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MOSQUES AND CEMETERIES IN ISRAEL: SANCTITY, DESECRATION, AND SOLIDARITY

This paper examines local and international responses to the attempt to transform a mosque into a museum and event hall in Beersheba. I place the Muslim outrage over a wine festival held at the mosque in historical context and trace how a multi-faith coalition of Muslims, Jews, and Christians formed to protect the sanctity of the mosque and cemeteries in Beersheba. This coalition has been formed around the principles of peaceful coexistence and interfaith.

Keywords: Mosques, cemeteries, desecration, solidarity, Israel.



The mosque in Beersheba

Historical Background

Bedouin tribes have inhabited the Negev for thousands of years. There have been Bedouin migrations into the Negev from time immemorial. Researchers contend that Bedouin migrants who came to Palestine with the Islamic armies in the seventh century comprised the first of the three Bedouin migratory waves from the Arabian Peninsula into the region. Each migratory wave displaced previously resident tribes, which then dispersed into Syria, Iraq, and Palestine, or moved south to Egypt and North Africa. We know from various sources that from the time of the conquest of Palestine by the Islamic armies until the second half of the nineteenth century, the tribes in the Sinai and Negev constantly fought both each other and invading tribes from the Arabian Peninsula [Al-'Aref 1934: 9–34, 231–37; Bailey 1985: 20–49].

During the four centuries of Ottoman rule (1516–1917), Palestine did not form an independent administrative unit, but was divided into several districts, *sanjaks* [Ma'oz 1975: xv-xvi]. Beersheba was founded in 1900, as the capital of the fifth subdivision (*qada*) of the Jerusalem *mutasarriflik*, under a dignitary with the rank of *qaimaqam*, as were the *qadas* of Jaffa, Hebron, Jerusalem, and Gaza [al-'Aref 1934: 192, 244; Marx 1967: 31–32]. The Ottoman reasons for establishing Beersheba included a desire to expand their tax base and enlarge the population from which to raise troops. In addition, Turkey, which was interested in controlling the Suez Canal, was fearful that British and French domination over it would give them a foothold in the Near East. It was thought that the Muslim Bedouin could be allies of the Ottomans and serve as a buffer between them and their enemies. Considerable diplomatic activity focused upon the Sinai Peninsula and the boundary between Egypt and the Ottoman Sultanate. The final boundary was fixed only in October 1906 [Shuqayr 1916: 588–616].

In the early years of Beersheba, rooms were set aside in Saraya House, the *qaimaqamia*, to serve as a municipal center until a proper municipality building was constructed. On the top floor, rooms were reserved to house each of the following: the District Court, the Tribal Court (*Mahkamat al-'Ashair*), and the office of the *qaimaqam*. On the bottom floor were the office of the Magistrate's Court, the Muslim religious court, and rooms for the superintendent of police and the city clerk. In the first stage of construction (1900–1903), the Saraya House and several structures around it were built, as were army barracks and

a center for the gendarmerie. The second stage of the city's construction commenced in 1904, during the period of Qaimaqam Assaf Belge Bey the Damascene (1904–1906), and included construction of the municipality building, a mosque, and later a two-story school for Bedouin children, the first school in the *qada*. Assaf Belge Bey was distinguished by his hard work and the wide range of his activities. He was also known for the social events and ceremonies he held, to which he would invite Bedouin from the surrounding region [Abu-Rabia 2001: 2007]. Beersheba also began to serve as a Muslim religious center with the appointment of an Ottoman *qadi*, one Shukry Effendi, whose job was that of a Muslim religious judge. This was the first such appointment in the region [Gal-Péer 1979: 273].

Other reasons for the choice of the site included Beersheba's sanctity to Muslims, because of its connection to Abraham and Ishmael and to 'Amro b. al-'Ass and his son 'Abdullah (renowned Muslim fighters) [al-'Aref 1934: 242–53]. Needless to say, Islamic cities¹ like Mecca, al-Madina, and Jerusalem are strongly associated with the sanctity, holiness, and mystical visions.

The government purchased 2,000 *dunams* (approximately 480 acres) from the Mhemdiyin tribe of the 'Azazma clan, and registered them in its name at the Land Registry Office (*Kushan*). The authorities appointed one of the most important sheikhs, Sheikh Hajj 'Ali Sliman al-'Atawna, as mayor. He would serve in this office until his death in 1922.

