lot more elaborate and strict regarding women's dress. I have no intention of belabouring the "veiling-issue" yet again, as others have done this extensively,[5] yet there is no denying the fact that veiling is indeed a significant boundary marker between the religious communities in Nablus.

The importance of dress has long been recognised in the social sciences, often referring to a "language of dress" to express attitudes and beliefs that spoken language does not or cannot express (Lurie 1992). Eicher (1995: 1), for instance, claims that dress is "a coded sensory system of nonverbal communication that aids human interaction in space and time". The link between dress and society has been explained by Keenan (2001), who sees dress as a reflection of, and upon, individuality, social distinction, and a social polity. In this understanding, dress becomes "generally highly indicative of behaviour and belonging, social placement and taste culture membership" (Keenan 2001: 26). As I have elaborated on this debate elsewhere (Droeber 2005), I do not intend to go into great detail at this point. Suffice it to note that research on dress has received growing attention in anthropology over the past two decades. It has often been framed in paradigms of material culture or practices of the body. In this regard, there

has been an emphasis on agency, practice, and performance, which takes the dressed body as both the subject and the object of dress practices. Research in dress has also reflected the trend to see consumption as an essential element in creating socio-cultural meaning.

Anthropologists have always been keen to emphasise that there is a close relationship between dress and culture (Lindisfarne-Tapper and Ingham 1997; Keenan 2001; Eicher 1995). Socio-cultural norms limit and dictate what is seen as "appropriate" dress in a respective cultural and historical context. As Rapport and Overing (2007: 32) put it, there is a wide "spectrum of enculturation – including styles of dress, make-up and piercing – by which individual bodies are rendered social artefacts and instruments, and their owners sociable". This view of dress also suggests that dress is actively adjusted to socio-political or even economic circumstances. What comes to mind here is furthermore the notorious debate about what is "authentic" or "traditional" dress in a specific context. This aspect is now well-understood with regard to what is generally referred to as "Islamic dress" of women, including *jilbab* and *hijab* (Hoffman-Ladd 1987; Hammami 1990; Zuhur 1992 and others). It has become quite obvious that what is described as "authentic" or "traditional" style is in actual fact frequently a relatively recent (re-) invention.

The link between socio-cultural, political, and economic contexts, on the one hand, and dress styles, on the other, is also reflected in much of what Nabulsis wear. This is particularly true for women's dress, as is probably the case in most modern societies. The fact that dress and body practices are gendered is a well-researched phenomenon. The so-called "beauty culture", which includes fashion, make-up, and surgery, appears to have more impact on women than on men, although the proportions are changing (Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2004: 112f.). What "beauty" means is obviously different in different

cultures and in different time periods, it is an idea(l) that is undergoing constant changes. In most cultures, dress, hairstyles, make-up, and perfume are deliberately designed to mark gender differences. And while, just like with other cultural norms, there are no laws to control these different styles, people develop very distinct ideas about what is gender "appropriate" and what is not, and in their majority they adhere to these norms. The dress lines between genders are, in all likelihood, transgressed more often in European contexts than they are in Nablus. It is almost unthinkable for Nabulsi men to have long hair, for instance, or for girls (not older women) to wear it short. While there are religious (Muslim) arguments for the genderedness of appearances, these norms apply across the entire religious spectrum.

There are different approaches to understand these phenomena: one approach, for instance, assumes a beauty system, based on upper-class, Western, feminine ideals, which constricts and oppresses women; another approach studies cultural discourses on femininity and beauty, which encourages women to improve and transform their bodies (Cranny-Francis et al. 2003: 197). One of the most dominant ideals, even in the Nablus context, is for "beautiful" women to be fair-skinned, slim, work-free, carefree, and young. There are slight variations to this European-style ideal, in as much as "slim" in Nablus does not imply skinniness, curvy (not overweight) women are perceived as "beautiful"; similarly, the desire to look "young" does not include any significant amount of plastic surgery, for religious and financial reasons, but is reflected in the ubiquitous practice of dyeing one's hair (both men and women).

Apart from the gendered nature of dress, there are also its religious aspects to be considered in the context of this study. While there are some commonalities in the ways, in which gendered dress norms are applied across religious boundaries, dress has been and continues to be a marker of distinction

between Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans. Some of the commonalities have been described in report by a commission appointed by the British Mandate government in Palestine in 1926 about the situation of Christians in the region. The report states that "when one descends to the plain of Jericho, crosses the Jordan, and ascends into the hill country of Moab, one is astonished to find oneself in the midst of a vigorous Christian community, with the *bearing*, *the manners*, *and the dress* which one has always associated with the Arabs of the desert" (Bertram and Young 1926: 109; emphasis mine). This is part of what I have described earlier as the *habitus* that people have developed in Nablus and elsewhere in the region. As a distant observer one can indeed get the impression that religion has very little impact on dress, since there are so few differences. A closer look, however, reveals that dress is equally used as marker of distinctions between Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans.

To begin with, it is difficult to distinguish between Christian, Samaritan, and Muslim *men* in Nablus at first sight, a fact that is also often mentioned by Muslim men and boys, who are unaware of the presence of Christian colleagues, fellow students, or neighbours. A Muslim student, for instance, told me that only very late and by coincidence he had learned that some of the boys in his class were Christians. In a context where religion in general is arguably not terribly important – as might be the case for schoolboys – religious affiliation does indeed not become outwardly apparent. The case is slightly different for Samaritans though, their religious affiliation seems to be known by those surrounding them, possibly because of their place of living, religious festivals, and/or refusal to share food with non-Samaritans rather than because of their style of dress. This applies particularly to those men, who have a more secular outlook, one that does not take religious precepts about clothing as compulsory or indisputable.

Some Muslim men have taken to a more "fundamentalist"[6] style, hailing from the Gulf states or South Asia, and are therefore clearly distinguishable – which is, in all likelihood, their express intention. They aim to set themselves apart not only from non-Muslims, but probably also from their less "orthodox" Muslim brethren. Other small accessories accentuate religious affiliation, such as the prayer beads for Muslims (sometimes also adopted by non-Muslims, bearing similarity to the rosary beads used by Christians), or skull caps also used by Muslims. Then there is the prohibition for Muslim men to wear gold jewellery, which is not always strictly adhered to, but is a potential indicator of religious affiliation, since Christian and Samaritan men are allowed to wear gold wedding rings, for instance. Moreover, there is the relatively recently re-discovered ideal for the more "orthodox" Muslim men to have long beards, which is an extremely rare sight amongst Christians and Samaritans. Finally, people frequently point to the rather dubious marker of disability as a sign for being Samaritan, as I have mentioned earlier. In other words, if one can read the signs, as locals will be able to do, there is some likelihood of recognising the male members of the different religious communities in Nablus, although many men do not display any of them.

The case is very different for women. They are, as in so many other contexts, the markers of their respective communities by outward appearance. The majority of Muslim women in Nablus wear headscarves and often long gowns, thus setting themselves clearly apart from Christian, Samaritan, and non-practising Muslim women. And while Christian and Samaritan women tend to adhere to the unwritten cultural-religious law of "covering skin" in public as a sign of modesty, they frequently wear particularly tight and short clothes and obviously do not cover their hair. In recent years, a seemingly growing number of young Muslim women also adopt a less

"orthodox" style without head scarf or covered arms, and wearing body hugging clothes. And while modesty continues to be seen as a major value and norm for women of all the religious communities in Nablus, how this modesty is being interpreted and embodied differs considerably between religious communities, social classes, generations, and geographical location. The meaning of sartorial and behavioural modesty is subject to often heated debates.

Such negotiations often take place between generations, with the older people demanding the strict covering of flesh and no mixing of the sexes, and younger people often advocating a more "laissez-faire" attitude towards both dress and behaviour. What is a constant in the majority of these discussions is the reference to "what should other people think?". I once overheard a conversation between a young woman who was a student at the local university and her mother. The daughter, not veiled and wearing tight jeans and T-shirt, argued for more freedom of movement and mixing of the sexes. The mother agreed in principle, saying that she trusted her daughter and that she was old enough to know what she was doing. The final remark, however, was that she did not grant her daughter this freedom because of what other people would say or think about her, because she wanted to protect her reputation. This fear of gossip is shared by members of all religious communities in Nablus. It is one of the most powerful weapons of informal social control. And it is against this background of social control that modesty continues to be assigned great significance by the majority of Nabulsis regardless of social or religious background.[7]

In other words, the discourse of the modesty of women is part of the public transcript in Nablus. It is quite interesting to observe that this discourse is shared by members of all religious communities, particularly in comparison with non-Nabulsis. Christians as well as Muslims in particular (Samaritans have

only one other community to compare themselves with, in Holon, Israel), regularly refer to the view that Nablus society is more "conservative" than other communities in the West Bank. In fact, this struck me as a rather unusual comment when I first came to Nablus. The majority of people I spoke to then alluded to this perception, possibly as a way of introducing a first-time visitor to the particularities of Nablus society. Christians use this argument to set themselves apart from other Christians in, for instance, Ramallah or Bethlehem. Especially women of older generations adhere to rather conservative dress codes, including long sleeves, covered chest and neck and long trousers, sometimes skirts reaching below the knees. They are also the ones, who try to convince the younger generation of the necessity of this kind of modest dress. And while they frequently point out that there is more freedom and respect for Christians in places such as Bethlehem or Ramallah, they are also exceedingly critical of the style of (young) women in those towns. The tight and short kind of dress style often seen there is regularly commented on as *'aib*, as a "shame". This is commonly followed by a remark such as "we are not like them". While this might be an inter-generational conflict fought, as in many other societies, on the dress front, I also understand it as an instance of enforcing intra-community rules of behaviour and of drawing boundaries. In the Nablus context, the "other", against whom lines are drawn, are Christians elsewhere, and, by doing so, Muslims and Samaritans in Nablus itself. It can be seen as a way of protecting one's own community by not giving these "others" any opportunity for moral attack.

As is the case in many other societies, rules of modesty of behaviour and dress apply more strictly to women than to men in Nablus. Such rules of modesty are frequently policed and enforced by women themselves, either between generations or between peers, as is the case when pressure is put on women who do not veil, or when they admonish others for hair or skin

showing unpermitted. In addition to that we can observe a significant amount of self-discipline among women, reflecting Michel Foucault's ideas of (embodied) power. Against this background, wearing jewellery that marks religious affiliation – such as large cross pendants – could become a strategy in drawing boundaries and ensuring non-harassment, as I have witnessed in Jordan. In Nablus, however, the situation appears to be slightly different, possibly due to the extreme minority situation.

I have once witnessed a conversation between three generations of women of the same Christian family. The grandmother was planning to take her granddaughter to a church service, for which they dressed up as is the general rule. The 12-year old granddaughter was wearing a large plaited, black cross on a long string around her neck, as young people often do. Upon seeing this cross, her grandmother told her in no uncertain terms that she should either take it off or hide it beneath her T-shirt. The granddaughter was puzzled, asking what was wrong with wearing such an innocent cross when going to a church service. Her mother and grandmother took turns explaining the situation to her. "This is not Ramallah", her mother pointed out, referring to their place of residence, "people here are different". "Muslims driving by will make negative comments when they see it", added her grandmother. I, too, was slightly bewildered, having assumed that there was indeed no problem in wearing religious jewellery (which I personally did on many occasions). I asked the mother of the girl, if it was indeed the case that Muslims would harass people for wearing religious pendants. She confirmed it to me, saying that when she was a young girl, growing up in Nablus (about 25 years ago), they always had to hide their cross pendants beneath their T-shirts when they went out in order to avoid malicious comments from passers-by. My own experience in this regard is a little different, but that might be attributable to the fact that I am seen as a foreigner, for whom different

rules apply. When I was once wearing a golden amulet with the image of the Virgin Mary my students asked me what it was. I explained it to them, some of them even knew, and the discussion took place in a very good-humoured tone. It can, of course, be argued that university students are not like the average person on the street, displaying more understanding and tolerance towards "others". Having said this, I have also met students who display very little understanding or interest in "others", be they religious, cultural, or social "others".