During World War I, General Edmund Allenby began his Negev offensive in October 1917, and on October 31 took Beersheba [al-'Aref 1934: 245–48; Luke & Keith-Roach 1930: 27]. During the British Mandate (1917–1948) Beersheba remained the capital of the *qada* and the administrative center of the Bedouin population, serving as a unifying factor that engendered a sense of political belonging. The British drew the boundaries of the *qada* so that it included all the Negev Bedouin, making the city, in effect, the capital of all the Bedouin in southern Palestine. Beersheba had also become the seat of the *qaimaqam*, who was chosen because he knew Arabic and admired the Bedouin lifestyle, which had captivated many of the British officers who served in the

¹ For more details about the Islamic city, see: [Raymond A. Islamic City, Arab City: Orientalist Myths and Recent Views // British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies. 1994 Vol. 21, No.1: 3–18; Ira Lapidu. Muslim Cities in the Later Middle Ages. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967].

district. This official guaranteed public order and Bedouin loyalty by forging personal ties with the tribes, including frequent visits to their encampments, and by mediating between the Bedouin and higher authorities. With Beersheba serving as a base, the British deployed their forces throughout the Bedouin region, keeping the peace more effectively than the Ottomans had. The British did not try to impose their own laws on the Bedouin, but rather endeavored to ‘institutionalize’ Bedouin law. Towards that end, Beersheba also became a juridical center, in addition to an administrative center for the authorities [Gal-Pe’er 1979: 269–98].

The British Mandate in Beersheba terminated in May 1948 as a result of the United Nations Resolution (29 November 1947) to divide Palestine between Jews and Palestinians. War broke out between Arabs and Jews. Muhammad ‘Abd al-Hady was the last *qaimaqam* in Beersheba during the British period. The British left Beersheba on May 14, 1948, in an impressive ceremony attended by Bedouin leaders and senior government officials. The Union Jack was lowered, and the Palestinian flag raised over the Saraya House by the mayor of Beersheba, Mr. Shafiq Mushtaha. Arab rule over Beersheba lasted only a few months, until the capture of the city by the Israel Defense Forces on October 21, 1948. As a result of the war, no Arabs remained in Beersheba [Abu-Khusa 1994: 274–86; al-Dabbagh 1991: 360].

The law in the State of Israel grants equal rights to all citizens (Shapira 2006: 448). Concerning the protections of individuals, the law and courts safeguard the rights of Arab citizens (H.C.J 6698/95). However, the legal authorities have not recognized the Arab population as a separate community comprised of a minority entitled to collective rights (Barzilai 2001: 55; Jabarin 2001: 53). In this light, the law indiscriminately protects all holy places in Israel, yet the regulations issued by the (former) Ministry of Religion mention only Jewish holy places (Protection of Holy Places Law, 1967).

The Ordeal of the Mosque

After constructing the Great Mosque in the town center of Beersheba (*Beer al-Saba’*) in 1904, it was used for prayer for next forty two years. After 1948², with the establishment of the State of Israel, the

² In that year, there were two mosques in the city: the Great Mosque and the Mosque of Haj Issa Bsiso. After 1948, the Great Mosque became an archeological

new Israeli government converted the mosque into a museum, preventing Muslims from praying there.

In 2011, almost a decade after petitioners went to the High Court of Justice to request to convert the mosque back into a place of prayer for Muslims. The judges ruled instead that the building should be used as a museum of Islamic culture. Even this was more satisfactory to the petitioners than the position of the Beersheba Municipality, which instead sought to open a “Museum of the Cultures of the Sons of Abraham” and opposed the use of the mosque for prayer, claiming that doing so would “**create violence and disturb the public order**”.

In August 2012, the Beersheba municipality³ added fuel to the fire when its officials decided to organize a wine festival in the courtyard of the historic Beersheba mosque. This decision evoked protests and condemnation by local and international Muslim community leaders. They did not stand alone, however. A diverse group formed to protest the decision. It included politicians, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, a senior Turkish government official, the Islamic Movement in Israel, the Adalah Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, Jewish activists who support co-existence between Arabs and Jews, and Christians, including the Greek Orthodox Archbishop, Atallah Hanna. Together, they sharply criticized the Beersheba municipal officials for using the mosque as a venue for a wine festival to promote the products of Israeli winemakers.

The Islamic organizations described the wine festival as an act of blasphemy and a violation to be added to the crime of closing the mosque and preventing Muslims from praying there. This violation, they argued, was part of a series of ongoing attempts to desecrate and obliterate Islamic sanctuaries and antiquities in Palestine under the mantle of “historic preservation”. They claimed that local and national Israeli governments have pursued a policy of neutralizing the religious significance of mosques and the social and political power of those who pray in them. This is an important but under-acknowledged arena in which Palestinians and other Muslims have been marginalized under aggressive nationalism by Israeli leaders.

museum, while the second mosque was turned into a restaurant. The population of the city of Beersheba in 1946 was 6,490, all Arabs [Gal-Pe'er 1979: 286–290].

³ Mayor Ruvik Danilovich.

Responses

The decision of Beersheba's municipality to organize a wine festival in the courtyard of the mosque evoked protest, outrage, and condemnation by local and international Muslim community leaders and politicians. The Wine Festival took place from September 5 to 6, 2012. The festival was planned to feature alcoholic beverages from some 30 breweries and wineries from around the country, in addition to imported products. A number of musical performances were also planned. Some of the responses to these plans are described below:

August 9, 2012: Adalah

On August 9, 2012, Adalah sent a legal letter to the Attorney General of Israel, the Minister of Culture and Sports, and the Municipality of Beersheba demanding that they intervene and cancel the Sixth Annual "Salut Wine and Beer Festival", which was due to take place in the courtyard of the Great Mosque in Beersheba. Adalah requested that all activity that violated the sanctity of the mosque as well as the dignity of the thousands of Muslims who live in Beersheba and the tens of thousands who come to the city daily, be stopped immediately. This is a sensitive issue that endangers the interests of all Arab citizens of the State. The use of the courtyard of the mosque for drinking alcohol is a red line banned in Islam, and is completely incompatible with the mosque's intended use for prayer (Adalah Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel).

August 16, 2012: The Islamic Movements

The southern branch of the Islamic Movement expressed outrage over plans to hold a wine festival in Beersheba in a courtyard outside a building formerly used as a mosque. Even the publicity for the festival constitutes an "unforgivable sin" and "a harsh blow to Muslim sensitivities". The Islamic movement accused local Israeli leaders of carrying out "an ongoing policy of religious persecution targeting Palestinians in this region".

August 29, 2012: Negev Muslim leaders

Negev Muslim leaders are calling for mass prayers of protest in the coming days at Beersheba's historic Great Mosque to protest the city's plans to hold a wine festival in a nearby courtyard. The issue of the

festival, to be held early next month, is due to be raised Wednesday in sermons in mosques throughout the Negev [Yanir Yagna and Jack Khoury // Haaretz. 2012. August 29].

September 5-6, Today's Zaman

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and a senior Turkish government official have warned Israel against organizing a wine festival scheduled for September 5–6 in the courtyard of the historic Beersheba mosque. OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu strongly criticized Israel on Saturday over its plans to use the mosque as a venue for a wine festival to promote the products of Israeli winemakers. İhsanoğlu described the recent plan as a violation to be added to the crime of closing the mosque and preventing Muslims from praying there. “This violation is part of a series of ongoing attacks against Islamic sanctuaries and antiquities in Palestine aimed at obliterating and desecrating them, which is a deliberate provocation of Muslims in all parts of the world”. This act demonstrates grave disregard for the principles of international law and norms and that feeds the atmosphere of tension and instability in the region. İhsanoğlu also called on the international community, rights organizations, UNESCO, and the UN High Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations to take urgent action to stop these attacks and compel Israel to respect sanctuaries and places of worship.

Other Turkish officials responded similarly. Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Bekir Bozdağ also condemned the planned festival, calling it a provocation and characterizing it as disrespectful to Muslims. Bozdağ stated that mosques are places of worship for Muslims and disrespect for sacred places is a violation of human rights. Bozdağ further called on the Israeli government to “stop this violation”. Religious Affairs Directorate President Mehmet Görmez also reacted negatively to the wine festival, demanding that the Israeli government “act with reason and avoid such a disrespectful act against a house of worship that belongs to another religion”. Görmez stated that in the globalizing world, people of different religions live together in the same communities in most countries. He noted that “[i]t is essential that the beliefs of minorities are respected for members of different cultures and civilizations to live together in peace”. He said overt signs of disrespect to symbols sacred to another religion were provocative and a threat to the social order.