What emerges from this discussion of marriage, hospitality, and dress rules in Nablus is a sense that both the hidden as well as the public transcripts do not only take place on a verbal level. They are in a very crucial sense embodied and practised. They are the expression of shared values, such as generosity or modesty, which are common to most Nabulsis regardless of religious background or otherwise. These values are defended, displayed, and discussed in public, and most Nabulsis strive to live up to them. This would be, translated into the practices described here, the content of the public transcript. At the same time, the behaviour based on these values and norms also provides ample opportunity for criticising the respective "others", for being "hypocrites". Frequently, one can hear people pass judgment on those, especially those of other religious (or other) communities, who do not live up to the standards preached. The vocabulary used for such people ranges from "liars" (*kazzabin*) to "dogs" (*klab*) to "this nation" (*hal-ummeh*)[8] and to "a rubbish people" (*sha'b mizbalah*). This kind of discourse is more often part of the hidden transcript, particularly used by members of the two minority communities. Yet, it can also enter the public transcript on occasion, when deliberate injury is intended.

Similarly, people's behaviour can be divided into public and hidden: the behaviour that is put on public display is intended to show immaculate and indubitable adherence to public norms and values, such as generosity or modesty. This is at

the same time part of the *habitus* that Nabulsis have learned to embody. Behind the scenes, however, one can find not only verbal criticism, but also behaviour that truly deviates from the public norms. Whether that is sexual immorality – a favourite subject among all, perhaps due to the strict rules governing public sexuality – or stinginess – especially in times of economic pressure such as during the years of this study, when everybody tries to save a penny – or political, economic, or social favouritism (*wasta*), all is existent and (rumoured) public knowledge. However, most people do try to hide this kind of behaviour, it takes place clandestinely, well aware of the fact that, should it become truly public knowledge, including names of specific persons, then it could ruin reputations and even lives, as has become evident in the incident of the Christian man having extra-marital affairs and being subsequently ostracised and threatened. It has also become clear that this part of the public transcript is of crucial significance for the religious minority communities in their effort to survive in their threatened minority situation. Hence, the strict enforcement of such public norms and values inside the minority communities. Finally, one overarching aspect of these different practical parts of the public transcript is that it is largely carried by and enforced on women. The exclusions as well as the inclusions that are expressed in these kinds of behaviour, whether that is through marriage, hospitality, or dress rules, are for the most part borne by women. While men confess allegiance to these public norms and values, and are judged accordingly, women appear to bear the heavier load of translating them into practice. It is in this sense that the public as well as the hidden transcript are clearly gendered.

In the following chapter I would now like to place the inter-religious relations in Nablus in a broader context and examine how international connections and networks influence the local situation.

5

NETWORKS: EXCHANGE, RELATIONSHIPS, AND SPACE

Both marriage patterns and hospitality practices throw into relief some of the networks and boundaries that are being drawn between the religious communities in Nablus. Recognising such relationships of exchange and cooperation (or lack thereof) becomes vital to understanding wider contexts. And vice versa, the broader context is essential to local dynamics. In this chapter I place the emerging local networks and boundaries into a wider perspective to show which extent local events respond to and in turn influence national and international affairs. Local geography thus turns into nodes in a variety of transnational networks.

One example of this link between local and international relationships is the relocation of the Samaritan community – first the split and movement to Holon in Israel, and second from the Old Town of Nablus to Mount Gerizim, their Holy Mountain on the fringes of Nablus and in an Israeli controlled area. These movements have had crucial impact on local relationships and networks and are firmly embedded in relationships to the Israeli government as well as other international players.

Similarly, the Christians of Nablus maintain a narrative of loss in a variety of guises – one of which is the gradual desertion of the Old Town, another one the "taking over" by Muslims of the one neighbourhood historically associated with a very strong Christian presence, Rafidiya, a formerly Christian village. Two issues stand out in such narratives: the sale of land, thus inscribing loss into the soil, and emigration, probably linked to the first, which is making loss felt in numbers and feeding into a discourse of survival.

Furthermore, there are networks in their virtual form, into which all religious communities in Nablus are embedded to a greater or lesser extent. The world wide web offers new opportunities for those communities to express themselves and their respective causes to a wider audience. Here the local, national, international, and transnational truly intersect.

In this chapter I attempt to draw some connections between the levels of action, in which Christians, Samaritans, and Muslims play a part. While everyday interaction is largely influenced by local-level dynamics, which have been the focus of the previous chapters, there frequently arise occasions, where decision-making is ruled by international events. I argue that often the local dynamics cannot be fully understood without taking into account individuals' and communities' embeddedness into broader, international, and transnational networks of relationships. While technology plays a crucial role in this, personal interconnectedness is similarly significant. Due to historical events, most notably the foundation of the state of Israel and the subsequent flows of migration, Palestinians of all backgrounds now have relatives and friends in various parts of the world. This chapter throws some light on such international networks, and how local dynamics are influenced by, and in turn influence, these wider relations.

Christians, Samaritans, and the "West"

Many Palestinians associate "Christianity" and "Christians" with the so-called "West", i.e. Europe and North America, just as many people in Europe and North America assume that all of the "Middle East" is Muslim. Christianity is, of course, at least nominally, more dominant in the "West" than it is in the "Middle East", but it can be argued that the proportion of *practised* Christianity is actually very similar, i.e. in a minority. This association with the "West" has historically been a blessing in disguise for the local Christian communities. On the one hand, it has caused much distress among Christians, as their Muslim compatriots frequently associate them with what they perceive as a "corrupt" and "Christian" West. On the other hand, as others have pointed out (Sabella 1999, Fargues 1998), Christians have had higher rates of migration than Muslims, in part because of their religious affiliation, which apparently makes it easier for them to integrate into Western societies.

The situation is quite similar for Samaritans, yet not with regard to what is usually seen as the "West", i.e. Europe and the United States, but in connection with Israel. This connection has, too, been an ambiguous honour: on the one hand, it provides the Samaritans with numerous advantages, usually denied to non-Samaritan Palestinians, such as protection by the Israeli government, travel documents, or cars with Israeli number plates. On the other hand, it has regularly caused non-Samaritan Palestinians to be suspicious of the Samaritan community in their midst, as they were associated with the enemy "*par excellence*" of the Palestinian state and people, Israel.

The Samaritan community has a long and chequered history in the region, being the oldest of religious community there. This ancient history is of little relevance at this point. What

is, however, important for our understanding of the current dynamics between religious communities in Nablus, are some of the events that occurred after the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, since its existence crucially shaped the status and position of the Samaritans among their Arab neighbours. While a small number of Samaritans went to live in what is today Israel before the establishment of the state, the real division occurred in the years after 1951. This was the year, when a separate Samaritan quarter was established in Holon, a suburb of Tel Aviv (Schur 1989: 128). This move was strongly supported by the former Israeli president Izhak Ben-Zvi (Maist 2004). All the Samaritans scattered throughout Israel (87 in 1954) settled there and had the same rights and duties as their Jewish neighbours (ibid.). The Highpriest resident in Nablus empowered Yefet ben Avraham Tsedakah to conduct religious ceremonies, such as marriages, and the community soon adapted to their Jewish surroundings.

At that time Nablus and the West Bank were under Jordanian rule, and the Jordanian authorities did not initially allow the Samaritans from Holon to visit Nablus, except for the Passover festival, when yearly reunions could take place (ibid.). After five years of total separation, this religious holiday became a major social event for Samaritans, as this was an opportunity to exchange news, visit relatives, and match young couples up for marriage. A further way of contact was through a radio programme, which offered an opportunity to exchange greetings and news about births, deaths, and marriages (ibid.). In other words, Samaritans during the first years of separation had very limited opportunity of contact and the two communities developed in slightly different ways.

Schur (1989: 132) goes as far as to observe that even though it became easier for Samaritans from Holon and Nablus to see and visit each other, the meetings between them "have lost some of their previous fervour and warmth". In fact, he claims

that "in every-day life the differences between the two communities loom sometimes larger than the unifying factors" (ibid.). There is the difference in language, but also the diverging networks of social relationships, into which members of both communities are embedded. While the Samaritans in Nablus have close contacts with "West Bank Arabs", those in Holon have closer relationships with "Israeli Jews" (ibid.). Especially the younger generation appears to have different interests, and some even claim they are better educated and less "backward" (ibid.). On the other hand, Ireton (2003) quotes an elderly Samaritan from Nablus, who explains that while the years under Jordanian rule had been harsh on the community, and the first meetings were difficult, "thank God in 1967 the two parts rejoined and we are now one group". Ireton (2003) interprets this affirmation of cohesion as a result of the threats to the community: "The relatively recent experience of a threat to the distinct group identity has strengthened their resolve to emphasise their cohesion". Although Samaritans may perhaps be keen to stress the unity of their community, I am in no doubt that the physical separation of the community into the Holon and Nablus sections has certain effects on their members' behaviour and outlook, thus creating slightly divergent groups.

Actual Samaritan perceptions about the relationship between the two sections aside, it is partially this relationship with the Holon community, and particularly their embeddedness into Jewish Israeli society, that has crucial influence on the perception of Samaritans as "not truly Arab" among many non-Samaritan Nabulsis. Although the Nabulsi Samaritans speak Arabic and are in many senses very similar to their Muslim and Christian neighbours, their loyalties are more often than not viewed with suspicion. Given the research and publishing activities that take place in Holon rather than Nablus, the Israeli section of the community may be considered a "window

to the West" for the Nabulsi Samaritans. It is arguably their most tangible and effective link with the Israeli government. It may be the reason for the protective attitude the Israeli government has shown to the Samaritan communities both in Holon and in Nablus. It appears, however, that there are obviously diverging views on the role and significance of the Holon community and the relationship with Israel and/or Jews by those involved in Nablus. While it seems that the two sections of Samaritans are perhaps less close than might be assumed, given the diverging life-styles they have cultivated over the decades, they are seen as one by most non-Samaritan observers in Nablus. Viewed from this angle, it is therefore easily conceivable that Samaritans are seen as part and parcel of Israeli society.

This view is reinforced by religious misconceptions that are very common among non-Samaritans in Nablus, namely that the Samaritans are "Jews". This is not the place to go into further details of dogmatic and theological debates. Suffice it note that there are significant differences between Jews and Samaritans in terms of historical accounts, dogmatic and theological perspectives, as well as traditions. In fact, from an historical perspective, there has been a considerable amount of animosities, even violence, between Samaritans and Jews (Maist 2004). And even today, not all is well between Samaritans and Jews in Holon, as one of their residents confesses: "orthodox Sephardi Jews who live in the neighborhood, treat Samaritans as pagans and strangers". He explains that it is "difficult to call relationships between the inhabitants of the two areas friendly and even neighbourly" (Maist 2004). As I have outlined earlier, the emphasis on the non-Jewishness of Samaritans has become one of the main concerns of local Samaritans during their public appearances. One of the key themes has become the affirmation that "we are not Jews". While this argument is certainly dogmatically sound, there are other aspects that

place the Samaritans in very close proximity with Israel. To fully appreciate this point, it must be remembered that for most Nabulsis Israelis are "Jews" (*al-yahud*), i.e. they make no difference between religious affiliation and citizenship. This means, that, from a local perspective, if there is evidence for a close relationship between Samaritans and the Israeli government, then that is almost equivalent to being Jewish.

The support for the Samaritan community by the Israeli government has many facets. Young Samaritans serve in the Israeli army (Maist 2004). All Samaritans have Israeli citizenship. The Israeli government is technically responsible for services in Kiryat Luza, the Samaritan village, yet these services have often been not very forthcoming. Many Samaritans, especially those in Holon, work in civil service positions and enjoyed the support of prominent politicians (Ireton 2003). Yet, at the same time, the Israeli government does not recognise the Samaritans as a minority, which the Palestinian Authority does. It does not offer them political representation, while they once were granted a seat in the Palestinian legislative council. In other words, while there certainly is Israeli support for the Samaritan community – which their non-Samaritan neighbours in Nablus appear to take for granted – it seems to be half-hearted. At the very least, it is undergoing permanent changes, depending on the personal attitudes some prominent Israeli politicians hold about the Samaritans. Ancient animosities between Jews and Samaritans perhaps run deeper than a perceived need to close fronts against a non-Jewish/Samaritan enemy.

When it comes to the embeddedness into international networks, the situation of the Samaritan differs markedly from those of their Jewish, Muslim, and Christian neighbours. While the latter three groups are scattered throughout the world, the Samaritans have no diaspora elsewhere. This lack of a diaspora is not simply an historical accident. As one of

Ireton's (2003; emphasis mine) respondents pointed out: "It is very difficult to be Jewish, it is more difficult to be Samaritan. But we are very proud. I am Samaritan, I am of the ancient Israel. I am the real Israel. I (the Samaritans) *don't leave this country for one minute*". For religious reasons, the Samaritans appear to be more determined than the Christians and the Muslims to stay in the area, despite the high price they sometimes have to pay for this resolve.

The role of a diaspora, however, is a significant one, given the close interconnectedness of the world and different governments today. Members of a diaspora community can lobby on behalf of their original community, which, in the case of the conflict-ridden region of Israel-Palestine, may be particularly useful and influential. Especially the Jewish diaspora in the United States and Europe were able to lobby various governments and religious communities on their behalf. To a lesser extent this applies equally to Palestinian Christians and Muslims. Samaritans on the other hand only have the two communities in Holon and Nablus to rely on in addition to their connections with the Israeli government and Jews in general. While they have been able to live a relatively peaceful existence in both Israel and Palestine, largely due to their diplomatic skills and quietist attitude, further support from outside might serve them well (Ireton 2003). At the moment, this external support largely takes the shape of touristic attraction to "the smallest religious community in the world" with its "queer traditions" and, particularly, the yearly Passover celebrations that are attended by thousands of visitors.

Since the Samaritans have largely kept the tradition of political neutrality with regard to both Israeli and Palestinian involvement, a fact that they emphasise regularly, they are seen as, and portray themselves as, ambassadors for peace in the region. This is another pillar in their building of international relations. As Ireton (2003) reports, prominent members actively

petition Western governments for a role as peace brokers in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Thus, a Samaritan delegation had meetings in Brussels in April 2002 with representatives of the European Parliament to promote Mount Gerizim as a centre for peace between Arabs and Jews (ibid.). The plan did not come to fruition, but it indicates the role and self-portrayal of Samaritans in the international community. As they are generally not seen as a threat by either the Israeli or the Palestinian governments (due to their small numbers), and as they have strictly kept themselves out of the conflicts between the two sides, they could possibly function as middlemen. This appears to be the way they would like themselves to be seen internationally. What remains an open question, however, is whether such a proposal would be accepted by either the Israeli or the Palestinian side, since they both have their reservations and stereotypes about the Samaritans, as I have outlined earlier. In other words, the Samaritans really appear to be left to fend for themselves.

The main strategy they have so far played in this struggle for survival, and with some success, is described by one of Ireton's (2003) respondents: "if you are very few you have to go with the government so as to live and (allow) the government . . . to take care of you and defend you from other people. It is very important – you see the Druze, they are 100 times more than the Samaritans, but even they always go with the government of the country they live in. They can have no other method." A further strategy, as I have mentioned earlier, has been to promote their heritage and ancient history. This strategy is aimed at a number of audiences: the Samaritans themselves, in order to increase self-awareness, patriotism, and cohesion; the non-Samaritan Nabulsis, in order to redress distorted images about the Samaritans; and the international community, in order to solicit protection as the "smallest religious community in the world" and to attract tourists.

It includes awareness campaigns, exhibitions, lectures, and travels, but it also increasingly makes use of the media to raise the profile of the Samaritans internationally and locally. As I will explain in the next section, modern technology has provided the Samaritans with new, efficient tools for these efforts.

The Christians in Nablus are in a slightly different position, as they can, at least in theory, fall back on an international "brotherhood" of Christians, and are therefore more intimately tied into a network of international relations. There are a number of aspects to this transnational network that I would like to examine at this point. Firstly, there are the relationships with world Christianity, which, as I have mentioned earlier, are, at one and the same time, a benefit and a problem. Secondly, we must consider the dominance of the Greek Orthodox Church as well as, albeit to a lesser extent, the Catholic Church in the region, including their foreign leadership. Finally, migration of Palestinian Christians has created personal transnational networks that may be different from their Muslim and Samaritan neighbours.

In a conversation with students, which included my having married into a local Christian family and the situation of Christians in the country, one of the students pointed out that local Christians had very close relationships with Christians in the West. When I explained that this was actually not the case and that Western Christians knew next to nothing about Eastern Christians, they expressed surprise. This appeared to be new to them, yet they were then quick to point out that "really they are no different from us, we cannot tell them apart". This conversation quite nicely expresses the views of many local Muslims about their Christian neighbours and their relationship with world Christianity. Frequently, I have come across the view that Christians here must be friends with Christians there, after all it is the same religion. This is regularly coupled

with the belief that all Westerners are (practicing) Christians. One result of these beliefs are some very simple equations. If religion is as conspicuous and important in Western societies as it is (assumed to be) in Middle Eastern societies, and if all Westerners are Christians, and if one disapproves of Western politics with regard to the Middle East, then Christianity must be not only anti-Muslim, but quite negative in general. And if Christianity as a religion is anti-Muslim and appalling, so the thinking goes, then local Christians are similarly not to be trusted. This, combined with rumours and anecdotes about Western Christian support for local Christians at the expense of Muslims, very easily and quickly leads to suspicions and accusations of disloyalty. These are in nature quite similar to the suspicions concerning the Samaritans and their connections with Jews and/or Israel.

On the other hand, Christians do indeed find more opportunities for connections with European or North American communities on the basis of their shared religion. Nablus, for instance, is twinned with several cities in Europe, and through these twinning relations, local congregations were able to strike up relationships with congregations in Europe.

It must, however, also be remembered that these relationships are facing serious problems, like any other international relations with Palestinians. One of the most important problems is language: while other Muslim communities worldwide in all likelihood speak some Arabic, Christians usually do not, and the majority of Palestinians do not have sufficient conversational English (let alone other language) skills to maintain meaningful relationships with abroad. Therefore, even simple proposals like letter-writing or chatting via the internet between communities in Nablus and in Europe or America have largely failed due to the language discrepancies. Furthermore, it is rather difficult for Palestinians in general to travel, which makes community relations quite tricky to

maintain. While technology – telephones or the internet – can, up to a certain extent, help to maintain relationships between people who have never met each other, it cannot replace personal encounters, which fortify such relationships. Travel of Nabulsis abroad is difficult and unpredictable, and travel of foreigners to Nablus is generally equally rare and short. These are not conditions that are conducive to stable and long lasting relationships. Finally, while at least the Catholic and the Anglican Churches are represented in both Nablus and Europe, there are also denominational differences that seem sometimes hard to overcome. My own experiences with many Protestants in Europe have shown me their extreme reluctance to form relationships with one of the dominant Greek Orthodox communities in Nablus or elsewhere, as Orthodox beliefs and practices are frequently considered "non-Biblical" or even "non-Christian". Similarly, Orthodox Christians in Nablus find it often rather difficult to relate to Protestants and sometimes even Catholics due to their divergent dogma. In other words, while "Christianity" may be seen as a uniting factor between local and Western Christians, especially by non-Christians, it is in fact often a dividing factor and the practicalities of everyday life in Nablus make it usually difficult if not impossible to maintain relationships with communities abroad.

Another link between local Christians and the "West" can be seen in the churches European based leadership. Both the Roman Catholic (*Latin*) and the Greek Orthodox (*Rum*) Churches have their spiritual centres located in Greece and the Vatican respectively. This has historically proved to be a problem, rather than an asset, as I have outlined elsewhere (Droeber 2005: 208ff.). Especially in the case of the Greek Orthodox Church, the oldest established church in the region, there has been a history of neglect and misunderstandings between Western leadership and Eastern congregations.

While the West Bank, as the "Holy Land" of Christianity, is in a less peripheral location than the East Bank that I have researched previously (ibid.), there are still some elements of marginalization that are worth considering. One aspect of this marginalization I have already mentioned above – the fact that the majority of Western Christians appear to be oblivious to the existence of Christians in the Middle East. Another, perhaps more significant, factor is the dominance of foreign leadership over local affairs. This has, over the course of decades, caused much grief among local Christians. Young men, for instance, who intend to enter the vocation of being a Greek Orthodox priest, have to leave and study in Greece and in Greek. The liturgical language has only relatively recently changed to Arabic, while many rituals continue to be held in Greek (Haddad 1992). The clergy hails to a large extent from Greece. This situation can be summarized thus:

> Although most Greek Orthodox Christians in the Holy Land are Arabs and Greek refers to the original language of the liturgy of the Church, ethnic Greek priests administer the Church. The Patriarch, the vast majority of bishops and many of the monks are thus ethnic Greeks whilst the lower clergy are mostly Arabs. In the course of its history, the Church began to celebrate the liturgy in Arabic for the numerous parishes of Arab faithful where Greek is neither spoken nor understood (jcjcr).

To illustrate the problems that stem from this state of affairs, which is, from an historical perspective, an improvement on previous decades and centuries, I shall report an incident that occurred in the Nablus branch of the Greek Orthodox Church in 2011. The congregation was split in their opinion and appreciation of the local priest, an elderly gentleman, who hailed from Beit Sahour, close to Bethlehem. Some of the more

influential congregation members raised a complaint with the Patriarch in Jerusalem, and as a result of much discussion and ill-feeling, he was removed from the post and assigned another congregation in the vicinity of Ramallah. While this was a rather negative experience for many of those involved, including the priest himself and his family, the real problems began after his dismissal. A new priest was given the post in Nablus, for whom the congregational association had to provide new accommodation, including expensive furniture. The new priest was Greek, which was initially not necessarily considered a problem, as there was another Greek priest in the church of Jacob's Well (*Bi'r Ya'qub*) close to Nablus, who spoke good Arabic and was quite well respected. It turned out, however, that the new priest did not speak Arabic to any notable extent, and had a difficult time integrating into the congregation and the local community. When, with time, his Arabic did not markedly improve and congregation members found it hard if not impossible to understand what he said, either during services or in private, the first dissenting voices were raised. The discontent grew and by early 2012, he was assigned a post elsewhere. The discontent in this scenario largely took the shape of "what do we want with these foreigners – give us a local priest, at least we can understand them". While it was partly directed at those who were responsible for the dismissal of the native priest, it mainly expressed dissatisfaction with the Jerusalem Patriarchate and its decision to send a Greek priest.

These sentiments echo with a widespread disillusionment with Western Christianity in general, yet they also bear the mark of personal injury. During the discussions about this issue, which I have experienced from a very close range, I have not only seen ridicule of the failed efforts of the Greek priest to settle in, but also sensed hurt pride and denied respect of local Christians with regard to the Greek leadership of the

church. Similar anger surfaces every now and then, like, for instance, when the Patriarchate in Jerusalem sold Church land to Jews. Tsur (2012) reports that in 2012 "after a four-year negotiation period, the Greek Patriarchate sold property in the heart of Jerusalem to the Azorim Company and to entrepreneur Benny Nehemia, on which they together built a prestigious residential project", receiving $10 million in the transaction. Similarly, in 2010, local Christians boycotted the Christmas celebrations in Bethlehem to express their outrage against land sales by the Greek Orthodox Church. I remember being struck by the empty streets and the square in front of the Nativity Church during the celebrations and reading the banners along the periphery protesting the land sales: "The Holy Land is not for sale". As the BBC (2010) reported at the time, local Christians accused the Greek Orthodox Church of "selling and leasing land in the West Bank to Israeli organizations". More specifically, they claimed that "the current patriarch, Theophilos III, had continued to allow Israeli investors to lease Church land in the West Bank and East Jerusalem" (ibid.). While the protests were triggered by the sale of one specific strategic piece of land, in the Bethlehem area, near the Israeli settlement of Har Homa, this appeared to be just the final straw to break the camel's back, a pattern that had been started by the previous patriarch, Irineos, who was dismissed in 2005 "over his alleged involvement in the leasing of Church land in Jerusalem's heavily contested Old City to Jewish investors" (ibid.). In a political situation, where control over and ownership of land is of prime importance, such accusations do, of course, cause outrage amongst Palestinians. Even Mahmoud Abbas, the (Muslim) President of the Palestinian Authority, who always attends the Christmas celebrations, remained absent, intentionally or otherwise travelling abroad (ibid.). Perhaps not surprisingly, the Church did not comment.