September 4, 2012: Ben White (freelance journalist, writer and activist)

A wine and beer festival to be held in the former Great Mosque in Beersheba is an exemplar of contemporary Israeli history. The municipality's plans have provoked anger from the country's Palestinian citizens, the establishment of a protest tent, and condemnation by community leaders and politicians. This episode is a microcosm of the hidden history of Israel, a country where town and country alike are strewn with reminders of the ongoing ethnic cleansing at the heart of the establishment of a "Jewish and democratic" state. The mosque of ethnically cleansed Palestinian village Al-Khalisa is now the museum of Qiryat Shemona.

September 5, 2012: The Journal of Turkish Weekly

The municipality of the Israeli city of Beersheba has withdrawn plans to hold a wine festival in the courtyard of the city's Great Mosque-turned-museum in the face of widespread protests and condemnations. Director of the Beersheba Mosque Museum, Dr. Dalia Manor, told The Anadolu Agency that the city assembly had decided to hold the festival outside the courtyard.

September 5, 2012: VESTNIK: Peter Lyukimson, Israel

The Israeli media said that Turkey was responsible for initiating protests against the wine festival. Some Turkish public organizations were agitating protesters against Israel. Meanwhile, Israel expressed surprise at the accusations, since the festival is held dozens of meters away from the mosque's fence. The mosque has been idle for years and was restored by the city authorities. Accusations of discrimination against Muslims and violation of their rights provoked justified indignation from Israel.

Space and Conflicts in Mixed Towns

Conflicts and struggles are part of an ongoing campaign to gain control over the ethnic and cultural identity of urban space in mixed towns. Ethnically mixed towns in Palestine emerged from the Ottoman *millet* system, and then evolved through the melting pot of the ethno-national conflict to become modern national configurations. In the first half of the twentieth century and, more dramatically, since 1948,

these cities were reconstituted as a new urban form. These mixed towns are in actual fact a fragmented fusion of colonial as well as local Palestinian and Israeli urban spaces [Monterescu & Rabinowitz 2007]. Scholars have usefully devised means of classifying different modalities of the “urban ethnic spectrum”, from assimilation through pluralism, segmentation, and polarization, all the way to cleansing. Within this simplified classification, Palestinian-Israeli⁴ mixed towns would probably range between polarization (Lydda, Ramle), segmentation (Jaffa, Acre), and pluralism (Haifa). The analysis of Jewish–Arab mixed towns takes the relationship between the Jewish majority and the Arab minority as its central object of study. Moreover, in this view the Arab “minority” becomes a key and active agent in the historical making of Israeli society and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict at large [Monterescu 2011: 274].

The scholarly and political discourse around ethnically mixed towns in Israel/Palestine is predicated on the tropes of indigeneness and immigration and their respective claims for territorial legitimacy and ownership [Kimmerling 2004]. Lockman argues (1996: 12) that the Arab and Jewish communities are represented as primordial, self-contained, and largely monolithic entities. By extension, communal identities are regarded as natural rather than constructed within larger fields of relations and forces that differentially affected subgroups among both Arabs and Jews. According to Monterescu (2011: 278–279) the two groups and their identities were constituted in a series of dialectic oppositions and homologies which not only opposed each other, but at the same time dialectically created each other, in dynamic but constantly asymmetrical relations of power. These processes, compounded by unresolved ethnic relations, economic tensions, and public policies, produce the cultural and political urban regime called “spatial heteronomy”. Rabinowitz and Monterescu (2008: 196) argue that mixed towns in Palestine/Israel are best characterized as emergent constellations, historically specific superpositions of earlier urban

⁴ This term refers to the Palestinians inside Israel. The term ‘Arab al-48’ was coined by the Arab countries in order to differentiate and perhaps draw a line between the Palestinians who live on the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and Arab countries, and the Palestinian citizens of Israel who remained inside Israel after its establishment in 1948 [Abu-Rabia 2008: 159–171]. In this paper I use the term Arabs in/inside Israel.