This gap between Church leadership and the interests of the local communities seems less evident for the other denominations that are represented in Nablus. The Anglican community (*al-brotestan*) appear to benefit more from their link to Europe and America, and because of the structure of the Church also seems to enjoy more independence from the European leadership. As for the Melkite Church (*al-kathulik*) which is the tiniest of the Christian communities in Nablus and also seems to know less interference from abroad, hold their services in Arabic, and intending priests can study in local seminaries (Beit Jala). Finally, the Roman Catholic community (*Latin*) are ruled by a foreign leadership, but have not experienced the same language issues in recent years as the Greek Orthodox have. Catholic priests are usually locals, can study in local seminaries (Beit Sahour), and use the Arabic language in the church services. Roman Catholics, similar to the Anglican Christians in Nablus, seem to benefit from relationships with congregations abroad, as visits and counter-visits are arranged with American and European congregations, albeit often only on a leadership level.

Despite the existing benefits of transnational relationships for some members and leaders of the local Christian communities, there is a strong sense of marginalization among many local Christians, a feeling that the world has forgotten about their existence in the Holy Land. There are some relatively recent efforts by local Christians, as I will explain in more detail later, to redress this problem and to take advantage of their international embeddedness in an effort to not only make Western Christians aware of their existence, but also to ensure the survival of local communities in Christianity's place of origin.

One final aspect of Nabulsi Christians' connectedness with the West is the result of decades of migration. While Christians emigrated much earlier, a significant upheaval was the war of

1948, when around 50,000 Christians were forced to leave their homes in what is today the state of Israel, which constitutes about 7 per cent of the entire number of Palestinian refugees, or 35 per cent of all Christians (Sabella 1999: 84). Many of them have fled abroad. Another wave of emigration occurred during the years following the war in 1967. In the thirty years after the war, around 18,000 Christians left Palestine or more than 35 per cent of the entire Christian population, a figure that represents more than twice the national average for emigrants (Sabella 1999: 92). The reasons cited by Christians for leaving the country usually do not include issues of discrimination of religious conflicts, but rather common ones such as employment, marriage and family reunifications, or study (ibid.). This was also emphasized in many of my conversations with local Christians, who claim that they would not leave if the economic situation was better. Or, as Sabella (ibid.) put it: "Palestinians, including Christians, do not leave simply out of political or social frustration – they seem to have grown accustomed to these". Furthermore, Sabella (1999: 94) points out, that "the argument that Islamic radicalism has led to Christian emigration from the Holy Land is not supported either by the findings of various surveys, or of the social reality of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip". In a survey conducted by Bethlehem University about the issue, respondents claimed that among the most important factors that would slow emigration of Christians were work opportunities, education, and economic conditions (Sabella 1999: 92).

For whichever reasons Christians emigrate, the results for the local communities are similar. Sabella (1999: 93) lists a number of consequences, including an ageing community, an imbalanced male-female ratio, brain-drain, a weakened role of the churches in society, and the existence of a diaspora. Like Sabella, most of the Christians, particularly their leaders, see emigration as one of the most important problems facing the

Christian communities in Palestine today. Countless times I have heard comments such as those by Sabella (ibid.): "At a time when political, economic and social transformations are taking place in society, there is need for each and every Palestinian to stay on his/her land". Those who do leave are therefore often seen as "deserters", who, despite technology and international travel are rather unlikely to either return or be intimately involved with the local communities. Sabella (ibid.) goes as far as accusing them of denying "the country of origin of their talents, skills and dedication" and claims that "their leaving makes it more difficult still for those who have opted to stay put in their homeland".

And indeed, this appeared to be a major grievance for many Christians in Nablus, ostensibly leading to a "campaign" by their leaders to convince community members of the importance of staying put. This is where the rhetoric of the "living stones" of Christians in the Holy Land comes into play. It represents the idea that Palestinian Christians embody the *living* history and heritage of Christianity, as opposed to the *dead* stones of archaeological remainders from Jesus' time. For them to leave the country would mean depriving Christianity of its original heirs. At the same time emigration of Christians means, in this reading, leaving the country to Muslims and Jews, who do not have more (or less) claims to the Holy Land than Christians do. Often repeated scenarios include precisely this image of this Holy Land void of Christians, a "the Christians are dying out" set-up.

The fact that emigration is indeed an ever-present phenomenon affecting most Palestinians in one way or another. Christians are no exception in this regard, there is not one Christian family I know of that has no relatives abroad. Living generations have emigrated to Australia, the United States, Europe, and South America. Often members from the same community or location would settle in the same place abroad.

Once I was listening to a conversation between members of a family living in Nablus, but with relatives in Bethlehem. They were talking about some people they knew from Beit Jala, a village close to Bethlehem. They mentioned that one of them had emigrated to Chile, upon which several other names of emigrants to Chile were cited. As one of them concluded: "Half of Beit Jala now lives in Chile".

That migration establishes multiple transnational networks is a well-researched phenomenon in the region. Antoun (2005), for instance, followed male migrants from one particular village in Jordan, in an effort to document the transnational networks of this community. He describes the results of this trend for both the village community as well as individual migrants abroad. This is summarised in the following way: "the migration establishes social networks, acculturative trends and images, and aspirations that cannot be contained by nations" (Antoun 2005: 1). Migration of this kind is the beginning of two trends and sentiments: firstly, Antoun (2005: 2) explains, that the nation-state "no longer captures the reality of day-to-day living or imagining of millions of current and former migrants in a transnational world"; and secondly, the sending community "continues to provide a focus for the interests and the imagination of migrants". The resulting tension between departures and connectedness is a crucial element in the maintenance of transnational social networks. I have described this tension in slightly different terms above, as the benefits and disadvantages of being embedded in transnational networks, especially of religious communities.

For Palestinian Christians, relatives abroad are a valuable resource just as for most non-Christian Palestinians: they come visiting and can be visited (one of the preconditions for receiving visas), they are the first link for those wanting to work or study abroad, they send remittances, and are often envied for their life "over there", where, of course, "the grass

is thought to be greener". This represents both the "adhesive" factor that the sending community appears to exhibit on the migrants, on the one hand, and the transnational imagination of those left behind. In fact, due to the often severe travel restrictions imposed on Palestinians, transnational migrants offer indeed often the sole "window to the West" (apart from the media perhaps). In this sense migration of family or community members is an important advantage for those who stay.

At the same time, as I have hinted at earlier, migration of community members is also a significant cause for resentment among those left behind. Especially young people cannot seem to wait for an opportunity to arise to leave. The amount of frustration I have witnessed among Nabulsis of all kinds of backgrounds appears incredibly high. My conversations with university students, however, also show that most of them have no intentions of staying abroad for good. The glue of the local community seems to be indeed powerful. This is of course compounded by the political situation and the nationalist rhetoric that pervade all aspects of life. Christians have, as I mentioned earlier, now begun to add their own "nationalist" rhetoric of being the "living stones of Christianity" to provide a stronger glue than that already existing.

Being embedded into transnational networks of migrants, however, also means that some are able to experience the downsides of living abroad, especially when they go visiting. As I have mentioned earlier, most Nabulsis, regardless of their background, see life elsewhere as better than at home, particularly if they have never spent extended periods of time abroad. Once they get the opportunity to travel, they often return disillusioned. This disenchantment is usually framed in a rhetoric of moral decline abroad. In a conversation with a middle-aged couple, whose daughter lives in the United States with her husband and children, they told me about their experiences

during their latest six-month long visit. While availability of goods and cleanliness stood out as something very positive and worthy of imitation, other things were perceived as much less desirable: "Everything is so expensive, clothes, shoes, etc., only food is cheap. And then there is a lot of poverty and real hunger around, they actually sift through the rubbish bins in search of food! But worst of all is the permissiveness – the girls don't wear anything decent, teenagers are pregnant, and nobody gets married, they just live together like this". Perhaps as an act of self-defence, and faced with the fact that they have to stay, many Nabulsis I have talked to emphasise this lack of mores in Western countries, which represents another ingredient in the local glue. Christians are just as adamant in this as other Nabulsis, frequently portraying themselves as more "conservative" than other Christians abroad and even than those living in other parts of their own country.

The "pull-factor" of the homeland does have its effect on the diaspora communities of all Palestinians, including Christians. The same family mentioned above discusses at frequent intervals the return of their daughter with her family. Equally based on a rhetoric of moral decline in the United States, compared to Nablus, they cite the difficulty of raising their children in a "non-corrupt" way (morally speaking) as the main reason for wanting to come back to Nablus after about ten years abroad. However, they appear to be torn between the benefits of both locations – the economic and political situation in the United States provides them with an arguably higher standard of living than they would probably achieve in the West Bank. Yet, the social conditions are always portrayed as being much more caring and morally superior in Nablus. When I first spoke to them in 2009, talk was about an impending return, before the children would reach school age. By 2012, the two older of the three children were in school and a return had been postponed several times. It appears that, so far, the magnetism of the

conditions of life in the United States could not be overcome by the sticking-factor of life in Nablus. This seems to be a very common theme, not only among Christians, the nostalgic reminiscences about life in Palestine among those living in the diaspora, paralleled by a perceived inability to readjust to life there and to leave the comforts of life abroad.

It is against this background that the campaign of the Christian leadership to prevent community members from emigrating makes immediate sense. Once they have left, they are unlikely to come back. And the benefits of having a diaspora do ostensibly not outweigh the benefits of having actual bodies in the pews or on the land. And while Christians frequently emphasise that statistics are not the most important thing about their existence – it is the quality of their presence as the "original" Christians that counts – emigration is indeed recognised as a problem and perceived as threat. While Palestinians of all kinds of backgrounds have emigrated and continue to do so, it bears much greater significance for Palestinian Christians compared to Muslims. For one, it has been argued that the higher percentage of Christians emigrating can be attributed to the assumption that they find it easier to integrate into "Christian" Western societies, a "pull-factor" that continues to cast its spell over local Christians. Moreover, losing such significant numbers of the community, coupled with lower birth rates among local Christians, does indeed lend support to the "dying-out" scenario. Or, to put it differently, it means losing out to the Muslims, something that no Christian (or Samaritan) I have spoken to would tolerate.

Another effect of both emigration and the association with world Christianity is the impact of Christian "fundamentalism" on the situation in the area, particularly in the guise of evangelical Christian support of Israel. I have witnessed a great deal of disillusion among local Christians in this regard, making them very wary of Western Christianity. Opposite to

what many Muslims accuse local Christians of – being disloyal to the Palestinian cause due to their religious affiliation – Christians in Nablus often seem to be more suspicious of Western Christians than of their non-Christian fellow citizens. By way of example I shall refer to the Israeli military campaign in November 2012 in the Gaza Strip. Everybody in Nablus, regardless of their backgrounds, was shocked and expressed their deepest sympathy with the people in Gaza. Knowing that there are local Christian communities in Gaza means that there are points of reference for both Muslims and Christians in Nablus. This empathy is undivided for the civilian population, the armed resistance evinces diverging views. When on this occasion, I reported on a facebook-discussion of some European Christians in support of Israel, the Christians I spoke to expressed anything from anger to a fatalistic "I told you so". One day later, some Palestinian Christians posted news that a Christian church building had been struck. In other words, local Christians are affected just as much as Muslims in this question, and are as loyal and worried about their homeland. This means that accusations about Christians being a "fifth column" and disloyal are largely based on unsubstantiated premises.