forms. The city can be viewed not as a container of ethnic “communities”, but as a locus of dialectic relationships between form, function, and structure [Lefebvre 1996: 101], in which social processes and urban “things” become intertwined [Harvey 1997: 19–27]. Modern urban spaces are mixed socio-spatial configurations and urban mix has often led to violent conflict over land, identity, and holy spaces. Palestine was host to two competing national projects: a local Palestinian Arab project and a colonizing Jewish-Zionist one. Both projects were equipped with coherent narratives of history and of entitlement: the Palestinians stressed native indigenous rights, whereas the Zionists emphasized primordial biblical promise and redemption from a dangerous diaspora in Europe [Rabinowitz and Monterescu 2008: 196–197]. Many of these mixed towns are still haunted by the bloody consequences of the old divisions. After 1948, the Arab communities lagged behind the Jews in education, health care, welfare, employment, planning, and development. Sixty years later, Arab communities in these residual mixed towns still include enclaves of poverty, poor educational facilities, widespread informal residential construction, and pockets of crime and violence. The 1980s saw the emergence of a new urban residential mix in Israel’s peripheral towns. New towns such as Natzeret Illit, as well as old, predominantly Palestinian towns depopulated in 1948 and reconstituted as exclusively Jewish new towns, such as Safad and Beersheba⁵ were becoming attractive to Arab families, who started moving to them to seek employment and cheaper residential options. Arab families from neighboring communities soon began renting and purchasing apartments. This phenomenon reflects the growth of a vital Arab middle class, financially able and politically and culturally willing to face the challenges associated with such choice of residence. Arabs by and large remain uninvolved in commerce, industry, education, and culture in the newly mixed towns, maintaining social ties and community focus in their neighboring communities of origin [Rabinowitz and Monterescu 2008: 198–212]. There is also a recent phenomenon of young, upwardly mobile Arabs, including university graduates, professionals, and artists who take up residence in long-established Jewish towns. Their relocation allows them to come closer to the economic, cultural, and political hubs

⁵ In Beer-Sheba this occurred after 1967. Among these were teachers, contractors, technicians, and other professionals.

of Israel [Herzog 2007; Rabinowitz and Monterescu 2008: 213; Rabinowitz 1997].

The Arabs in Israel, labeled ‘Arabs’ or ‘Palestinians’ by Israelis, are equally suspect as Palestinians and Arabs abroad due to their Israeli citizenship and general association with Israel. Seen from the Arab world, the Arabs in Israel emerge as an ambiguous and problematic element whose status in the national arena is yet to be determined, and whose very loyalty to the Palestinian nation might be suspect. Israel’s willingness to integrate its Arab citizens into economic, political, and social life might, in fact, further reduce their chances of clarifying their credentials in the eyes of Palestinians generally [Rabinowitz 2001: 71–74]. The Arabs in Israel claim that “[w]hen [they] are in Israel [they] miss the Palestinian people, but when [they] are in the Palestinian territories or Arab countries they consider [them] Israelis or friends of Israel; then [they] miss Israel”. It hurts me personally that most of the time we feel that we should apologize for staying to live in steadfastness (*samidun*⁶) in Israel [Abu-Rabia 2008: 159–171].

I would argue that rather than feeling estranged, some segments of the Arabs in Israel may be as cosmopolitan as the elites in business, religious movements, politics, media, arts, and academia. I am not so naive as to think that it is easy to achieve that sense of cosmopolitanism in Israel, since the Arabs in Israel at all times have to feel the suspicions and ‘stranger-hood’ inflicted upon them by the Israeli authorities and the majority society, which imposes itself tangibly on their senses. I think that many Arabs (in Israel) feel that they are alienated within Israeli society, at the same time Israel feels altogether alienated in the Middle East. The Palestinians in the Arab countries are labeled “Palestinians refugees”, but they have felt completely alienated in their “temporary host countries” during the last 64 years. The tragedy of both Palestinians and Israelis is that they share the same feeling of alienation in the Middle East, although they have different (and sometimes contrary) explanations for their feeling. This feeling of alienation and estrangement captures and controls their minds, mainly when they cross the borders from one country to other.