As a result of developments and sentiments such as those outlined above, one could observe, as I have mentioned earlier, among local Christians the emergence in recent years of an increasing sense of self-awareness of their special position as the "original" Christians as well as of their kind of Christianity – especially in its Orthodox guise – being the "true" Church as opposed to Western versions that are often looked at with suspicion. Similarly, there is increasing criticism of Christian tourists who come to see the stones and archaeological sites of ancient Christianity, often limiting their tours to Israel with occasional day trips to the West Bank. This is interpreted as just another manifestation of the ignorance about and neglect

of Palestinian Christians by their Western "brothers and sisters". Nabulsi and other Palestinian Christians, therefore, emphasise their role as the "living stones" that are essential to a true understanding of Christianity. Some, in fact, go as far as claiming that only if you have lived in the area for a significant length of time can you fully understand Christian beliefs and dogma, in effect accusing "Western" Christians of missing the point and having distorted Christian beliefs. It is against the backdrop of these developments that both religious and nationalist rhetoric coincide in their urge for local Christians to stay.

To summarise, both the Samaritan and the Christian communities have to carefully balance their relationships with international players – Israeli, European, American – on the one hand, and their local loyalties and relationships to the homeland, on the other. It appears, however, that although the embeddedness into international and transnational networks of relationships has certain benefits for both Samaritans and Christians, proving their loyalty to their homeland becomes of greater significance given the minority context they live in. And while there might be the occasional note of sarcasm about this kind of conspicuous patriotism among Christians and Samaritans, I did not get the impression that it was a fake sentiment and that both minority groups are, generally speaking, indeed loyal citizens. Muslims, on the other hand, can quite openly call for international support in the name of religious "brotherhood" without having their loyalties questioned. In other words, the local practices of boundary work identified in the previous chapters are decisively inflected by international interests in and relations to the region. I would now like to turn to another international network into which all religious communities in Nablus are embedded to a smaller or larger extent – the internet. How do they use this tool to further their own interests both internationally and locally?

The World Wide Web

One day, when I opened my facebook account, I came across a post from one of the Nabulsi Christian leaders, which had been taken from the "Palestinian Christians" site. Curious, I opened their account (http://www.facebook.com/#!/PalestinianChristians) to find a variety of contributions and contributors writing in both English and Arabic. It was opened in September 2010 to provide a forum for Palestinian Christians, both in Palestine (West Bank and Gaza) and in the diaspora, to express their views. Their self-description says that they are "the first Christians, the natives of this land". They took their motto and motivation from the Old Testament (Isaiah 62:1): "For Zion's sake I will not remain silent. For Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until its righteousness shines like the dawn and its salvation burns brightly like a torch". This translates into their mission that "we are the voice of the voiceless Living Stones in Jesus' Land. We want to share with you about our daily life experience, witnessing, suffering and faith". The Arabic translation on the same page is a little more elaborate, it reads (translation mine): "We are the voice of the voiceless, we are Palestinian Christians, the living stones, a voice that is usually marginalised or absent. We are here to raise our voice loudly before everyone and to say to the world: we are here for your sake and we are going to stay here in the land of Christ until the Day of Judgement."

It is worth quoting their self-description in more detail at this point, as it provides valuable insight into how at least some Christians perceive their own situation, not only with regard to Palestine – the Holy Land – but also with regard to world Christianity. It reads:

> Greetings in Salaam, Peace, Shalom & Shlama from Jesus Land, After more than two thousand years, Christian

families are still living, witnessing & worshiping in the land where Jesus Christ was born, lived, preached, crucified & resurrected.

We are NOT immigrants. We are NOT converts from Judaism or Islam. We are the descendants of the original indigenous Christians who first believed in our Lord Jesus Christ. We live in Nazareth, Bethlehem, Gaza, Nablus, Rafidia, [. . .], refugee camps & other places in the Biblical Palestine & Jordan.

We are Palestinian Christian Believers (Oriental Orthodox, Eastern Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant, Evangelicals & others). Together, we comprise the MOTHER CHURCH, the Church of Jerusalem. [. . .]

Today, their [the disciples of Jesus] direct descendants number around a million. These are the Palestinian Christians who still maintain the faith & tradition. [. . .]

Everyone is more than welcome, regardless of gender, religion, nationality or political affiliation.

All Christian denominations & churches are welcome here, [. . .]

Palestine = ONE Democratic Secular State

"We want to live so we can praise God in Palestine and to witness for Christ – we want to live for Palestine, not to die for her – but if we must die, then we will die honorably and bravely." Fr. Manuel Musallam, Gaza, Occupied Palestine.

GOD BLESS PALESTINE

This self-description is quite instructive about a relatively recent trend among Palestinian Christians, one I have alluded to earlier. While there are many among them, who claim to be politically disinterested and opposed to political activism, there appears to be a rising awareness among some of them, especially the leadership, that Palestinian Christians can and should play

a political role. Of course, many Palestinians, Christian and otherwise, are simply disillusioned and disenchanted concerning the potential difference Palestinian politics, official and unofficial, could possibly make. Yet, it seems that Christians are increasingly realising that getting world Christianity on their side might be useful for their nationalist cause. Hence the dual note in the description: religious rights and responsibilities as the "original" Christians, and political demands and responsibilities as nationalist citizens.

Of course, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, when large parts of the world seem to be connected through the World Wide Web, it should not come as a surprise that Palestinian Christians have also discovered this means to raise awareness about their situation. Palestinians in general know, probably for the first time to a notable extent, to use modern technology, in this case mobile and internet technology, very efficiently for their cause during the Al-Aqsa Intifada between 2000 and about 2005. No longer having to rely on traditional media channels to obtain their news, people in different parts of the world, especially those in the peripheries and in marginalised positions, have successfully employed such modern technology to cry out to a global audience and to circumvent censorship. Palestinian Christians seem to have taken a while to exploit these means for their cause, but are beginning to make themselves heard more clearly in a variety of ways. The facebook page is a good example of how international audiences are addressed with politico-religious issue. This page largely seems to aim at an international audience – locals do not have to be told that there are Christians in Palestine, especially not in English. Given the general ignorance in large parts of the world about the existence of Christians in the so-called Middle East – the common notion being that the Middle East is by definition Muslim – the act of presenting oneself on such popular site as facebook speaks indeed of political awareness.

Most of my Christian respondents were very surprised to hear that the majority of people in Europe and North America are unaware of the religious plurality of the region. This webpage of course also reflects the fact that a considerable number of Palestinian Christians live abroad, often in English speaking countries. In other words, it is the electronic manifestation of the transnational networks, in which Palestinian Christians are enmeshed in, either as a result of migration or of their religious affiliation, as I have explained earlier.

There is neither space nor need to go into all the details of the postings on this website, as they alone would fill a book. Suffice it to note that, in their majority, the comments in both Arabic and English are of a political rather than a religious nature. They refer to events in Christian Palestine, such as visits of foreign church leaders, speeches by leaders, Israeli policies and activities, international Christianity, especially with regard to their support of Israel, and inner-Palestinian agreements and dialogue.

There was a flood of new comments and articles on the occasion of the violence that erupted in Gaza in November 2012. They were without exception in support of the people of Gaza and in their majority in English (or bilingual). This is an indicator that they are meant for an international audience rather than local Christians (or non-Christians), which would echo the recent efforts of the local Christian communities to make themselves heard internationally. There were, however, also a number of comments that could be addressed to local Muslims: these articles point to a number of events or activities that show that Christians are just as involved in the Palestinian national struggle as are non-Christian Palestinians. They include, for instance, reports about attacks by Israelis on Christian churches in the West Bank, as I have mentioned earlier. They furthermore feature stories about Christians' involvement in resistance against Israeli occupation, such as

a photo of a young Christian man from Birzeit (Ramallah), "wearing a rosary [and holding] a stone during minor clashes with Israeli occupation militia in protest against Israel's terrorist aggression in the Gaza Strip", a caption in both Arabic and English.

Just as if to prove the Christians' point, someone described by the site's owners as a "Zionist Jew" commented on a number of articles posted on the "Palestinian Christians" site, among them a prayer for Gaza. His outbursts included comments such as "No place of christian church in Holy land {sic!}", "Fuck palastinian terrorist, Life to Shalom Israel", "JESUS SAID TO KANAANIT WOMAN: YOU ARE DOG. Yeshoua know that palastinians are Dogs", "palastinians should move to jordany, you have no place in holy land", or "you Christians and arab you are stupid pple; jesus was a fuck gay". Even though both the comments and the introduction – "Just another minor example of Holy Land Christian believers have to deal with from the Zionists" – were written in (bad) English, they are arguably addressed to both local non-Christians and internationals, who might need further proof of the fact that local Christians are just as caught up in the political problems in the region as anybody else.

There are other websites that are used and maintained by Palestinian Christians, also mainly addressed to international audiences, such as the site of the "Kairos Document" (http://www.kairospalestine.ps/?q=node/1). This document is based on a similar document, also called "Kairos", that was issued in South Africa in 1985. Its self-description announces that it is "the Christian Palestinians' word to the world about what is happening in Palestine". One of its main purposes is to "request [. . .] the international community to stand by the Palestinian people who have faced oppression, displacement, suffering and clear apartheid for more than six decades", to ask Christians in the world "to stand against injustice and

apartheid, urging them to work for a just peace in our region, calling on them to revisit theologies that justify crimes perpetrated against our people and the dispossession of the land". In contrast to the Facebook site mentioned above, this document and its authors also take up theological arguments in their effort protest against the military occupation of their land, saying that "any theology that legitimizes the occupation is far from Christian teachings because true Christian theology is a theology of love and solidarity with the oppressed, a call to justice and equality among peoples". At the same time it is political, as it "demands that all peoples, political leaders and decision-makers put pressure on Israel and take legal measures in order to oblige its government to put an end to its oppression and disregard for the international law". And while the document itself exists in twenty languages, the webpage is mainly in English, which again indicates that it is intended almost exclusively for an international audience.

In Arabic there are also a number of websites that are maintained by and dedicated to Palestinian Christians, such a www.sirajuna.com, which provides a forum for articles on a whole range of issues, usually either political or theological. The articles are often authored by Christian leaders, but also come from regular news agencies and "ordinary" people. Not all of the writers are Christians, and it becomes immediately obvious, although this is not a stated aim of the website, that one of its main functions is dialogical, bringing together Muslims and Christians in the region. Another website, for instance, www.christian-guys.net, is set up as a chat forum for Christians across the Arab world. This website is exclusively in Arabic, and arguably intended for intra-community dialogue, rather than outside communication, be it to international Christians or local Muslims.

Websites, such as the ones described here, then illustrate a number of points. For one, they reflect the reality of

inter-religious relations on the ground in terms of the audiences addressed with different kinds of narratives and comments. Furthermore, they are a manifestation of the trend of increased self-awareness that can be observed among local Christians, including their self-description as original Christians or "living stones", as well as the need to stay put rather than emigrate. Given the omnipresence of internet, particularly Facebook, among the majority of Palestinians, it can also be argued that the debates that take place in virtual reality will also have their repercussions in real life, impacting the relationship between religious communities in one way or another, which remains yet to be seen.

Turning to the other religious community that is of interest here, the Samaritans, it has to be noted that they are not represented on any of the most popular social websites, such as facebook. There are some informative websites about their community and history, such as www.thesamaritanupdate.com, but it appears they are in less need of an international audience. And indeed, they often point out the need to make their fellow Palestinians aware of their existence rather than international audiences. They enjoy special protected status under the Israeli government, as I have outlined earlier, as well as at least some international popularity, which can be witnessed during their Passover festivities, which are watched by thousands of foreign tourists. Indeed one of the first pieces of information on the website "The Samaritan Update" concerns future dates of the Passover Sacrifice on Mount Gerizim. The website is historical, theological, and educational in nature, and contains no political comment whatsoever. The situation is similar for Arabic websites about the Samaritans: apart from some general information about their history and dogma, there is little to no contemporary information available, and nothing is political in nature. It appears that any of the efforts by Samaritans to address international and local audiences are

so far limited to personal encounters during travels abroad, lectures, exhibitions, etc. Perhaps, being true to their "dogma" of being politically strictly neutral, they also feel no need to make use of the internet. The information they seem to be interested in disseminating – about their history, dogma, and practices – does not require interactive websites and can be found in books in any library.

In other words, while both minority groups have a problem of not being recognised, this recognition is largely sought by different audiences and by different means. The international community seems to play a more significant role for local Christians, and recognition is sought through a variety of means, including the internet. Being twice marginalised, locally and internationally, they address a number of audiences with their concerns – either to prove their significance as "original Christians" or their loyalty as citizens worthy of respect. In this multifaceted endeavour they increasingly make use of modern communication technology, the results of which are not yet clearly evident. Samaritans, on the other hand, seem to be in a different position, arguably less in need to defend themselves internationally and choosing different means of communication in the local arena. With the "curious" reputation of being the smallest religious community in the world, they are sure to receive international attention. And with the protection of the Israeli government (appreciated or otherwise) there may be less need to position oneself against that predominant enemy of most Palestinians. This leaves the local non-Samaritan population, and they can easily be reached through face-to-face communication, as they are found in only one location, Nablus (excepting Holon here for the sake of argument).

The embeddedness into transnational networks then provides another arena for the expression of public and hidden transcripts. Given the nature of modern means of communication,

such as the internet, though, most of this discourse is, however, by definition public. It offers a suitable forum for the hidden transcript through the anonymity it provides to its users. The comments, articles, and other postings are not only addressed to international audiences, but are also informed by the transnational relationships that Muslims, Christians, and Samaritans in Nablus have.

In the last section I would now briefly like to return to the local scene and examine how relationships between members of the religious communities are created and cut through space, rather than religious affiliation. This is one of the areas where reality meets, and often crosscuts, ideologies of relatedness.

Shared and divided space

Historically speaking, Nablus, like many other cities, has had its religious quarters, and surrounding villages have often been dominated by just one religious community. As I have explained at the beginning, this is often reflected in the religious architecture that remains visible until today. The situation has changed over the decades, and while some areas are still dominated or exclusively inhabited by Christians or Samaritans, most neighbourhoods are today mixed and dominated by Muslims. Despite the mixing, there continues to be a strong sense of "living with one's own is best" among the minorities. One extended Christian family, living in a compound-like assembly of houses and flats built around the original old family house, for instance, were rather worried about one of their young families having moved away due to some family discord. While there was some empathy for the reasons of their move, the neighbourhood they had moved into was considered a "bad choice", as it consisted of Muslims only. The argument that was put forward as the main drawback was that the family's four girls, the oldest seventeen, the youngest

six years of age were not safe in such surroundings. While this view reflects the sexual scare scenario I have described earlier, it also gives an indication of the importance of spatial arrangements for members of the religious communities in Nablus.

Galvin (2000), in another context, proposed to include the sharing of space (as well as substance, as I have explained earlier) as a way of constructing social relationships, especially kinship, claiming that the intensity of interpersonal relationships depends on the "legitimisation" of ties of relatedness over time and space. She suggested that sharing space forms an essential element in the process of constructing relatedness. This approach has the benefit of grounding relatedness in people's everyday experiences and moving away from rigid concepts of social structure, thus providing opportunity to elucidate the ways in which relationships are being negotiated, interpreted, undermined, and implemented, often *in spite of* and *against* normative structures. It helps us understand the nature of social relationships in Nablus beyond the rhetoric clear boundaries between religious communities.

There are at least three aspects of spatial arrangements that have to be taken into consideration with regard to interreligious relationships: homes in neighbourhoods, the arena of economic activities, as well as leisure time. The areas where people have their homes in Nablus are arguably the most segregated of the three. Members of the minority communities quite deliberately choose the neighbourhoods where they live, preferring areas where other Christians or Samaritans are clustered. Samaritans are obviously the most exclusivist in this regard after having established their own village on Mount Gerizim, Kiryat Luza. The previously existing Samaritan quarter in the old town of Nablus was a lot less isolated given its central location and proximity to hubs of economic activities. Christians have traditionally also lived in the old town and elsewhere, but were, and continue to be concentrated in

the village of Rafidiya, which has been included into the municipality boundaries in 1966. As I have described earlier, it is inhabited by three Christian family clans as well as one Muslim one. It is the neighbourhood that is today most strongly associated with Christians, being also the location of four churches, a Christian school, and Christian kindergartens. Few if any Christians today move out of this neighbourhood, or remain in close proximity. This trend is aided by the "up-and-coming" reputation that Rafidiya has acquired in recent years with trendy boutiques and restaurants. Muslims' choices, on the other hand, are influenced by social and economic factors rather than religious ones. It should further be noted that the refugee camps in and around Nablus are inhabited exclusively by Muslims.

The area that is necessarily mixed is where economic activity takes place, particularly shopping. While there are corner shops and some other establishments in all neighbourhoods of Nablus, arguably most transactions take place in the city centre, particularly in the old town and in the area around the central roundabout. Thus, although essential necessities can be purchased in one's own neighbourhood, everybody comes together at some point in town to run some errand. And while there is a tendency to prefer shops owned by members of one's own religious community, given the choice, it is economic considerations that largely drive people's shopping behaviour, which results in a constant crossing of boundaries between religious groups. The city centre, which has historically been the place of residence of Christians, Samaritans, and Muslims, therefore becomes the arguably most "multicultural" space in the city. It is also here, that political and social gatherings usually take place, which provide another arena for creating a shared sense of identity for members of all religious communities. It must, however, be remembered that members of the minorities often choose not to join such gatherings.

Furthermore, Samaritans seem to go downtown less often than, for instance, Christians, and mainly for the sole purpose of purchasing certain goods or services that are not available in their village, rather than for a leisurely shopping stroll.

This brings me to the third kind of shared space, which would be where Nabulsis spend their leisure time. If understood in the traditional sense of, for instance, parks, pools, clubs, or theatres, these are, however, few and far between. Due to both the political history of the city, including curfews, fighting, and military presence, as well as cultural traditions, which consider some leisure activities as unsuitable or even religiously and morally "wrong", such leisure opportunities could not develop to any significant extent. Where they do exist, they provide a similar environment for mixing as the city centre. Some are gender segregated, such as cafes, others are for families only, such as parks or restaurants. Although Nablus' cinema reopened in 2009 after 22 years of being closed, it does not enjoy the same kind of popularity as cinemas in European cities, for instance. Both cultural and financial considerations stand behind this lack of widespread enthusiasm for the film theatre. For similar reasons, there is no tradition of young people frequenting clubs or similar establishments. Theatre plays or concerts are comparatively rare for the size of Nablus, and they have no dedicated venues; they often take place on the university campus, which has suitable venues for such events.

It must also be noted that leisure activities are largely confined to the long summer months, when Nabulsis prefer to spend their evenings out of doors. Winter nights are not only chilly outdoors, but also frequently uncomfortable inside as adequate heating is not a feature in the majority of buildings. This marked difference is most readily observable in Nablus streets: they are crowded with mainly young people during the warm summer evening, creating in some parts of the city

a party atmosphere, but they are deserted during the cold and wet winter months. In fact, it can be argued that Nablus' most important leisure arena is its streets. They offer plenty of space to stroll around, plenty of opportunity to meet people, old and new, relatively cheap sources of food and drink (compared to restaurants), and most important of all, they incur no expenses, such as entrance fees. It means stating the obvious that the streets are also no particular community's special domain. They are, however, clearly the realm of the young.

The construction of relatedness through space, therefore, can be divided into the public and the domestic spheres of Nablus life. While domestic space – in the sense of neighbourhoods and of homes themselves – remains to a large extent segregated along denominational lines, public space is, perhaps out of necessity, mixed. This division of space into shared and divided, thus, reflects the division of discourse into the public and hidden transcripts. The public side of both space and discourse is marked by harmonious mixing, whereas the domestic side maintains a group's "distinctness", an emphasis on being "different".

There is an interesting gender aspect to this division of space. Nabulsi society is generally characterised by a discursive association of women with the domestic sphere and of men with the public sphere. There is neither space nor need to go into the details and feminist critique of this division of public and private, which I am fully aware of. What is of importance for this discussion is the perceptions of Nabulsis themselves, who in their absolute majority subscribe to such a view. And while both men and women in Nablus regularly cross the boundaries between public and private, they tend to emphasise their ideal-typical adherence to this gendered division of space. If the assumption is correct that the domestic sphere is marked by a stricter separation of religious communities from one another, and that it is, furthermore, largely

the domain of women, then this means that the boundaries between religious communities are also mainly maintained through and across women.

Another aspect is important in this discussion: if relatedness is indeed created through spatial arrangements, then this bears vital significance for the existence of public and hidden transcripts, of discourses of inter-religious harmony and differences respectively. Since public spaces are frequented to a similar extent by members of all religious communities in Nablus, they could indeed have the potential of creating a sincere feeling of relatedness among all Nabulsis regardless of their backgrounds. Particularly as this space has been occupied, invaded, and closed by a shared enemy – Israeli military forces – it also becomes a space of enjoying and celebrating its openness, when it exists. I remember getting this distinct feeling of Nabulsis celebrating a kind of victory in the city's streets after the closures of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, when I returned in 2009. On the other hand, the Nablus notion of the "sanctity" of the domestic sphere means that in this space differences can easily be maintained, not only between religious communities, but also between Nabulsis with different class or geographical backgrounds. These observations echo with more recent findings in kinship studies in anthropology, which confirm that "relatedness" is almost never confined to "blood-ties" (here also in a religious sense), but is instead constructed through a variety of practices, including the use of space and the sharing of substances.

A final clue for the creation of relatedness among Nabulsis comes from discussions about people's sense of self. Joseph (1999, 1993) identified "relational selves" in Arab societies, which do not correspond with the bounded, autonomous self of the European Enlightenment and Modernity. Relationality is based on notions of self that "do not conform to the individualist, separative, bounded, autonomous constructs subscribed

to in much of Western psychodynamic theory" (Joseph 1999: 2). Rather than pathologising such relational selves,

> [i]n societies in which the family or community is as or more valued than the person, in which persons achieve meaning in the context of family or community and in which survival depends upon integration into family and community, such relationality may support the production of what is locally recognized as healthy, responsible and mature persons (Joseph 1999: 9).

Studies of Arab societies have often described the socio-political make-up as extremely group oriented or corporatist, which, however, is not what relationality means. Instead it suggests a "view of persons [. . .] as embedded in relational matrices that shape their sense of self but do not deny them their distinctive initiative and agency" (Joseph 1999: 11). Thus, in this conceptualisation agency is not reliant on autonomous selves, but emerges experientially and existentially. Persons enmeshed in such matrices have often "resisted, constructed alternatives, or created networks that crossed the boundaries of family, neighborhood, class, religion, ethnicity, and nation, emerging with notions of self that, while privileging relationality, are quite hybrid" (ibid.). This gives us an indication of why Nabulsis sometimes emphasise their belonging to a nation as more important than their belongingness to a religious community or family. The boundaries of self are fluid and changing, and are crucially based on some sense of community, wherever its boundaries are perceived. The picture that emerges is one of flexibility, hybridity, and bargaining in the area of social or religious relationships. This dynamic view of social relations stands in direct contradiction to early anthropological concepts of social *structures*, seen as essentially unchanging. Such constructs have, of course, undergone severe criticism,[1]

suggesting instead a more procedural approach to the construction of relatedness.[2]

The perspective taken here – privileging day-to-day exchanges – reflects what Bourdieu calls "relational thinking", an approach to the study of social life, which "identifies the real not with substances {e.g. occupation, age, sex, qualifications} but with relationships" (Bourdieu 1984: 22). He argued that people's choices flow "from actor strategies to maintain or enhance their position within the social order rather than from abstract rules or norms" (Swartz 1997: 60). Focusing on everyday observable behaviour helps to avoid the structuralist tendency to accept normative models, as represented in discourse, as I have explained earlier. In the case of inter-religious coexistence in Nablus this would refer to the idea of clear boundaries between religious communities as they are often portrayed by both local actors as well as written accounts. Instead, while relationships were discursively constructed as stable and bound by obligations, they had to be maintained and re-instated on an almost daily basis.

6

FIELDS: DOCUMENTING SHIFTING RELATIONS

Just as I was revising the final draft of the manuscript for this book, I received yet another invitation, via my university email address, to attend an event to introduce the "history, heritage, and culture of the Samaritan community". It came a month after the municipal elections in Nablus, and the newly elected mayor apparently saw it as one of his first tasks to host this event. It also happened to arrive just a couple of weeks after the Muslim holiday of Sacrifice (*'id al-adha*), which was a three-day holiday for all Nabulsis. Furthermore, it happened during the Christian advent season, which gradually became evident in Christmas decorations in the streets of Rafidiya (where most of the churches are located) and in the chocolate Santa Clauses on display in some supermarkets. The invitation served as a gentle reminder that the traditions of the three religious communities in Nablus were alive and well, and that the relationships between them continued to be worked upon. The event also was also evidence that the relationships between members of the three religious communities were anything but fixed, as they are often portrayed in popular discourse, the media, or much academic literature. If the relationships were clear-cut and long-lasting, why would there be a need for

such an introductory workshop, hosted by the local university and the newly elected municipal government, the third such event I was aware of in the space of two and a half years? If everybody knew about each other, why would it be necessary to offer such a broad and basic introduction rather than a more specialised debate, for instance?

Events such as these are a manifestation of the main argument that runs through this book: that members of the three main religious communities are negotiating boundaries within and between themselves, all the time balancing local, national, international, community, and personal interests. These negotiations result not only in specific patterns of distinctions and similarities that are unique to this town, but which are applicable also to other areas of Palestine; they moreover give rise to the symptomatic public and hidden transcripts that are the hallmark of inter-religious discourse in Nablus. What is called for, then, is a dynamic model of intergroup relationships that accounts for the constantly changing nature and circumstances of these relationships, as these are embodied and bargained with on a day-to-day basis, and one that allows practices to be accommodated that run counter normative rules and discourses, which so often are mistaken for reality.

In this book, I have mainly attempted to document some of the ways in which the boundaries between the three religious communities in Nablus are negotiated, maintained, created, or crossed. In chapter one, I set the scene by providing an historical and political background of the relationships between religious communities in Nablus. This context is essential for our understanding of contemporary social dynamics and relationships. The existence of the three religious communities in Nablus, which is unique in Palestine, is the result of such historical and political developments. Nablus is not only unique in terms of its religious communities, but also in a number of other ways, as I have explained in that chapter.

This makes it a very useful fieldwork site for the exploration of inter-community relations, as some aspects fall much more clearly into relief than in other locations. Here I have tried to trace the relations between the three religious communities, which have historically known considerable variation, ranging from friendly to hostile, and place these relationships into the wider socio-cultural and political context of Nablus as a town with a Muslim majority.

In chapter two, I have been concerned with the processes of drawing boundaries between communities. This is, of course, neither a new nor a unique endeavour, yet older attempts of tracing community relations have resulted in rather static models that are echoed in studies of Middle Eastern communities as well. This view portrayed social or religious groups and the boundaries between them as largely *normative* boundaries – reflected in what people *say* they are or should be – rather than *real* boundaries – the limits that are set up through people's everyday behaviour. The normative boundaries and relationships are often deduced from the gatekeepers' or leaders' perspective rather than "ordinary" people's views, behaviour, and discourse. It must, however, not be forgotten that, in a context such as the Palestinian one, the power of the group frequently supersedes the agency of individual actors, which, by itself, cannot account for the nature of inter-religious relationships in Nablus, Palestine, or elsewhere. The model I have used here to come to a better understanding of these relations is based on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, which focuses on the *embodied* practices and strategies that members of the religious communities use to distinguish themselves from significant others. It takes into account both individual strategies as well as group pressures and dynamics to create a flexible and changing model of these relationships. What emerged from this approach are boundaries that are ingrained into the respective group members through socialisation processes and

carefully maintained through daily practice and discourse. At the same time these boundaries are constantly re-negotiated, manipulated and crossed. In this way the careful equilibrium, necessary in the volatile situation the region continues to find itself in, is maintained and re-established when external events shake the balance.

In chapter three, I examined some of the processes and strategies of creating, maintaining, and demolishing Others and selves. The most dominant Other for all Nabulsis is arguably the occupation of the area by Israel. This Other presents a powerful force for the construction of national selves in Nablus, selves that frequently override denominational differences. In this chapter I have analysed how such national selves are constructed particularly in public discourse, or the public transcript, by all those involved. I have argued that the national cause, fuelled by the Israeli occupation, provides an umbrella, under which all Nabulsis can and do at times rally, regardless of religious affiliation. In this sense religion becomes insignificant, ideas and a rhetoric of "brotherhood" and harmony paramount. In this context the differences between religious communities within Nablus are frequently being downplayed in public discourse. The same set of circumstances, however, also put religion on top of the agenda. Not only is the state of Israel defined in religious terms, inviting a similar emphasis among Palestinians, usually in Islamic expressions. Thus, many nationalist arguments have increasingly taken on religious notes, particularly with regard to access to, and rights over, religiously significant sites. At the same time, the increased use of religious rhetoric has placed the Samaritans in a precarious position, as they have been acknowledged as "Jewish" by the Israeli government, while defending themselves as non-Jews in local contexts.

In order to better understand the developments that led to the current state of affairs of inter-religious relations in

Nablus, I have furthermore examined some historical and contemporary depictions of Christians and Samaritans by Muslim writers. I have found great similarities between these written accounts, on the one hand, and contemporary public discourse, on the other. It appears that such accounts, both historical and contemporary, have an almost educational character, explaining to an assumed Muslim readership not only some aspects of Christian and Samaritan history and dogma, but also the great similarities between members of the minority communities and those of the Muslim majority. This public transcript of "brotherhood", similarity, and unity is, however, subverted in the hidden transcripts that exist among all three communities, as I have indicated throughout the book.

In chapter four I have attempted to take Bourdieu's notion of "embodiedness" of the *habitus* and distinction into account by moving beyond the discourses of the hidden and public transcripts. I have chosen three areas of everyday and special behaviour to illustrate how in these fields distinction and similarities are lived. Marriage patterns have, most of the time and in most societies, structuring functions for society. The rules that exist about marriage in most societies, including that of Nablus, quite clearly prescribe suitable and unsuitable partners. In Nablus this has emerged not only as a structuring strategy between social classes or areas of residence, for instance, but also between the religious communities. It is one of the long-term and lasting strategies to draw and maintain boundaries between Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims, with the minority religious groups being more adamant about not crossing them, remaining almost entirely endogamous. On a more day-to-day level, the drawing of boundaries through sharing of food and offering hospitality, as well as dress codes have proved less clear-cut than marriage arrangements. There are many similarities in the behaviour of members of the three religious communities in these areas, which can be counted

as evidence for the existence of a powerful and shared *habitus* among Nabulsis. There is, for instance, a strong emphasis on modesty among members of all religious communities, which has turned into a hallmark of Nabulsi society in public discourse, particularly with outsiders. There is a sense of pride in Nablus' "conservative" reputation among many Nabulsis. Where differences do exist in these matters, they are frequently gendered, which here means mainly that the differences are borne and embodied by women rather than men. These circumstances resemble the idea of women as "bearer of the nation", here referring to the religious communities. The rules governing these kinds of behaviour largely belong in the category of informal social control, although marriage and some dress rules have a strong religious component as well. For all of these areas, the Samaritans stand out as the most exclusivist among the three religious communities, having the strictest regulations and now living in relative isolation.

In chapter five, I take into account the fact that local relationships are, in today's "globalised" world, strongly influenced by transnational relations. I have illustrated some of the ways in which locals of all three religious communities are embedded in wider networks of transnational relations, such as through migration, the internet, or religious links. These transnational networks impact on local living arrangements, on local loyalties, and dynamics on the ground, particularly with the two minorities' alleged close relationships with "Western" players, be that Jewish Israel in the case of the Samaritans, or Christian Europe and America in the case of local Christians. This alleged closeness with "outsiders" has always been a bone of contention between Muslims, on the one hand, and Christians and Samaritans, on the other. I have, however, found very little evidence that the minority communities are more influenced by international players, or less loyal to the national cause than the majority community would be.

The areas of inter-religious relations, which I have discussed in this book's chapters, can not only be understood in terms of the hidden and public transcripts, in which both minorities and majority communities take part. They also lend themselves for an analysis in terms of "fields" of struggle for power, the concept that Bourdieu has developed to provide a more dynamic model of intercommunity relations. At this final point in my discussion I would like to consider this idea in an effort to once more tie together the various strands explored in the previous chapters. A "field" in Bourdieu's sense "defines the structure of the social setting in which habitus operates" (Swartz 1997: 117). Bourdieu himself (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97) defines a field in the following way:

> [It is] a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (*situs*) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital) whose possession commands access to the specific profits that are at stake in the field, as well as by their objective relations to other positions (domination, subordination, homology, etc.).

In other words, as Swartz (1997: 117) put it, "fields may be thought of as structured spaces that are organized around specific types of capital or combinations of capital". It is a "matrix of institutions, organizations, and markets", in which people compete for certain capital (ibid.). One important aspect of the concept is that it is based on the centrality of relationality in social reality. Rather than assuming fixed structures of groups, populations, organisations, or institutions, Bourdieu emphasises patterns of struggle and interests that shape social action.

Throughout this book I have tried to take this conflictual character of the relationships between members of the three religious communities in Nablus into account. What I had hoped to show was that the social, political, and economic conditions of struggle in Nablus shape cultural and social production, which is in the context of this study framed in religious terms. It should have become evident that "the distribution of capital in the market [or field] reflects a hierarchical set of power relations among the competing individuals, groups, and organizations" (Swartz 1997: 120). Yet, beside the power relations, hierarchies and rankings, there are also exchange relations, a theme that runs through all of the book's chapters. These interactions, while vital for the socio-cultural, economic, and political existence of all those involved, are, however, not balanced. They are essentially shaped by their relative position within the social hierarchy. This aspect has also clearly shone through my examination of interactions between members of the religious communities in Nablus. While balance, equality, and harmony have been the main themes of public discourse, or the public transcript, the impact of the existing social hierarchies on people's interactions with each other has become clearly evident in their hidden transcripts. What is important to remember is that people's actions are the result of both *habitus* and structures, neither one or the other alone. It is furthermore vital to understand that "fields are sites of resistance as well as domination" (Swartz 1997: 121), a fact has found expression in the hidden transcripts described earlier. And yet, fields clearly reproduce domination, rarely being a site of social change, as has become obvious in the Nablus context.

Bourdieu has further clarified some of the characteristics, or laws, of fields. Firstly, he has described fields as "arenas of struggle for control over valued resources", or forms of capital, which has become clearly evident in the context of inter-religious relations in Nablus (Swartz 1997: 122). The capitals

struggled over in this case are largely of symbolic, cultural, and religious nature, yet have its repercussions in the economic and political sphere as well. Secondly, as Swartz (1997: 123) outlines, "fields are structured spaces of dominant and subordinate positions based on types and amounts of capital". In other words, unequal relations are not based on the personal characteristics of those involved, but on the imbalanced distribution of capitals. Regardless of how inequality is generated, the fact remains that "field struggle pits those in dominant positions against those in subordinate positions", or "those who defend 'orthodoxy' against those who advocate 'heresy'" (Swartz 1997: 124). Particularly the latter is a recurrent theme in Nabulsis' discourse, although the respective Other is always depicted or perceived as in a sense "heretic", regardless of their position in the power hierarchy. What is also important to note is that "orthodoxies call into existence their heterodox reversals by the logic of distinction that operates in cultural fields" and that "challengers oblige the old guard to mount a defense of its privileges; that defense, then, becomes grounds for subversion" (ibid.). I have examined these dynamics particularly in the context of the hidden and public transcripts and how they are used by both the majority and the minorities. Of the three field strategies mentioned by Bourdieu – conservation, succession, and subversion – it seems that mainly the first and the last are dominant in Nablus. Conservation strategies are those employed by the dominant, whereas subversion strategies are employed by those "who expect to gain little from the dominant groups" (Swartz 1997: 125).

Bourdieu's third law of fields maintains that they impose on actors specific forms of struggle (ibid.), a fact that has become clearly obvious in the Nablus context, where the hidden transcript was often the only strategy open to members of the minority communities. He furthermore argues that both the dominant and the dominated "share a tacit acceptance that

the field of struggle is worth pursuing" (ibid.), which means they have a common interest in preserving the field itself. In the case of inter-religious relations in Nablus, this could be interpreted as the national cause, which produces a widespread agreement among both majority and minorities that the *status quo* should be maintained, at least until a solution to the political problems is found. This might also be the reason why "actors misrecognize the arbitrary character of their social worlds", which contributes to the maintenance of the existing social order (Swartz 1997: 126). In the Nablus context I have found that while many actors in fact do recognise the arbitrary character of their social world, they are nevertheless reluctant to publicly challenge it and prefer to do so behind closed doors – a strategy that still adds to the preservation of the existing structures.

The final law proposed by Bourdieu refers to the notion that "fields are structured to a significant extent by their own internal mechanisms of development" (ibid.). This means that fields are relatively autonomous in relation to other fields and to external factors. Here he mainly refers to the interchangeability of capitals, which is never fully achieved. Bourdieu maintains that fields develop over time their own interests, which may or may not be very different from external interests. I have argued here that such an autonomy of the religious and cultural field in Nablus is extremely limited, as it is always interpreted as influenced by external factors, mainly of a political nature. It seems to me that whatever happens, in whichever context, and to whoever, particularly if this is of a negative nature, there is an overwhelming tendency among most Nablusis to put the blame on the political situation, particularly the military occupation by Israel. However, these external influences are always mediated through the internal logic of the specific field, which in the Nablus context often means assessment according to relative distance or closeness to

the "Jewish" occupier. Where the idea of autonomy of fields becomes interesting is when there are contradictions between them. This can happen, when people face and are challenged by different fields or contexts. In such cases, the idea of relatively autonomous fields helps us understand how people can resist power and domination in one field and be more complicit in another. In Nablus that could refer to the religious field, on the one hand, and the national political, on the other. While there is a large extent of cooperation or compliance between religious communities in political terms, there is resistance in cultural and religious expressions and interrelations, at least on the level of the hidden transcript.

Despite the relative autonomy of fields, there also exists what Bourdieu calls "homologies" between them in functional and structural terms, which refers to similarities within a difference between different fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 105f.). To explain this homology between fields, Bourdieu can fall back on his concept of *habitus*, which makes "actors display similar dispositions across a broad range of domains" (Swartz 1997: 134). External factors never influence actors in specific fields directly, but "only through the specific mediation of the specific forms and forces of the field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 105). Yet, all fields are related to the structure of social space, or class structure, which means that in each we find dominant and dominated groups, struggles, exclusions etc. (ibid.). Having said that, it has also become evident that every aspect of these structural influences has its field specific expressions (ibid.). Thus, struggles in one field have "political effects and fulfil political functions by virtue of the homology of positions that obtains between such and such [. . .] a political or social group in the totality of the social field" (ibid.). For the Nablus context, this means that the more or less open struggles between religious communities are, on the one hand, the result of external structures and

positions of relative power, and, on the other hand, not only show similar differences and expressions in fields other than the religious-cultural, but also have their repercussions in the political field. The relationship between dominant and dominated, or majority and minorities, cuts across various fields of socio-cultural production. Examples of this could be seen in the weak representation of the two minority religious communities in both economic and educational elites. As Swartz (1997: 130) put it, "those who find themselves in dominated positions in the struggle for legitimation in one field tend also to find themselves in subordinate positions in other fields".

For Bourdieu (1980: 147), the functions in internal struggles "are inevitably accompanied by external functions, which are conferred on them in the symbolic struggles among the fractions of the dominant class and, in the long run at least, among the classes". In other words, cultural, or in the context of this study, religious, differences are at one and the same time social or class differences. This is also the point, where Bourdieu's ideas seem to touch on Scott's ideas of hidden and public transcripts: he maintains that "the struggles for the specific objectives at stake in the autonomous field to produce *euphemized* forms of the ideological struggles between the classes" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 106; emphasis in the original). His ideas of homologous fields, which parallel his ideas of *habitus* and social action, offer an explanation for the relative position of members of the religious minority communities in Nablus. Their relationships of minorities and majority, or dominant and dominated, are reflected across the board of social relations and structures, yet they are "not the aggregate result of conscious, rational calculation", rather they are the result of the functional and structural homologies between fields (Swartz 1997: 133). This is furthermore closely connected to class legitimation, as the dominant cultural order and class structures are unconsciously reproduced in a variety

of fields. This work is, as Bourdieu maintains, largely done by intellectuals, who, in the case of the religious communities in Nablus, can be read as the religious leadership, who help to legitimate the dominant cultural order and reproduce the class structure" (ibid.).

This summary of Bourdieu's concept of field, which I provided in an effort to bind together the loose strands explored in this book, can admittedly do neither the situation on the ground, nor the theoretical demands of a thorough analysis do, any justice. It was rather intended to indicate how the various incidents and contexts explored in the book's chapters do indeed form a bigger picture of hierarchical social relations in Nablus. The relationships discussed here, namely those between members of different religious communities, are only a small, albeit significant, part of this larger whole. I have used this concept here as well to indicate further directions of research in this area. Not only do inter-religious relations require further qualitative research that goes beyond statistical figures and political rhetoric; the lives and relationships between other social groups in Nablus and elsewhere in the West Bank suffer from a similar of qualitative, in-depth exploration, which would provide a fuller picture of the field-concept for Nabulsi society in specific, and Palestinian society in general. Taraki (2006: xi) has already pointed out that the dominant approach of Palestine research has been marked by macro-level political-economy analyses, preoccupied as it is with structural transformations at the level of the economy, the class structure, and the polity. Only in the last twenty or so years did in-depth anthropological studies on Palestinian society appear (ibid.). yet, even this focused mainly on political actors rather than everyday lives and relationships. Palestinians have academically become politicised. Taraki (ibid.) explains that the "internal dynamics, stresses, and contradictions of the social groups and communities within which people live out

their lives, or the sensibilities and subjectivities of individuals as they negotiate their mundane existence away from the barricades have not received much serious attention from researchers". If we want to understand (and possibly solve) the problems in the region, we have to move beyond political analysis and the rhetoric of those in power (or those with the loudest voice); we will have to provide more detailed explorations of the day-to-day dynamics between social, religious, cultural, and political groups. This study has been an attempt to do just that, albeit in a very limited context.

NOTES

Chapter 1. Introduction: Nablus as a religious and cultural space

1. The years of the Samaritan calendar are counted from the time when the Israelites crossed the River Jordan into the land of Canaan, which occurred in the year 2,794 after the creation of the world according to their sacred history (Sassoni and Sassoni 2004: 15). The building of the Temple would then fall into the fifth century CE.
2. For a concise, albeit perhaps not very academic discussion of the theological background of the site, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mount_Gerizim.
3. Bethlehem University's Socio-Economic Survey of the Bethlehem area (1989) and the Socio-Economic Survey of the Latin Patriarchate (1990) (Sabella 1999: 89).
4. The Tuqan family was one of Nablus' elite families and remains one of the most influential ones until this day.

Chapter 2. Boundaries: Negotiated, embodied, manipulated

1. I am aware of the contested nature of the concept of "minorities" and their social, political, and economic roles in any given society. For this reason, I am using "minority" here in a strictly numerical sense – both Samaritans and Christians in Nablus form numerically very small parts of the general population, each accounting for less than 1 per cent. Any of the usual political, social, or economic associations of the term "minority" – of being

underprivileged or discriminated against – are not initially implied in my usage, unless specifically mentioned.
2. For a useful summary of labelling theory see Meighan and Siraj-Blatchford (1997: 310ff.).

Chapter 3. Distinction: The making of "selves" and "Others"

1. For decades the Samaritan community suffered from a decline in numbers, so that at the end of the nineteenth century, their group numbered only around 70 individuals. As the community was strictly endogamous, the genepool had become extremely limited, with the well-known consequence of disabilities emerging among them.
2. I exclude, for the sake of argument, Samaritan connections to the Israeli government. These connections are of course powerful, yet they are less relevant in the local Nabulsi context.
3. It is interesting to note that the Arabic word for "denominations" used here is the same used to describe Muslim "schools of law", both of which denote rather diverging levels of difference between "members". Christian "denominations" are frequently not in communion with each other and have more or less formal membership, whereas Muslim "schools of law" offer similar, only slightly different interpretations of Islamic Sunna (Qur'an and Hadith) with no formal membership and the right to "pick and choose" between them.
4. The patriarchs as well as the priests of the Greek Orthodox Church have, in the past, been of Greek origin, much to the chagrin of the local Christians. In the case of the latter, this has now changed, priests are generally locals.

Chapter 4. Gendered taboos: Marriage, hospitality, and dress

1. Samaritan weddings, for instance, are usually witnessed by "all individuals of the religious community and a number of friends from outside the community" (Ayash 2003: 96; translation mine).
2. For Samaritan conditions and traditions of marriage see Ayash (2003: 94–101).
3. Muslims frequently argue along the same lines to justify the rule of marrying four wives. The rule was supposedly established to deal with

the large number of widows (and shortage of men) in the aftermath of a large battle in the early days of Islam.

4. Perhaps the most debated and arguably controversial contributions to the area of food laws and the symbolic significance of food can be found in Douglas (2005) on Jewish food laws and concepts of pollution and taboo, and in Harris (1975) on how, in a cultural materialist interpretation, food laws were developed in response to natural circumstances.
5. For three of the more recent examples see Heath (2008), Joppke (2009), and Lazreg (2009) all of which I have criticised elsewhere (Droeber 2008, 2009a, 2009b).
6. I use the term "fundamentalist" here in the popular sense, being fully aware of the political and historical ramifications the term carries.
7. One exception here is perhaps the social class background, as upper-class Nabulsis, like in many other societies, enjoy more of the kind of freedom that money and power can buy. Members of well-to-do families are more frequently seen in less traditionally modest dress and enjoying relatively more freedom of movement than members of the lower social classes. Having said this, it must be emphasised that the upper-class in Nablus is relatively small in number.
8. *Ummeh* here obviously refers to the concept of Islamic nation and is used by some minority members to describe the Muslim majority. It is, in these contexts, pronounced in a rather sarcastic way.

Chapter 5. Networks: Exchange, relationships, and space

1. Schneider (1968, 1972, 1984) called for abandoning the concept of "kinship" in anthropological studies altogether. He was subsequently criticised for his cultural and anthropological relativism (Feinberg 2001), but has to be credited for problematising the Eurocentric notion of "kinship" (and its basis in biology).
2. Carsten (2000) introduced the concept of "relatedness" to replace the narrow notion of "kinship" in an attempt to "rescue" kinship studies by re-conceptualising their basic premises.

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