⁶ The term *samidun* means steadfastness in the face of the Zionists, and is used to describe Arab/Palestinians citizens in Israel. For more details see: [Khalidi R. 1997: 177–209, *Palestinian Identity: The Construction of Modern National Consciousness*, New York: Columbia University Press.

The way in which human beings divide space shows how they perceive the reality in which they live and points to their collective identity. Ethnic factors have a decisive influence on the distribution of the national space of Israeli Arabs. The reason for this lies in their sense that belonging to a national-ethnic minority affects the relationship between Jews and Arabs in the State of Israel. Some claim that Israeli Arabs are discriminated against because of their national-ethnic origin. Many young Arabs have voiced the opinion that Israel, because it is by definition a Jewish state, is unable to grant equal rights to Israeli Arabs. A hierarchical order is apparent in the fabric of identities of Israeli Arabs, which includes religious, ethnic, local, national, civil, personal, and family elements [Schnell 1994: 17–27]. The home, as a territorial unit, is usually a focal point that symbolizes the identity of its occupants [Cooper 1974]. Most Arab communities in Israel are homogeneous settlements: their populations consist entirely of Arabs of uniform ethnic origin. The Arab population does not tend to move to Jewish communities, except for a few minor examples that stem from several reasons, the main one being a housing shortage in Arab communities. In mixed cities as well, a high degree of spatial separation between Arab and Jewish populations is maintained [Kipnis & Schnell 1978]. In modern societies, people construct for themselves a fabric of identities at different hierarchical levels, emphasizing their family and national identity, and sometimes their regional identity. In the civil context, Arabs in Israel are striving to achieve equal rights and equal opportunities through legitimate democratic means [Schnell 1994: 36, 3.]

The strong sense of territoriality among Israeli Arabs is not only the result of intensive use of space, but also stems from their ethnic-national identity. Territories identified as Arab, whether because they have an Arab majority, or because they were previously owned by Arabs, are also perceived as territories that arouse feelings of home. When the *muezzin* signifies more than anything the feeling of home, its calls to prayer at set times, five times a day⁷, symbolize the dominance of the traditional lifestyle in everyday life. For the Arabs, the place where their ancestors have been buried for generations is the only home territory where they can realize their sense of territoriality [Schnell 1994: 76–86]. In many cases, defining historic moment is the

⁷ Fajr, dhuhr, ‘aser, masa, eisha/

disastrous loss of life, limb, property, and rights during the 1948 hostilities, an event subsumed under the powerful term *al-nakbah* — the Palestinians disaster [Rabinowitz: 2001: 74]. The vision of ‘a homeland awaiting’ is articulated as follows: “*People with no dream and vision cannot preserve a memory, and thus we lose our past. Without a vision, memories become a burden. The old church and the mosque we see at the entrance to Haifa become nuisance-disturbing landmarks commemorating our defeat. We keep suppressing them. We suppress our history*” [Zreik 1999]⁸.

Muslim and Christian Synergy

The fact that most Christians in Israel are Arabs and that Israeli leaders have doubted their loyalty to the State has added another problematic element to the relations between Israel and the local Christian community. At the official level, Israel has usually demonstrated a thoughtful attitude towards church establishments, but the situation of the Christian Arab citizens of the country has not improved much and there is little difference between the relations with Christians and those with Muslims. This situation has contributed to the identification of the Christian minority with the Muslim minority. However, it was the Christian minority (which is mainly urban and has a higher level of education than the Muslim minority) that was more aware than the Muslim minority of being discriminated against, and these characteristics have pushed Christian Arabs in Israel toward political organization and representation in the Knesset beyond their proportion in the population. It is important to note that the field of relations between Israel and the churches, the Christian community, and the Christian world in general is one of the most neglected in the policy and practice of the government authorities. Among the reasons for this are the residue of the historical relations between Jews and Christians; ignorance; the growing influence of ultra-Orthodox political parties, the increase in the power and influence of the ultra-Orthodox-national factors as opposed to more moderate approaches that existed in the past in the religious-Zionist camp, and in particular an Israeli agenda

⁸ [Zreik Raif 1999, ‘Through Arab Eyes’, *Haaretz Literature and Art Section*, 20 April 1999. (cited from Rabinowitz, Dan 2001:75).

laden with security-related, social, and economic problems [Ramon 2012].

We assume that when the Arab minority (Muslims and Christians in the State of Israel) is exposed to danger or the threat of damage or destruction, there are collaboration and a sense of empathy and solidarity between members of the ethnic minority who feel persecuted by the (Jewish) majority. It is important to note that this type of solidarity between church and mosque is rare, especially in the face of boundless religious attacks. The transition from the battlefield of the church to that of the mosque is perceived as very threatening to the Christian minority. There has been an escalation from defamatory slogans on the walls to sabotage and burning mosques, the attempt to burn churches, and the destruction of Christian and Muslim cemeteries, despite the severe condemnation and rabbis and other Jews and their expressions of empathy.

In light of the retaliatory degradation of mosques, churches, and cemeteries (both Muslim and Christian), the Christian Islamic Conference was held in Bethlehem under the banner “Together against Racism”. This conference was attended by Muslim leaders and muftis as well as the Roman Catholic Bishop and Archbishop and the Greek Orthodox Archbishop, all of whom presented lectures. Christian bishops, archbishops, and clerks visited Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, while Muslim leaders and muftis visited Christian churches.

It is important to note that this new type of solidarity, collaboration and a sense of empathy and solidarity between the religious leaders of Muslims and Christians are rare. The ancient conflict and contest between these two monotheistic religions, turned into new phenomenon of synergy.

Examples of defamatory slogans:

Anti-Christian graffiti was found on the walls of the Baptist Narkis Street Congregation and on a monastery in the Valley of the Cross in West Jerusalem, the Dormition Abbey in the Old City, reading: “Jesus is the son of a b **** h”, “Jesus son of Mary, the w ** re”, “Death to Christianity”, “Christians are monkeys”, and “Christians are slaves”. Cars that were parked outside the church were also vandalized, and their tires slashed. Graffiti of the type used by extremist settler in attacks on mosques in the last several years was left on the church walls.

The Supreme Court Decision

The petitioners, the Association for Assistance and Defense of the Rights of Bedouin in Israel and the Muslim Council of the Negev, appealed the decision of the Municipality of Beersheba to establish a general museum in the Grand Mosque in Beersheba. According to the petitioners, the decision violates the right to freedom of religion and worship as well as the right to dignity and equality, and the Muslim community should be allowed to use the place as a mosque once again. According to the respondent, an active mosque whose sole purpose is to take over the buildings out of extreme nationalist and religious motivations should not operate in the heart of a Jewish city.

The Supreme Court criticized the Beersheba Municipality, stating that it had not given appropriate weight to the issue of freedom of religion and worship and the legitimate expectation of the Muslim community to return and renew their religious connection with the mosque building. It was determined that the museum established in the building would be devoted to museum of Islamic culture, and that the petitioners had the right to contact the Planning Committee and demand the re-designation of the building from a museum to a place of prayer [Supreme Court 731/02, given on 22.6.2011].

Summary

Although there is a consensus in the East, as in the West, regarding the human rights of freedom of religion and free access to holy places, the respect of sanctuaries and places of worship, but in the twenty-first century, in practical terms, the situation is not so simple. Sometimes places of worship are perceived as a threat or a danger to the quality of life of the majority, as is the case in Europe, where in some countries it is forbidden to build minarets on mosques, or in the case of the mosque in Beersheba, discussed here, where use of the mosque for prayer was not allowed based on the assumption that it would “**create violence and disturb the public order**”. The case of the Great Mosque and cemeteries (for Muslims and Christians) in Beersheba are a good exemplar for other mosques and cemeteries in Israel, but not for all of them.

The formation of a multi-faith coalition of Muslims, Jews, and Christians to protect the sanctity of the mosque and cemeteries, has been formed around the principles of peaceful coexistence and

interfaith. This formation of a multi-faith coalition has been existed, according to my view, because Muslims and Christians are minorities in Israel. The consequences of this coalition, mainly between Muslims and Christians, that Muslims Chief Qadis and Christians Archbishops cooperated together in order to protect their sanctuaries and places of worship in Israel and Palestine.

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The British military cemetery in Beersheba, for Allied soldiers who died in World War I



The Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church of Jerusalem Atalla Hanna together with Sheikh Ekrima Sa'id Sabri, the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine