THE TWO DEATHS OF BASEM RISHMAWI: IDENTITY CONSTRUCTIONS AND RECONSTRUCTIONS IN A MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN PALESTINIAN COMMUNITY[1]

in Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power. March 2001. VIII:1. pp. 47-81.

Abstract: This article illuminates political transformations in a West Bank Palestinian town over the past decade by examining the ways stories of a killing which took place in 1981 produced radically different conceptions of community during the period of intensive *intifada* mobilisation and subsequently as the Palestinian National Authority established its rule in the wake of the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Agreements. The paper examines how political arrangements between the Israeli state and the Palestinian administration forced the local community to negotiate intra-communal conflicts in the terms of an archaic and divisive idiom of tribal law which in turn accelerated the disintegration of the nationalist solidarity which had characterized *intifada*-period social life. The paper contends that shared perceptions of antagonistic violence are central to processes of collective identity formation, and shows that discursive shifts can, in certain contexts, give rise to new formations of identity antipathetic to those which preceded them.

Keywords: Antagonism, Nationalism, *intifada*, Feud, Narrative

Many observers of - as well as many participants in - the Palestinian *intifada* (literally 'shaking off') saw the harbingers of a new Middle East in the radical forms of social and political organization thrown up by West Bank and Gazan Palestinians against the continuation of Israeli dominion over their homeland . Edward Said, introducing Lockman and Beinin's *Intifada: the Palestinian Uprising Against Israeli Occupation*, saw the disappearance of social fragmentation, the marginalization of old forms of social organizations, and the elevation of women in the struggle to roles equivalent to those of men as "momentous changes ... [which will] surely have an effect throughout the Middle East as the twentieth century approaches its end" (Said 1989: 21). Such enthusiasm, however, began to erode as the *intifada* changed character in its latter years and after the *intifada* was called off following the secret Oslo Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. Glenn Robinson's *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution*, written in 1995 but published in 1997, expresses in its title the frustration felt by many of those observers and participants as the Palestine National Authority began to consolidate its rule and halt the already faltering momentum of that earlier radicalism. By 1998 Lisa Taraki, a Palestinian sociologist, was noting that despite the radical reworkings of Palestinian society effected by widespread communal mobilization against the occupation the changes were not irreversible: "Traditional forces may assert or reassert themselves in different times and different forms....there are some indications that there may be a revival of the

hamula [clan or extended family][2] structure in the areas of social support and political life" (Taraki 1998: n.p.).

This paper examines political and social changes which have taken place between the late 1980s and the present day in Beit Sahour, a small town a mile to the east of Bethlehem which garnered international fame for first articulating and enacting the strategy of civil disobedience which gave form to the first years of the *intifaḍa*. The paper focuses on stories and activities devolving from the 1981 killing of a young Beit Sahouri, Basem Rishmawi, and uses the 'micro-politics' of affiliation and antagonism which resulted from evolving understandings of why he was killed and who he was killed by to illuminate more widescale changes effecting post-*intifaḍa* Palestinian society in general. The paper gives particular attention to 'the revival of the hamula structure' in the dynamics of everyday life, and attempts to show how political decisions on the national and international level shaped and constrained local political decisions so as to defeat moves towards using radical *intifaḍa*-period means of envisaging community and dealing with conflict. In stressing that the ascendency of traditional forces in community life was - and continues to be - deeply contested, this paper shows the local community as an active, deeply political arena for assessing situations and engendering solutions and suggests that there is nothing inherently stable about the current hegemony of the 'traditional'. To once again cite Taraki's assessment of the state of contemporary Palestinian society, the "hegemony [of traditional forces] over political life is not a matter that has been settled, even in the short term" (Taraki 1998: n.p.).

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The sheer brutality of the events remains. Sometime between eight and nine p.m. on the 23rd of March, 1981, Basem Rishmawi left his fiancee's home in the West Bank town of Beit Sahour to walk the short distance to his family's house. He never arrived. Five days later a late night call from the Bethlehem offices of the Israeli military police announced to his family that Basem's body had been found on the 25th in the vicinity of the town dump. According to the Shin Bet officer who called, a military investigation had revealed that Rishmawi had been killed while preparing a bomb which had exploded prematurely. He announced that the body would be delivered that night to the Greek Orthodox church for interment. Soldiers, arriving before the body, allowed only around a dozen people - immediate family members and a priest - into the church and it was these who were able to briefly examine the corpse when it was delivered at approximately 1:30 a.m. on the 29th. It was immediately clear that there was something wrong with the officer's story; although the body had been dismembered by an explosion, there seemed to be no connection between the damage that force had caused and other wounds such as heavy bruising on the face, multiple penetration wounds, and deep gouging - seemingly caused by brutally tight binding - on the wrists. As the mourners whispered amongst themselves that it appeared as though a bomb had been set off in or next to the body after death, armed soldiers watched over the brief funeral and the subsequent entombment in the family plot.

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I first encountered Basem's name and image in January 1990 after members of one of the town's numerous *intifaḍa* 'committees' had smuggled me into the town past roadblocks erected by the military authorities to enforce a siege imposed in response to Beit Sahour's protracted maintenance of a tax strike[3]. Hung in a place of honour on the wall of the reception room of a house my 'guides' had brought me to was a picture of a solemn-looking young man. When I asked about it, I was told the story of Basem's killing, and it was made clear that - although no one knew whether he had been killed by Jewish settlers or by Israeli soldiers - he was an arbitrarily-chosen victim of Israeli oppression of Palestinians: "it could have happened to anybody, and by chance the victim was Basem" (8.1.90)[4].

I would come across Basem's picture again and again in the following days as I interviewed people whose houses and shops had been stripped by squads of soldiers led by tax collectors, whose husbands, fathers, sons or daughters had been imprisoned or were moving from house to house avoiding arrest, and whose will to revolt was fanned by the government's attempts to break a town Jerusalem Palestinians characterised as "tougher than Gaza" (6.1.90). During that week informants repeatedly asserted that all Beit Sahourans - and by extension all Palestinians - were rendered equivalent by the activities of a occupying force which - in attacking a Palestinian presence - failed to distinguish between Muslim or Christian, male or female, young or old, rich or poor. A Christian shopkeeper told me "there is no difference; we are under the same conditions, the same oppression, the same hopes, the same policy...the occupation does not differentiate between Muslim and Christian" (8.1.90) and later a Muslim schoolteacher said "we live together as the same people; we feel there is another one who is enemy to us both" (11.1.90).

Basem - who had apparently been kidnaped, tortured to death, and then torn to pieces by his Israeli captors so that his remains could bear the brand 'terrorist' - stood in this situation as a sort of Palestinian Everyman. He - like other Beit Sahouris before him - had already suffered the martyrdom Palestinians under occupation could see as the inheritance they stood to receive so long as the logic of the Zionist occupation of Palestine held sway. When Edmond Ghanem was killed on the 18th of July 1988 by a soldier who dropped a building block on him from a guard post on top of a three story building, Beit Sahouris could see the event as yet more evidence of the presence of a systematic programme of extermination mobilised against them and this, like the killing of Basem Rishmawi, strengthened their resolve to protect themselves by uniting to fight the common enemy. Symptomatic of this collectively espoused resolve was the 1993 calendar published by the Arab Orthodox Club[5] which displays, beneath an image of Beit Sahour prominently foregrounding Catholic and Orthodox churches as well as the town's mosque, photographs of seventeen Beit Sahouris who shared not their religious affiliation but the fact that they, Muslim and Christian alike, had been martyred by the forces of occupation (six in 1992).

The idiom of martyrdom became the language of community during the early days of the *intifaḍa*. One man, telling me of the killings in Gaza which sparked off the *intifaḍa*[6], claimed his immediate response to the news of the murders was the thought "why am I not this man?" (8.1.90). He knew Israeli soldiers killed Palestinians simply because they were Palestinians and since he was Palestinian he was sure that it had just been a matter of contingency that he had not been one of the victims. It was his identification with this potential 'fate' that gave rise to his, and his neighbors', resolve to overthrow an occupation which offered that future to all Palestinians: "We see that one day it is one person, and the next day another. The following day it may be us, so we say *'Hellaʒ'* [enough] and begin to work to stop it"[7]. The soldier's (or settler's) undifferentiating gaze created a defensive 'Palestinian' identity out of a society which, without that antagonism, might not have discerned a unity within the congeries of identities constituted by allegiances to family, class, religion and locale.

Loss and victimisation at the hands of the collective enemy became, in the context of *intifaḍa*, elements of a prestige economy. As I stood in the midst of scattered clothing, bedding, and broken furniture left behind after a tax raid on the apartment of a couple who ran a small electrical goods shop, the woman told me that "the people who have not had their things confiscated by the tax men are envious of those who have; it's like building a new house" (10.1.90). In this potlatch-like counter-economy status accrued to those who 'gave freely' (and aggressively) to the enemy (Mauss 1969: 31-45), and 'new houses' - stripped and desecrated by predatory military assaults - took the place of the tidy apartments and small houses of the pre-*intifaḍa* years. Over the previous twenty years Beit Sahour had extensively developed an infrastructure of small local industry (much of it finishing clothing for the Israeli market) which had considerably raised the general standard of living above that of other West Bank communities. People with whom I spoke in 1990 prided themselves however in throwing back at the Israelis wealth which had come to seem no more than payment for accepting occupation. Beit Sahourans played a vanguard role in the uprising by refusing to pay taxes to the occupying government and by systematically disengaging from the Israeli economy. The Israeli response was draconian, but a recently-plundered pharmacist told me that "if the bedouin can live in tents, so can we. We have our agriculture and it is very good. The Jerusalem Post called us the 'Japan of the Palestine/Israel' but we can lose all that and go back to the fields" (12.1.90)[8].

Landscape, history, sectarianism, and social organization were reworked in popular discourses which circulated through and constituted the self-professedly revolutionary community of that period. Parts of the town which had previously been designated by topographic features or by the names of important persons or families who had lived in the area were renamed so as to resonate with the myths of Palestinian resistance. The town's highest sector (previously known as the *raʒ* or 'head') was renamed 'Shqeef Castle' so as to recall a famed Palestinian victory while other sectors

of the town became 'Tell al-Za'ter' and 'Shateela' to evoke militant refugee camps in the Lebanon[9]. When people spoke of local history they accentuated stories of coordinated resistances by the townspeople to earlier oppressions. I collected numerous accounts of Beit Sahour's resistance to the Ottoman draft during the First World War[10], of Muslims and Christians marching together to the shrine of Nebi Musa to oppose the British Mandate, of an Orthodox priest who cached arms to fight the British during the 1936-1939 revolt, of Baathist, Nasserite and finally Communist demonstrations against the Jordanian occupation, and of the long history of Beit Sahouran support for the Popular and Democratic Fronts during the period of Israeli hegemony. In these the 'we' of an historic and enduring community was reified and affirmed[11]. Underplayed in - or simply excluded from - these narratives were past clashes with local Bedouin communities (the *ta'amra)*, disputes over land ownership, struggles between classes, feuding between family groups, and the divisive responses of local Christians and Muslims to the differentiating policies of the various colonizing powers which had dominated the town. Beit Sahourans - at least in the presence of a foreign anthropologist[12] - vied to relate stories of a past in which the most salient thing was the spirit of intercommunal solidarity against oppression which the narrators had extrapolated from the present situation.

These stories celebrated Beit Sahour's overcoming of the temptation to divide along the lines provided by the towns persons' various religious affiliations. In 1984 the Beit Sahouri population stood at 8,900 persons of which 17% were Sunni Muslim, 67% were Greek Orthodox, 8% were Roman Catholic, 6% were Greek Catholic, and 2% were Lutheran (Pena 1984)[13]. I cite below two statements - one by the Muslim schoolteacher quoted earlier and another by an Orthodox member of the medical committee which had smuggled me into town (itself made up a Muslim, two Orthodox and one Latin Christian) - which are representative of the statements Muslims and Christians alike made to me during the visit:

We do not remember we are from different religions unless somebody from outside reminds us....We [Muslims] carry *arak* [a local anis-flavored hard alcohol] and seeds to weddings; we bring to them what makes them happy. We are not fanatic; we do not have such sensitivities. We are trying to keep living in the same way, not being influenced by the occupation mentality. They [the Israelis] are trying to break apart a culture we have built over centuries (11.1.90);

and

It is you outside who try to make a difference between the Christians and the Muslims. We are a people, we all go to each other's feasts, we visit with each other, we live the same life. We are one people (8.1.90).

That intercommunality was evident in public manifestations of solidarity such as the annual joint Christian-Muslim scout marches on Christmas day and the decision of the committees organizing the 'Day of Prayer for Peace' on 5 November 1989 to invite Shaikh Said al-Din al- Alami, Mufti of

Jerusalem and head of the Islamic Council, to announce from the pulpit of Beit Sahour's Orthodox Church a *fatwa* (religious ruling) against the purchase of the confiscated Beit Sahouran goods Israeli tax officials were putting up for auction in Tel Aviv. It was also memorialized in the Municipality's decision to refuse to allow any of the Holy Land's churches to claim and build a shrine over the site of recent apparitions of the Virgin Mary in a cistern under the town market. It instead resolved to erect there a non-denominational municipal shrine (Bowman 1993: 448-451). That shrine's caretaker, an Orthodox man employed by the Municipality, asserted "we are here Muslim and Christian, there are two Christian groups. The Municipality builds for all the people and the people all own and use the well" (12.1.90).

During the *intifada* local political activities were organised by thirty five 'neighborhood committees' representing thirty five neighborhoods. The activities of these committees were coordinated and issues pertaining to the whole of the town were dealt with by the *Sulha*, a parallel municipal authority established in 1989. Previously Beit Sahour's internal political structures had been based on the town's clans. Issues arising within a family or between families were debated in family forums and then forwarded through a clan elder to the Municipal council (constituted of representatives of the eight major families, six of which were Christian and two Muslim). This familial locus tended to ensure that municipal engagement in local issues pertained either to interfamilial or intersectarian disputes. Membership on the neighborhood committees was, however, decided by local elections which - in a town whose considerable twentieth century expansion had ensured that most neighborhoods were made up of two or more clan groupings - blunted the salience of the *hamula* groupings and focused committee discussions on concerns shared by all those living in the neighborhood; health care, security, provision of water, electricity, food, income for the families of people killed, injured or imprisoned, *etcetera* (14.3.1999). The *Sulha* was in turn directed by an executive committee elected by representatives of the twenty-two major political, cultural and social organizations in the town and was concerned with issues pertinent to the entirety of the town; raising money to support the needy, settling disputes, and coordinating responses to *intifada* situations (Robinson 1997: 80-81). The idiom of identity was thus transformed from one grounded on *hamula* and sect to one built on political struggle and the nation.

In what Robinson refers to as a 'revolution' (albeit 'incomplete'), the Beit Sahouri community restructured not only its imaging of itself as a community but also the social and political structures through which it decided and expressed its collective will. Basem Rishmawi, although he was both a Greek Orthodox Christian and a member of the al-Qazaha *hamula*, was a symbol for Beit Sahouris throughout the years of *intifada* of what it meant to be a Palestinian under Israeli occupation. His martyrdom was a particularly gruesome and spectacular instance of what Palestinians in Beit Sahour and throughout the West Bank and Gaza learned under Likkud's Sharon and then through the tutelage of Yitzak Rabin's 'iron fist policy' (with its policy of breaking the bones and bulldozing the houses of stone throwers) was the fate they too could expect

if the occupation were to continue. Basem's sad yet severe gaze joined those of the other Beit Sahouri martyrs in gazing from the secular iconostases which were the poster-bedecked streets, the walls of the portrait-dense reception rooms of people's houses, and the illustrated calendars in which the dates of the deaths of martyrs coexisted with those of people's present and future. He and his comrades looked out over the people of Beit Sahour as they struggled to find ways of celebrating Palestinian identity without having to follow Basem's path to a terrible death in a back road dumping ground.

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Basem's name began to circulate again two years after the Oslo Agreements had brought the *intifada* to a close. In the summer of 1995, soon after Israeli troops withdrew from the Bethlehem region leaving it under the control of the Palestine National Authority, a Beit Sahouri named Faez Qumsiyyeh was arrested by Palestinian security for non-political criminal activities. Under interrogation Faez confessed to having been involved - along with his cousin Sammer Qumsiyyeh and a local Muslim - in the murder of Basem Rishmawi.

For the second time events related to the death of Basem Rishmawi engaged Beit Sahour: one woman, an affinal relative, told me "it was like he had been killed again, and all the Rishmawis and much of the rest of the town went into mourning" (19.12.97). This time, however, the story of his killing did not circulate in the midst of a burgeoning nationalist mobilization leading to *intifada* but instead accompanied a 'winding down' of commitment and solidarity in the wake of a partial amelioration of occupation. Since the heady days of the tax strike Beit Sahour's fervor had been substantially diminished by the failure of the Palestine Liberation Organization to provide the support necessary to bulwark commitment in the face of fiercely punitive measures:

> the PLO in Tunis [had] failed to support Bayt Sahur's [sic] campaign, as it feared the political consequences of such grassroots initiatives....Tunis's - and particularly Yasir Arafat's - disregard for Bayt Sahur's campaign of civil disobedience was strongly felt by members of the new elite in Bayt Sahur [who]...were nearly unanimous in their view that Tunis not only did not support Bayt Sahur's efforts but actually tried to thwart them by privately urging others to pay their taxes and by more closely aligning itself with members of the old elite (Robinson 1997: 88 and 89).

Communal solidarity began to unravel as those who had already lost considerable amounts of property grew increasingly aggrieved at others who, fearful of finding themselves in similar penury, began covertly to pay their taxes.

After the arrests in March 1990 of the remaining members of the underground grassroots United National Leadership of the Uprising committees which had coordinated internal *intifada* strategy, the uprising was directed from outside by the various external factions (*Fateh*, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Palestine People's Party) operating semi-autonomously under the PLO umbrella. From then on political activity in Beit Sahour, as elsewhere in the Territories, was coordinated and carried out by competing

political factions paid for their activism and remunerated for their losses by the outside organizations. Many argued this took the revolution away from the people and gave it to the politicians who destroyed it: "the *intifada* was made by those on the street and broken as soon as they began 'throwing stones for money'"(29.7.94). Political factionalism and differential access to support and protection from loss eroded the sense of 'equivalence' which Laclau and Mouffe point out is a fundamental element of popular mobilisation (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 63).

Tendencies towards fragmentation were aggravated by the peace settlement. This, although it failed to ameliorate day to day deprivations[14], removed Israeli soldiers from the streets and hid the operations of the Israeli security apparatus behind the proxy Palestinian 'Preventative Security Force'. Everyday evidence of 'another one who is enemy to us both' virtually disappeared, and as the focus that antagonist had provided diffused the sense of collective solidarity with which Beit Sahour had faced its enemy began to dissipate.

To understand the role of the antagonist in the formation - and maintenance - of Palestinian identity one must comprehend the ways in which politicized identities develop out of those forms of identity characteristic of the everyday exchanges of communal life. In the development of Palestinian solidarity, differential aspects of identity - based on religion, class position, *hamula* affiliation, party membership, and even to some degree age and gender - were *subsumed* within an enveloping political and public identity. Thus a contingent political identity came to seem essential, while more ingrained and enduring identities were perceived as secondary or limited in salience.

During my fieldwork in Jerusalem's Old City between 1983 and 1985 I observed a discursive shift as Palestinians were forced by increasing hostile attention from soldiers, settlers and tax collectors to recognise that their communality as 'Palestinians' was more salient than the differences religious affiliation opened between them. People who in the early months of my fieldwork had called themselves 'Palestinian Christians' or 'Palestinian Muslims' pointedly began to reverse the order of the substantive and the adjectival so as to say "I am not a Palestinian Christian; I am a Christian Palestinian" (14.2.85 and *passim*) or "I am a Palestinian first, then a Muslim" (Bowman 1986: 5). In Beit Sahour elements of identity which made for difference were similarly encompassed by those supporting communal solidarity. A Catholic friend who was a committed activist marked a radical separation between the public space of national communalism and the private terrain of sectarian difference in telling me that "my relation with my god is in my heart and my house; it does not concern the public. In the street I am Aissa" (10.1.90).

Outstanding in such cases is the perceived presence of an antagonist which dissolves the differences between those it threatens. What creates the space of perceived communality are not the routines of everyday life structuring and manifesting systems of difference and orchestrating relations between the variant vertical and horizontal role positionings of age, class, gender, education, appearance, religion, *etcetera* but the presence of an antagonism is perceived to threaten all within its purview with either physical extermination or the wholesale extirpation of their

differentiated, subsumed identities. In this sense the antagonism comes from 'outside' a system of social and cultural meanings and unifies what is inside as that which is at risk[15]. An antagonist is seen to put at risk a system's capacity to create and maintain identities. Thus, in an example cited by Laclau and Mouffe, "it is because a peasant *cannot be* a peasant that an antagonism exists with the landowner who is expelling him from his land" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 125); without land the practices which make up the *habitus* of a peasant's life are impossible to enact. In such situations the multiplex 'being' the antagonism threatens with impossibility shapes itself into an overarching political identity uniting all those who feel themselves at risk in the articulation of a counter-assertion which poses their collective being as an antithesis to the force working against them. More central than the diversity of the elements conjoined in opposition is the counterthrust of opposition itself; such political identity takes form as what, in Hegelian terms, one can call the negation of a negation.

Although the threat of death figures centrally in evoking antagonism, it is the danger that communal identity will be destroyed that is more important than actual bodily destruction. An antagonist gives rise to political identities by threatening social death, and in the Palestinian instance, as elsewhere (see Pettigrew 1997), the death of the martyr is powerful because it prefigures the potential extermination of the social body for which the martyr's body stands in. The threat Palestinians came to perceive the Israeli state as posing to them was not necessarily the threat of wholesale genocide (although as incidents in the Lebanon showed such genocide was not beyond belief) but what might be called 'politicide'[16].

Zionism threatened the death of a nation, but not the literal destruction of all those bodies which made up the Palestinian people. Golda Meir's famed assertion that Palestine was "a land without a people for a people without a land" discursively constructed the land of Palestine (which was to become Israel) as empty of a 'people' even though it might be populated by 'persons'. Those persons could live in Israel as 'Israeli Arabs' but under the Zionist ideology there was no place for them as 'Palestinians'. So long as Palestinians were 'Arabs' - a subordinate and stateless group with no inherent link to the specific territory the Israelis claimed as their own - they could be tolerated as labourers within the Zionist state. Rabbi Aviner of the Gush Emunim settlers' movement makes this clear:

the sons of Ismael among us have a right to live on the land, but, needless to say, this is true only on condition that they accept the Kingdom of Israel, agree that political sovereignty belongs to the People of Israel, and are prepared to be loyal and obedient citizens of the state. As Maimonides says: "They must not raise a head in Israel, but be submissive under hand" (quoted in Karpin and Friedman 1999: 42).

Palestinian assertions of 'Palestinian' identity and their attempts to retain a grip on lands being expropriated by state and settler activities marked them as antagonistic to Israel's state-building project and rendered them subject to various forms of violence, ranging from expropriation and

expulsion through to assassination and - with Israel's 1982 attempt to destroy the PLO in the Lebanon - extermination[17].

That process of identity formation had been visible in Beit Sahour in the period leading up to and through the first years of the *intifada*. By the time Faez Qumsiyya confessed to killing Basem Rishmawi, however, consensus on Israel's antagonism had been eroded not only by factionalization but as well by the sense of many that the Palestine National Authority's establishment was the first step of an inexorable progress towards Palestinian statehood. That perception transformed the Israeli state from a force with the disallowal of a Palestinian state and people as its *modus vivendi* to a partner in mutually beneficial contractual relations with a Palestinian entity. 'Palestinian' - when no longer the marker of a domain at risk but instead the collective label of those gathered within the embrace of a territorially defined state - loses its defensive salience, and new articulations of identity, spawned by new perceptions of antagonism operating *within* the Palestinian community rather than *against* that community as a whole, can begin to emerge (see Bowman 1994). It was in such a context that the 'second death' of Basem Rishmawi would be interpreted, and acted upon, in ways very different from those which followed on his 'first death'.

The significant difference between the knowledge which circulated after Basem's 'first death' and that which followed his 'second' is that while the perpetrators of the 'first' were known to be national 'others' - either soldiers or settlers - those who killed Basem the 'second' time were known to be Beit Sahouris. The devastating implications of that emerges strongly from the response of one informant to my query about the possibility of a revenge killing: "no one in Beit Sahour kills others in Beit Sahour" (16.4.98)[18]. The fact that the second killing showed precisely that Beit Sahouris could kill Beit Sahouris not only invalidated that adage but threatened to dissolve the community itself.

The description of Basem's killing which emerged was particularly ugly. As Basem got into a car which had stopped to offer him a ride as protection from the rain, he was overcome and bound with wire by the three men inside - Faez Qumsiyyeh, Faez's cousin Sammer, and an unnamed man, a Muslim. The three then drove him to the valley where his body was later found where they tortured him. The torture, according to those who spoke of it, was not motivated by any desire for knowledge but by a combination of sheer sadistic pleasure and the fact that Sammer Qumsiyyeh felt that Basem had once slighted him. Basem was beaten and his face, arms and body burned with cigarettes. He was cut in his stomach, arms and legs, and chained to the bumper of the car and dragged along the road. Finally he was stabbed to death. The body was disposed in the rubbish dump as an intentional gesture of degradation and shaming (19.12.97 and other locations).

It is difficult to discern the source of these details as it seems unlikely that Faez - except under extreme duress - would have divulged such information. Many attributed the knowledge to a file alleged to have been left behind when Israeli security abandoned the Bethlehem police station. The file, clearly labeled 'Basem Rishmawi', indicated that the three men, under instructions from

Bishara Qumsiyyeh - Sammer's father - had kidnaped and executed Basem because of Basem's association with *Fateh*. People claimed the file supplied details of the torture and the killing as well as of Shin Bet's subsequent recovery and deceptive mutilation of it[19].

Regardless of whether or not the file existed, there was no doubt of Bishara Qumsiyyeh's involvement. Bishara Qumsiyyeh had been leader of the Bethlehem region 'Village League'[20] throughout the 1980s, and ran an Israeli-armed 'militia' of thugs and criminals which imposed a reign of terror on Beit Sahour and neighboring sites of nationalist sentiment such as Bethlehem University. Although it had been believed before the 'second death' that League members never killed Palestinians, the League was well known for collaboration and acts of intimidation. In the late 1980s members broke up and sprayed with gunfire the premises of the Arab Orthodox Club. One of the great victories of the *intifada* in Beit Sahour was the defeat of the Village League; in March 1988 Bishara Qumsiyyeh was forced to mount the pulpit of the Orthodox church to confess, before a capacity crowd, to having been a collaborator and to renounce further association with the military.

Rishmawi's murder fitted the Village League agenda perfectly. Basem had, six months before his killing, broke with the Palestine People's Party (Communist) to join *Fateh* (telephone interview: 14.1.99) which had arranged for his training in guerilla camps in Syria during a supposed family visit to Jordan (14.1.99, 13.3.99). In light of this, it is not clear why Beit Sahouris did not assess the killing as a straightforward expression of Israeli antagonism. It was certainly known that the Village Leagues had worked as extra-legal extensions of Israeli rule, and the role of the military in returning the body implicated it in the murder. Nonetheless, despite clear indicators that Basem had been executed by agents carrying out an explicit Israeli policy of eliminating PLO operatives in the Occupied Territories, the town took the killing as very much an intra-communal concern.

The town had, in effect, been given no choice. The Palestinian officials who had overseen Faez's confession refused to try Faez and his accomplices for collaboration and murder, and instead instructed the Rishmawi and Qumsiyyeh families to settle the case between them by *Atwah*, or tribal law (16.12.97). Many Beit Sahouris believe that unpublished agreements behind the Oslo Accords prevented the Palestinian judiciary from prosecuting collaborators Israel considered sufficiently important to protect (13.12.97). Bishara Qumsiyyeh had been named in Faez's confession and would have been implicated had a trial been allowed to proceed[21]. As the families involved knew of Faez's confession (he had repeated it to his parents and asked them to arrange reconciliation with Basem's family), the only way to quiet the case and its dangerous ramifications quickly was to hand it over to them, through the medium of tribal law, for extra-judicial settlement. The police clearly wanted the case closed quickly and intervened at several points to insist that rapid progress be made towards an amenable settlement (16.12.97); when at one point they feared

the Rishmawis would refuse a settlement they arrested and beat Basem's brother and another Rishmawi to let the family know they would not tolerate the case being dragged on (telephone interview, 14.1.99; field notes, 15.3.99).

The problem posed to the town by the case being handed over to tribal law, rather than pursued under 'general law', is that the categories involved in the former are collective whereas the latter deals with individuals. *Atwah*, or tribal law[22], is designed to negotiate the payment of blood money in cases of inter-group rivalries so as to effect a reconciliation between two groups forced into hostilities by the actions of individual members. Beit Sahour, however, did not see itself as constituted by separate groups, and many remained advocates of the communal solidarity evinced during the *intifaḍa* and were convinced of the danger to the town of treating the acts of individual agents in terms of collective responsibility. Relations within Beit Sahour - particularly amongst the Christian families - were tightly imbricated, and although one could distinguish nominally between distinct *ḥamulaṡ* (and within each of them between individual *'ailaḥṡ* , or constituent extended families) the interrelations between these were formally and informally dense. While any murder of townsperson by townsperson in a small town is potentially explosive, the murder of a Rishmawi by a Qumsiyyeh was particularly divisive insofar as both are *'ailaḥṡ* of the al-Qazaha *ḥamula* (to which forty percent of the town's population belongs) and both families are almost exclusively Greek Orthodox (the religious community to which two thirds of the town's population is affiliated). Were extended family loyalties to predominate over communal loyalties a wedge would be driven through the midst of one of the town's two major clans and - insofar as intermarriage between members of the two *'ailaḥṡ* are not uncommon - nuclear families would be riven. Furthermore, although parallel cousin marriages occur in Beit Sahour, marriages between Christian families often not only cross *ḥamula* boundaries but also knit together couples (and thus families) across sectarian divides[23]. People stressed that almost every Christian in the town, with the exception of some who came - or whose families came - to Beit Sahour as refugees in 1948 and after 1967[24], were related - directly, through ties of god-parenthood, or both - to both the Qumsiyyeh and Rishmawi families. The children of one of my primary informants (who was of the Al-Jaraysah clan) were god-parented by Rishmawis, while his brother's children were god-parented by Qumsiyyehs. A feud between Rishmawis and Qumsiyyehs would impede if not block the operation of a number of kin and patronage networks linking Christian Beit Sahouris across a multitude of fields. The Orthodox community, which currently shares a single church, would risk a split. The Arab Orthodox Club, with representatives of each of these *'ailaḥṡ* in its governing positions, would be disrupted by hostilities and would, if it survived, no longer represent or serve as a forum for the whole of the (male) community. Finally, the town itself - which has a minority Muslim population yet which is sited in a region with a Muslim majority - might be placed at risk if the issue of the third man - who no one would name and many would not even indicate was Muslim - opened

hostilities between Muslims and Christians.

As a result, when representatives of the families of Faez and Sammer Qumsiyyeh[25] approached the Rishmawis to request a truce so that negotiations over blood money could be initiated, a number of moves were made by towns persons and community organizations to bridge the gaps prized open by the violence of the events.

One of the first moves made was the renunciation of Faez Qumsiyyeh (and by implication the entirety of his immediate family) by the elders of other Qumsiyyeh families in the town and their reiteration of their 1988 rejection of the family of Bishara and Sammer[26]. Although it was generally held to be inconceivable that anyone other than a "psychopath" (15.1.99) would think of taking vengeance on the families, form was, nonetheless, followed, and the delegations which approached the Rishmawi elders to sue for peace did not include Qumsiyyehs but were composed of spokesmen from other Sahouri families through which the families of the killers had chosen to speak. The guarantors confessed the guilt of their respective clients and promised that an agreement on blood money payment would be reached. In response elders from the Rishmawi family guaranteed that no revenge would be taken.

The Rishmawi response to the Qumsiyyeh admission of responsibility was far from unanimous; questions of who would negotiate the settlement and what sort of settlement it would be had to be worked through. The Rishmawi *'ailah* is large, and in the crowded *maglis*[27] in which the representatives of its many households gathered discussion went on far into the night over how the case would be handled. The divide lay between two camps. One, which contained many of those who had been active participants in *intifada* mobilization, said the killing was a political act which had been carried out against 'the nation'. Negotiations should therefore be handled by 'the national front', in other words by a committee made up of representatives of the political parties active in the town. The other camp was occupied by two groups with distinct agendas which could nonetheless both be met by threating the matter as a family affair. The larger of the two was concerned to ensure that Basem's family got the greatest possible settlement out of the negotiations. Basem, as his parents's eldest son, would have been their chief support and the family - since his death - had been impovershed by his father's subsequent stroke. This group was concerned that while a settlement between the Qumsiyyehs and a bloc made up of the national parties would serve to 'build bridges' and thus to end the threat of factionalization within the town, it would result in only a nominal payment of blood money and would leave Basem's family little better off than it was at present. The other party in the 'anti-national' bloc was that of the traditionalists, and although this was neither a popular nor a powerful position it was held by several of old men who felt their authority had been eroded through the years of popular mobilization[28]. They wanted things done 'properly', and were anxious to prevent yet another 'coup' by the political forces which had usurped power they felt belonged in the hands of the

hostilities between Muslims and Christians.

deals with individuals. *Atwah*, or tribal law[22], is designed to negotiate the payment of blood money in cases of inter-group rivalries so as to effect a reconciliation between two groups forced into hostilities by the actions of individual members. Beit Sahour, however, did not see itself as constituted by separate groups, and many remained advocates of the communal solidarity evinced during the *intifaḍa* and were convinced of the danger to the town of treating the acts of individual agents in terms of collective responsibility. Relations within Beit Sahour - particularly amongst the Christian families - were tightly imbricated, and although one could distinguish nominally between distinct *ḥamulaṡ* (and within each of them between individual *'ailaḥṡ* , or constituent extended families) the interrelations between these were formally and informally dense. While any murder of townsperson by townsperson in a small town is potentially explosive, the murder of a Rishmawi by a Qumsiyyeh was particularly divisive insofar as both are *'ailaḥṡ* of the al-Qazaha *ḥamula* (to which forty percent of the town's population belongs) and both families are almost exclusively Greek Orthodox (the religious community to which two thirds of the town's population is affiliated). Were extended family loyalties to predominate over communal loyalties a wedge would be driven through the midst of one of the town's two major clans and - insofar as intermarriage between members of the two *'ailaḥṡ* are not uncommon - nuclear families would be riven. Furthermore, although parallel cousin marriages occur in Beit Sahour, marriages between Christian families often not only cross *ḥamula* boundaries but also knit together couples (and thus families) across sectarian divides[23]. People stressed that almost every Christian in the town, with the exception of some who came - or whose families came - to Beit Sahour as refugees in 1948 and after 1967[24], were related - directly, through ties of god-parenthood, or both - to both the Qumsiyyeh and Rishmawi families. The children of one of my primary informants (who was of the Al-Jaraysah clan) were god-parented by Rishmawis, while his brother's children were god-parented by Qumsiyyehs. A feud between Rishmawis and Qumsiyyehs would impede if not block the operation of a number of kin and patronage networks linking Christian Beit Sahouris across a multitude of fields. The Orthodox community, which currently shares a single church, would risk a split. The Arab Orthodox Club, with representatives of each of these *'ailaḥṡ* in its governing positions, would be disrupted by hostilities and would, if it survived, no longer represent or serve as a forum for the whole of the (male) community. Finally, the town itself - which has a minority Muslim population yet which is sited in a region with a Muslim majority - might be placed at risk if the issue of the third man - who no one would name and many would not even indicate was Muslim - opened

community's traditional leadership.

As it was, this latter group 'settled' the issue by taking it out of the hands of the family. After a night of unresolved argument, one or more of its members drove to the neighboring Bedouin village of Ta'amra and reported there to the elders, who traditionally would have been those approached to serve as *quḍaa* (judges), that they had been insulted by the national bloc within the Rishmawi family. The old men demanded an apology, implying that without one they would not be available as *quḍaa* for Beit Sahour in the future. When this was reported to the representatives of the national grouping the group walked out of the negotiations in disgust.

Thus a discursive shift made it impossible to deal directly with the case in national political terms. Ironically, despite the translation of the terms of the dispute into the traditional familial idiom, the community - including all the Beit Sahouri Qumsiyyehs not in the nuclear families of Faez and Sammer - remained in fervent opposition to those implicated in the killing. In Beit Sahouri eyes the case remained a political issue concerning the whole town despite the fact that the machineries of presentation and negotiation brought into play necessitated that it be dealt with as though it were an issue between two *'ailah* (family groups). Over the next several days men representing various non- familial collectivities in the town (the Orthodox Club, the political parties, the churches, the unions, the scout groupings, and so on) met with Rishmawi family elders to familiarize them with the implications of the case for their groups, for the town, and for the national cause in general. In addition, one Beit Sahouri - a senior member of the PNA's Southern Region 'intelligence service' (*muhaabaraat*) - told the Rishmawis exactly what the National Authority expected to emerge from the negotiations.

Anxiety escalated as the conditions for the *ṣulha* (reconciliation ceremony) were discussed because of fear that the amount of blood money the Rishmawis would demand might prove to be so high that the Qumsiyyeh families would refuse to pay it, thus instigating the breakdown of the truce and the outbreak of feud. *Atwah* is not a coercive system grounded in state power but a system of reconciliation grounded on the assumption that those who embrace it consider continued sociality to be more important than the occasional expenses accrued in maintaining it. Traditionally blood money payments ensure peaceful relations between groups placed in a state of potential war, disarming the warring groups by establishing emergent commensality between them and binding those groups with formal ties of obligation through the arrangement of a number of deferred payments until these bonds can be replaced by less onerous ties of friendship and even marriage (see Peters 1990: 64-65 and 170). In Beit Sahour the intervention of extra-familial groups who considered the case in terms of the interests of wider communities was provoked by awareness of the severity of the crime (involving not only torture and the fatal spilling of blood but as well the intentional dishonoring of the corpse) as well as of the extremely long delay between the time the crime was committed and the time when the delegations from the families of Faez and Sammer Qumsiyyeh approached the Rishmawi *maglis*. While the calculated infliction of pain and

humiliation rendered the crime more heinous than either an undeliberated act of passion or, as is often the case behind blood money negotiations, a simple accident[29], the long delay between when the murder was carried out and when its perpetrators confessed (or, as many suspected, were forced to confess) suggested that the commitment of the perpetrators to peace with the Rishmawis was at best pragmatic (14.3.99). It was clear that the spirit of desired reconciliation which should accompany *atwah* was absent on the part of the Qumsiyyehs, and the fear of those who could see the wider implications was that the Rishmawis would respond with what would in effect be a compensatory act of violence by demanding full compensation for the loss and dishonoring[30].

On the night of the *ʕulha*, which took place in the hall of the Greek Catholic convent, the "whole town" gathered because "everyone - even [other members of the Qumsiyyeh] family - had suffered badly under the league" and all were concerned about how the affair would be resolved (14.3.99, 15.3.99). The meeting was convened under the jurisdiction of a noted *ʕheikh* from Hebron, a major Palestinian city twenty miles to the south of Beit Sahour, who had been chosen to act as *qaaḍi* (judge) by the Rishmawis with the agreement of the representatives of the Qumsiyyehs[31]. The size of the meeting, its public character, and the prestige of its arbitrator were all unusual, as was the character of the negotiations. Usually, as one of my informants told me, the arbitration was simple, quickly effected, and, finally, convivial:

normally, even when a person was killed, the killer's representatives would go to the family of the person killed, apologise profoundly (how can you refuse when the old men are humbling themselves and the entire family is putting itself in your debt?...) and then work ritually through 'we need a million shekels', then 'and here is 100,000 for Mohammed and 100,000 for Jesus' until there was nothing to be paid. This is about good will and needs to be done within at most three days (14.3.99: see also Granqvist 1965: 122-123 and Haddad 1920: 107).

Here, however, the good will was lacking. The Rishmawi family made an initial demand which, while high, would have allowed a series of reductions to a price which could easily be paid, even by Faez's family which - unlike Sammer's - was not well off. In response, however, the representatives of Faez's family and that of Sammer and Bishara made a counter offer which was ludicrously low for intentional murder (*i.e.*, 9000 Jordanian dinars). This hostile bargaining breached convention and threatened the negotiations with breakdown. After interventions by the extra-familial spokespersons who had earlier discussed the case with the Rishmawis negotiations continued. An agreement was finally reached (and approved by the *qaaḍi*) that the two Qumsiyyeh families would each pay 20,000 Jordanian dinars[32] as a first payment with subsequent payments adding up to no more than 18,000 further dinars to be arranged and made at later dates. Faez's negotiators spoke with his father and returned to announce his agreement. Those who spoke for Sammer left the hall to relay to Bishara the *qaaḍi'ʕ* decision and returned a few minutes later to announce that Bishara had said that Sammer had been forced to confess by beating, that he'd not been involved, and that

he would pay nothing (14.3.99 and *passim*).

The immediate response was collective outrage. Bishara's initial representatives as well as the negotiators he appointed had repeatedly admitted that the family accepted Sammer's guilt and its own responsibility for making blood payments. The last moment renunciation broke the truce, and while some said the *qaadi* announced that any Rishmawi had the right to kill any of the males of Bishara's immediate family (14.3.99) others claimed there was no need to announce it when the deal was refused since everyone knew it (15.3.99). *En masse* the crowd - including other Qumsiyyehs - broke from the church hall and headed for the house of Bishara and Sammer in order to burn it down. A neighbor who worked for the Palestinian security forces knew that women were living in the house and, fearing they might be killed, hid in a field and fired his machine gun in the air. The crowd - assuming Bishara and armed supporters were in the house - dispersed, and PNA forces came in to clear the house and establish order[33].

For the next couple of weeks an uneasy peace reigned. Arrangements had been reached with the father of Faez Qumsiyyeh, and although he was unhappy at having to sell land to pay blood money there was no feud between his family and the Rishmawis. Bishara, from within Israel, sold his house to the husband of his daughter so as to formally protect it from being damaged in feud vengeance. Sammer was safe in prison although he, like his father, was liable to be killed by any Rishmawi that saw them (18.12.97)[34]. No one - see below - spoke of the third man other than to say he was safe in a collaborators' village in Israel. Most, if not all, of the 20,000 dinars was given to the parents of Basem.

Two weeks after the debacle in the church hall Faez died in prison. The official PNA version was that he died of natural causes, but Beit Sahouris believed that Bishara had had him killed to lift the onus from his son and, indirectly, from himself (16.12.97, 19.12.97 and *passim*)[35]. Faez's father claimed that, regardless of who had killed Faez - and he implied it was a Rishmawi - Faez's death satisfied the principle of 'blood for blood' - a death had been followed by a death. He said not only that all debts were off but also demanded, even before Faez's funeral, that the Rishmawis return his 20,000 dinars (15.3.99).

The Rishmawi response was furious. The negotiations in the church hall had left them substantially slighted, not only by the initial Qumsiyyeh offer of 9,000 dinars and the violation of ritual that offer effected but also by the relatively small amount of the agreed settlement. Faez's father's demand that the 20,000 dinars be returned came across as more violence against the concept of community which underlay both *atwah* and Beit Sahour: "the point of blood money is not about the cost of a crime (for instance the medical care of a victim) but about making a statement of apology and reconciliation. Faez's family's demand for the money is an obscenity" (19.12.97). This event, for some of the Rishmawis, was the last in a series of provocations directed towards their family by the Qumsiyyehs. As insult after insult seemed to emerge from the same *'ailah* which had earlier

tortured a Rishmawi to death, a number of Rishmawis began increasingly to argue that the killing and the events which followed were neither political nor criminal but antagonistic expressions of one 'lineage' towards another. Although others - both within the Rishmawi *'ailah* and outside of it - continued to struggle against this interpretation by arguing that the events were spawned and fostered by the antagonism of the Israeli state towards the Palestinian people as a whole and towards the townsfolk in particular, their voices began to be muted by the growing inter-familial fracas.

One impediment to feud, however, was the presence of a substantial number of Qumsiyyehs in the bloc mobilized against Sammer, Bishara and Faez. Qumsiyyehs had been as much persecuted by the activities of the Village League as had other Beit Sahouris, and one informant told me that Bishara - in the heyday of his powers - had made a particular point of refusing favors to other Qumsiyyehs to show that he was beholden to no one (14.3.1999). For the identity politics of the situation to move fully into the idiom of family and lineage such situationally-drawn delineations had to be effaced, and this erasure was effected during Faez's funeral by one of the Rishmawis who photographed all of the Qumsiyyehs who attended and then circulated the 'incriminating' photographs amongst the Rishmawis. According to the photographer, and those who took him seriously, the presence at Faez's funeral of a large percentage of the town's Qumsiyyehs was testimony to the fact that they were loyal to Faez despite having renounced him to escape responsibility for the murder. The photographer's charges seemed to be given even greater credence by the fact that those Qumsiyyehs who had been ostentatiously photographed leaving Faez's funeral were understandably nervous about attending the funeral two days later of an elderly Rishmawi who had recently died[36]. Those Rishmawis who wished to provoke hostilities between the two families were able to claim that the Qumsiyyehs had chosen to attend the funeral of a Rishmawi killer rather than to offer condolences to the Rishmawis for the loss of one of their family.

Despite the fact that not all Rishmawis and Qumsiyyehs accepted their placement in the newly polarized social terrain, the charge served to constitute two antagonistic camps made up respectively of all Rishmawis and all Qumsiyyehs. Those Rishmawis who felt that family honor had suffered in the course of the *Sulha* and what ensued were able, through mobilizing a rhetoric of hostility to 'those' who had humiliated them, to reassert the strength and honor of the Rishmawis (see Stirling 1960 for an analogous case). The members of Faez's immediate family, who felt resentment about the fact that they had been left to carry the financial burden of paying off the Rishmawis, in turn found it in their interest to implicate other Qumsiyyehs in the burgeoning feud with the Rishmawis so that the 20,000 dinars Faez's father had been forced to pay would be returned as a consequence either of a strong bloc of kin support consolidating behind him or because an eventual outbreak of feud violence would abrogate the terms of the settlement.

On several occasions over the subsequent three and a half years violence has broken out between

Rishmawi and Qumsiyyeh youths, and although to date careful counsel has prevented these eruptions of the underlying hostilities from developing into more extensive feuding nothing has been resolved (15.3.99 and *passim*). Faez's father continues to demand his 20,000 dinars back while the Rishmawi elders continue to assert not only that that demand is a violation of the *Sulha* agreement but also that the failure of Faez's family to make the final payment (*teyba*) programmed into the agreement means that the reconciliation process has broken down. Things are, in effect, in abeyance, and although no substantial violence between Qumsiyyehs and Rishmawis has broken out and caused the suspended antagonisms to coalesce into open feud neither has any move by nationalist or trans-familial forces in the town succeeded in breaking the deadlock and restoring commensality between those involved.

The Rishmawi-Qumsiyyeh feud, like the Israeli Occupation, has withdrawn into the shadows but is far from forgotten. Both violences underlie the surfaces of everyday interaction within Beit Sahour, and an upsurge of violence from either could serve to mobilize the town. If that violence were to come from the occupation - for instance out of serious and threatening confrontations over settler expropriation of Beit Sahouri land on *Jebel Abu-Ghneim* (or, as the Israeli press calls the planned site of a massive new settlement, *Har Homa*) - the town would be likely once again to sublimate its internal divisions and unite to present a consolidated front to a shared enemy. If, on the other hand, a fight between Rishmawi or Qumsiyyeh youths should lead to bloodshed or if a Rishmawi, arguing that the failure to pay *teyba* nullified the truce, were to take vengeance on a member of Faez's family, an open feud would erupt which would, at least temporarily, shatter the structures of sociality which hold Beit Sahour together.

* * * * *

I have attempted through this ethnography to show how 'ways of telling' shape the possibilities of response to events in the life of a community. The 'first death' of Basem Rishmawi articulated, for the majority of inhabitants of Beit Sahour, a model capable of giving shape to a Manichaean world made up of an imagined community and another grouping antagonistic to that community. It impelled strategies of social consolidation and resistance appropriate to the maintenance of the community it helped to bring into conscious being. However, as the context in which that story circulated was transformed by political and social developments so too was the story's significance. Although one might argue that what happened in 1995 was that 'people got their facts right' and therefore a 'true story' replaced a 'false story', what I have tried to show is that the rectification of the 'facts' - the realization that Palestinian collaborators working for the Israelis killed Basem rather than Israelis themselves - would have had little if any effect had there not already been a very substantial shift in the perspectives of Beit Sahouris on issues of politics, identity, nation and community. Within the terms of nationalist discourse the question of whether an Israeli soldier following the orders of his superiors kills a Palestinian or whether a Palestinian collaborator following the orders of his Israeli superiors does the deed, is moot; in each instance the deed is a

political assassination carried out by an agent of the national enemy in accordance with that enemy's plans to eradicate the nation. That the 'second death' of Basem Rishmawi came instead to be, for many, an expression of the antagonism of one Beit Sahouri family grouping for another demonstrates the ascendency of a different mode of interpretation. Antagonism, which I have argued serves to construct solidarities amongst those who perceive it as threatening, came to be seen as inter-familial in the post-Oslo context, and the ascendency of that idiom 'muted' interpreters who continued to argue that the real antagonism came from the Israeli state. That muting, however, did not simply silence voices but engendered situations in which a nationalist response was seen as inappropriate and extraneous.

The hegemonization of the familial idiom of interpretation and the overturning of the nationalist idiom was not a simple matter of will, choice, and the fickleness of interpreters. Through the details of the story of a story which I have relayed above we can see the operations of the convoluted logic of contingency. The contexts within which various interpretations of the torture and murder of Basem Rishmawi are situated and elaborated are themselves dense with the accretion of a multitude of other articulations as well as with the institutional structures (some active, some latent) which have taken shape as persons in the past and present have used those articulations as models for activities. An event in the process of being interpreted and fixed in its meaning by a consensus has - like a pinball dropping through various channels and rebounding from flippers and barriers - to 'negotiate' a multitude of switching points, and at each of these shifts can be effected in the way the event is interpreted and in the consequences it will come to have. If the inequities of power underlying the Oslo Accords hadn't led to the PNA's vow not to prosecute collaborators..., if the old men in the Rishmawi family *and* of the Ta'amra hadn't been resentful of the undermining of traditional structures of authority..., if Faez hadn't died in prison..., if the photographer hadn't had the equipment or the will to photograph the persons at the Qumsiyyeh funeral...things would not have developed as they did. Some of those 'switching points' are more stable than others; the decision of the PNA to turn the case over to tribal law inserted the deliberations on the significance of the case into a traditional structure which could only work in familial terms. The translation of the events into the idiom of family which that time-honored institution had effected can in turn be seen to over-determine the far more idiosyncratic decision of the photographer to extend the borders of the antagonism to the limits of the Qumsiyyeh *'ailah*.

Although after more and more interpretative decisions are made the range of options which succeeds is substantially reduced, the force of contingency still prevails. In this case there is no way that the analyst, poring over this dense interweaving of interpretations and events, can assess how things will turn out. Although the logic of events has substantially closed down the ways in which the community can negotiate the implications of the murder of Basem Rishmawi, the historic context in which that logic operates still retains the power to transform its course and its meaning. If, in the near future, an Israeli settler or soldier building Jewish homes on the outskirts of Beit

Sahour shoots a Beit Sahouri demonstrator things will develop very differently than if, in the course of a normal weekday, a Rishmawi or Qumsiyyeh schoolboy gets caught up in a school ground argument over a girl and stabs a youth from the other family. Whatever happens - and it may be neither of these - the unfolding of future events will in turn scatter new stories, acts, and interpretations over those which have already been accreting around this event since 1981, and the commingling of these two bodies of stories will in turn engender new events and new configurations of sociality.

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Postscript: The Third Man

Throughout my research into the way Beit Sahouris negotiated the dilemmas thrown up by the murder of Basem Rishmawi, none of my informants would tell me the name of the 'third man' implicated in the killing. It is not that people didn't know who he was, or where he had lived, or where he was at present; it was just that people didn't want to talk about him. People would say he wasn't important either because he had lived outside of Beit Sahour or because he had disappeared and couldn't be tried for the crime. Others would however let slip in passing that he was a Beit Sahouri who had lived quite near to Bishara Qumsiyyeh and that he had recently been seen living in Israel in a collaborator village on the road between Jenin and Afula. When I repeated this information to people who denied his importance, or argued that by the rules of *'Atwah* it didn't really matter whether or not the culprit could be located if his family could, my informants would look uncomfortable and change the subject. I have never been able to collect more information about this man, about whether and why the PNA refused to allow him to be implicated and tried in the case, or about the relations of his family with the rest of the Beit Sahouri community. The 'third man' was beyond the bounds of the story, and his family had not been called to account in the course of the *sulha* negotiations.

On the last day of my most recent visit to Beit Sahour I met with a friend who, in the course of gossiping, asked me if I'd heard about an episode which had occurred that winter which "had the whole town in an uproar"? A Beit Sahouri woman - "a bad woman, but Orthodox" - had surreptitiously married a Muslim man (whose name or provenance was not proffered, although the location of the place where they lived immediately after the marriage implies he was Beit Sahouri). When her family found out it tried to get her back, but she and her husband fled to Ta'amra where they took shelter with a Bedouin family. Elders from her family, along with the town mayor, went to the PNA in Bethlehem to complain and were told by the authorities (who are very sensitive to Muslim-Christian issues) that they had no right to interfere. My informant concluded:

the Sahouris see this as an expression of the threat to them of the Muslims. It used to be that we were separated by the mountains from Obadiya [a neighboring Muslim village] but now its mosques are on our borders, the Jews are on Jebel abu-Ghneim, and Bethlehem is mixed.

Everyone is taking over, and now they are beginning to take the women (15.3.99).

In this discourse Beit Sahour has become a very different place from that described in the discussions related in the first part of this paper. There Beit Sahour was a Palestinian village made up of Christians and Muslims who shared in everything, and particularly in their solidarity in the face of the national enemy (who was 'Israeli', not 'Jewish'). Here, on the other hand, "we...the Sahouris" are Christian and deeply threatened by other religious communities ("Muslims" and "Jews") pressing on our borders from all sides and now, most frighteningly, "beginning to take the women".

What is invisible in this discourse is the Beit Sahouri Muslims who constitute a minority population within the borders of a largely Christian town which is located within a national territory in which Muslims are the majority population. The man in this story, who has stolen the daughter of his Christian neighbors and, by marrying her, turned her into a Muslim, is, like the third man in the killing of Basem Rishmawi, the internal trace of an antagonism which Beit Sahouran Christians rarely discuss, and then only as something 'outside'. Neither of the two, however, acted from 'outside'; it was from within Beit Sahour that they had effaced Christian identities through murder and seduction.

Throughout my notebooks as far back as my earliest *intifada* work in Beit Sahour there is a shadow discourse which haunts Beit Sahouri assertions of strong commensality and communality between Muslims and Christians. Christian Beit Sahouris spoke - in tones which in 1990 were hushed and somewhat embarrassed yet which, as my records get closer to the present day, become more open and assertive - of the threat of the Muslims elsewhere in Palestine, of their covetousness about Christian wealth, of their intolerance for religious and cultural difference, and of the impossibility of coexistence with them. This material was always just under the surface, but it didn't predominate and only served to organize perceptions (and assertions) at certain moments - and then only in relation to Muslims outside of Beit Sahour. Even now it is extremely rare to hear a Beit Sahouri Christian say something negative about a fellow townsperson who is Muslim, and when they do it is criticism of particular individuals which link them to a generalised *outside* collectivity (e.g., 'so and so is like a Khalili [Hebronite]'). I have never heard a Beit Sahouri Muslim criticise a Beit Sahouri Christian *as* a Christian.

The unnamed and unpursued 'third man', like the unnamed and unlocalized Muslim husband about whom everyone in Beit Sahour was allegedly talking (but not to me), is a reminder of what must not be brought into the open. Although Beit Sahouris have always been Christian Beit Sahouris and Muslim Beit Sahouris, a chilling realisation is growing as the threat of Israeli military dominion appears to recede. Without the presence of 'an enemy who is enemy to us both', forms of self and communal assertion which had previously been sublimated in the interest of asserting solidarity are coming to serve as 'models of' and 'models for' the social (see Geertz 1973: 93-94). To be reminded that the antagonism between Muslim and Christian, which the ideologues of both

religions increasingly assert, is not simply an antagonism between an inside and an outside but even more saliently an antagonism inside Beit Sahour is to be reminded of the impossibility of community. That counterfactual knowledge is simultaneously known by all, and universally disavowed.

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Biographical Sketch: Glenn Bowman trained in social anthropology at Oxford. His doctoral fieldwork (1983-1985) focused on Jerusalem pilgrimage and led to his subsequent interest in Palestinian communities under occupation. He has carried out field research in Yugoslavia on nationalist mobilization and the production and dissemination of contemporary art in Belgrade. He currently teaches in the anthropology department of the University of Kent (Canterbury, U.K.) where he coordinates the MA programme in the Anthropology of Ethnicity, Nationalism and Identity.

Acknowledgements: Field research was primarily funded by the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological research although a short field trip to Beit Sahour in January 1990 was paid for by the Middle East Research Information Project. My greatest appreciation goes, of course, to the people of Beit Sahour although I am as well deeply indebted to colleagues in Israel/Palestine, the U.S. and the U.K. who have read and commented on this paper.

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1

This paper is based on fieldwork carried out over the past decade. An earlier version of the paper was published in 2000 by Aarhus University Press in the proceedings of a conference organised by Ton Otto and Henk Driessen entitled *Perplexities of Identification: Anthropological Studies in Cultural Differentiation and the Use of Resources*. In an earlier article – "Nationalizing the Sacred: Shrines and Shifting i\Identities in the Israeli-occupied Territories" (Bowman 1993) – I discuss *intifada*-period responses to Basem Rishmawi's killing. A more extensive ethnography of Beit Sahour is forthcoming in my *The House Before the Dawn: Identity and Politics in a Palestinian Community* (Oxford: Berghahn Books).

2

See Rothenberg 1999 on the Palestinian *hamula*.

3

See Hunter (1991: 121-128) on the *intifada* tax revolt strategy in general and Robinson (1997: 66- 93) for Beit Sahour's role in it.

4

Insofar as the disputes raised by this case have not been resolved, I do not mention informants by name other than when their identities are already commonly known. As sequentiality is highly significant in this paper's tracking of discursive developments, I follow each direct quotation with the date of its utterance.

5

Even today the Arab Orthodox Club remains the principle site of men's social gathering in Beit Sahour, and all male towns persons (Christian, Muslim and atheist) are welcomed. Its name refers not to the neighboring church but to the early 20th century political mobilization of Orthodox Christians which intended to wrest control of the church and its substantial properties from its 'foreign' (Greek) priesthood.

6

On December 8, 1987 an Israeli tank transport vehicle swerved across the road at an Israeli checkpoint to flatten a carload of Palestinian workers waiting for clearance to cross into Israel so they could go to work in Tel Aviv; four residents of the Jabaliya refugee camp were killed in the incident. The driver claimed to have killed

the men in revenge for the previous day's knifing of an Israeli tax collector in Gaza city.
7

I discuss this imbrication of antagonism, identification and identity at greater length and with critical reference to Benedict Anderson's theory of the genesis of imagined community in "A Country of Words: Conceiving the Palestinian Nation from the Position of Exile" (Bowman 1994: 140-147 and 161-162).
8

This assertion of the ease with which Beit Sahour could return to its 'agricultural roots' is somewhat idealized, although townspersons did attempt to do so during the *intifada* to escape dependency on Israeli markets (see Frankel 1994: 42-66, Hunter 1991: 144-145 and 211-212, Schiff and Ya'ari 1990: 247-248 and Robinson 1997: 74-76). Beit Sahour, unlike neighboring villages, was established on lands rented from Bethlehem landlords, and its inhabitants worked to develop strategies for gathering money with which to purchase land. From the eighteenth century until recently, Sahouri men engaged in labour migration to the area around Nablus where they worked as stone cutters. In the nineteenth century the Latin church sponsored the development of an artisanal crafts industry focused on carving mother of pearl and olive wood for the tourist trade. Consequently Beit Sahour was largely independent of agriculture by 1967 and prepared to take advantage of Israel's drive to increase commodity circulation (and market dependence) in the Territories (see Mansour 1988 and the essays on occupation economics in Abed 1988).
9

Shqeef is Beaufort Castle in South Lebanon. *Fateh* held it from 1970 until 1982, even during the Israeli invasion of 1978. Tell al-Za'ter resisted a several month siege by Maronite militia in early 1976 (personal communication from Rosemary Sayigh).
10

Speaking of the Ottoman period, one man said "people here were under people who claimed to be Muslims but who oppressed the Muslims too. They had to ask themselves 'what are we? Is this a religious war or not? Is this an occupation?" (11.1.90).
11

Nonetheless the constant emphasis on the town's resistance to the Israeli occupation indicated that it was in this particular struggle that the community realized the quiddity of its identity.
12

Although I note the proviso here that this particular discourse might have been produced solely for the ears of an outsider, I do not believe this to be the case. Internal solidarity, which was extremely strong despite the oppressive challenges posed to it during this period, depended on the verisimilitude of assertions of communal solidarity. Furthermore a text in Arabic - *The White Revolution in the Disobedient City* - published in 1990 by Izzat Dragma, a Beit Sahouri, also validates and circulates the elements I note above.
13

Townsfolk, Christian and Muslim alike, consistently stated that the Muslim population was between twenty five and thirty percent. The 1997 census, which collected but did not publicize figures on religious affiliation, shows a population of 11,250 of which 7,972 were over twelve years of age and 620 over 65 (Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 1999: 50 and 55).
14

The Oslo Agreements barred access to Jerusalem to all but the very few who could attain permits from the military authorities, etiolated trade links between West Bank businesses, and forced un- or alternative employment onto many workers who had after 1967 become dependent on working in Israel. Since 1993 *per capita* income on the West Bank has dropped by 23% (personal communication from Graham Usher).
15

"[W]ith this 'exterior' we are not reintroducing the category of the extra-discursive. The exterior is constituted by other discourses. It is the discursive nature of this exterior which creates the conditions of vulnerability of every discourse, as nothing finally protects it against the deformation and destabilization of its system of differences by other discursive articulations which act from outside it" (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 146. n. 20).
16

I use this neologism to distinguish the elimination of communal consciousness focused on territory and distinct identity from either genocide (physical destruction of an entire people) or ethnicide (destruction of a group's culture and language); see, for the latter terms, the papers in *State Violence and Ethnicity* (van den Berghe 1990).
17

See *Land and Power* (Shapira 1992) on the ideological redefinition of Zionism's project in the face of resistance, and the Israeli revisionist historians (Morris 1987; Morris 1990; Pappe 1992; and Shlaim 2000) on anti-Palestinian violence in the state's foundation and consolidation. Lustick (1980) remains excellent on attempts to stifle Palestinian consciousness during the early years of the Israeli state.
18

I was told in 1994, before the 'second death', that "no Christian or Muslim has ever been killed by another here" (21.7.94).
19

Persons involved in negotiations between the Qumsiyyeh and Rishmawi families denied this story's vivid details, attributing both them and the abandoned file to gossip. Tellingly, when I asked those who spoke of the file why someone would have left such a revealing artifact, they replied with variations on one man's succinct answer - "to tear us apart" (17.4.98).
20

Formally the *Harakat al-Rawabet al-Filistiniyya* ('Movement of Palestinian Leagues'), these were set up in 1981 by the orientalist Menahim Milson who the new Likud government appointed head of the Civil Administration of the West Bank. The leagues simultaneously functioned to mediate between the military government and local communities (providing family reunion permits, travel permits, driving

licenses, jobs in the civil service, building permits, abrogations of house demolition orders, intercessions on behalf of jailed relatives, and reductions in prison sentences) and to organize and run proxy military units dedicated to the destruction of the PLO and the intimidation and closure of institutions providing civil alternatives to Israeli structures of governance (Tamari 1983, see also Aronson 1990: 248-253).
21

Not only was there no trial but, according to one informant, no record of Faez's confession was kept and he and Sammer were held under charges distinct from anything relating to Basem's murder (11.3.99).
22

The details of procedure and terminology in tribal law pertaining to murder are laid out comprehensively in Aref el-Aref's *Bedouin Love, Law and Legend* (El-Aref 1944: 86-115) which is based on his work among the Beersheba *badu* in the 1930s. Hilma Granqvist gives a wonderfully detailed description of traditional dealings with matters of unnatural deaths in the 1920s in the village of Artas, which borders on Beit Sahour (Granqvist 1965: 110-132). Cohen (Cohen 1965: 139-145) and, more recently, Ginat (Ginat 1987) describe and analyze blood disputes in Israel/Palestine while Peters's functionalist study of the feud amongst segmentary North African Bedouin is useful for ethnographic detail (Peters 1990: 59-83). The classic study of Mediterranean feuding is, of course, *Cohesive Force* (Black-Michaud 1975).
23

A Catholic informant told me: "It is standard practice to take daughters from the Orthodox and return them to the Orthodox" (4.4.98). This arrangement, while not prescriptive, is quite common. Christian-Muslim marriages are rare, usually only involving Beit Sahouris 'outside' in diaspora (but see below for a recent case and its consequences). See Holy 1989, Donnan 1988, and Geertz 1979 on the logic and function of parallel cross cousin marriage.
24

376 households could be categorized as belonging to 'refugees' out of a total of 2306 (data collected December 1997).
25

Although the murder had happened fourteen years earlier, the adult males of Faez's and Sammer's immediate families went into hiding since - according to the rules of tribal law - they were liable to vengeance killing by Rishmawis until the terms of a truce were reached (as long as, in the words of Cohen's informants, "the grave of the victim is still open" Cohen 1965: 139). Faez and, by then, Sammer were in prison (and Bishara in Israeli-controlled Jerusalem), but according to *atwah* all males from the killer's clan over twelve and not elderly are vulnerable to attack (Haddad 1920: 105). In the Beit Sahouri instance, however, not only did the town's *ethos* militate against anything more than nominal observance of the rules but the other Qumsiyyehs's denunciations of the crime were seen to absolve them of responsibility.
26

Such a declaration by members of the extended *'ailah* of their 'innocence' of - non-implication with - the killer is called *i'lān barā'a* (see Cohen 1965: 144, n. 1). Among the Bedouin with whom El-Aref worked it is called *tulu'* (El-Aref 1944: 88).
27

The *maglis* is the traditional reception room of a Palestinian house, and the site wherein public occasions pertaining to the family take place (see Gilsenan 1982: 181-187 for Lebanese parallels). In situations such as those described above, the *maglis* of the elder representative of the family group will serve as the meeting point of all family representatives and those 'outsiders' they host.
28

The accuracy of their feeling is testified to by the statement of one Rishmawi, a member of the national camp, who told me "since the early sixties we had been working to diminish the authority and influence of the *hamula*" [14.1.99].
29

Cohen (1965: 68-71) and Granqvist (1965: 117-123) provide examples of accidental deaths necessitating negotiations and payments.
30

Traditionally the representatives of the offender approach the family of the victim as soon as possible after the transgression, thus indicating their desire to prevent vengeance and to reestablish balance in the community. In such cases the miscreant's willingness to put himself (or be put by his kin) in the hands of those he has made enemies is countered by the victim's family's sacrifice of prestige in its openness to making an arrangement. Black-Michaud points out that "the victim's group, whose sacred duty it was to avenge their kinsman's death..., were, by accepting arbitration, diminishing somewhat their stature in the eyes of public opinion by this willingness to procrastinate for motives of a material nature" (Black-Michaud 1975: 92).

31

The qaadi's religious status is analogous to that of other blood money arbitrators such as the Cyrenaican *marabtin bi'l Baraka* (Peters 1990: 64) and the Berber *igurramen* (Gellner 1969). The victim's family chooses the *qaadi* but the perpetrator's family must agree the choice and pay wages and expenses.
32

£17,866 or $28,170 at the September 1995 rate of exchange. This was a relatively low settlement considering the nature of the crime. It can be compared with the 12,000 dinars a local factory owner was forced by arbitration to pay one of his workers when his gun accidently went off and grazed the man's neck (15.12.99).
33

The story of the policeman dispersing the crowd was told me by the man involved (16.12.97 and 19.12.99). Several other people have told me that Bishara was in the house and had fired on the crowd (*passim).*
34

Although all the other adult males of Bishara and Sammer's family were legitimate targets for vengeance killing, people with whom I talked claimed, in the words of one informant, that only Bishara and Sammer were liable to be murdered "because they have not attempted to resolve the case" (18.12.97).

35

That version is given credibility by the fact that within a week Sammer was released from prison, allegedly because there was no one alive and in reach of the PNA who could testify against him.
[36]

Informants claimed that in the past all Beit Sahouris attended all marriages, baptisms, and funerals, but now people “are required to go [only] to funerals”, treating all else as family affairs (16.11.93). Observation reveals that now only friends, families, and members of the same religious community attend funerals, but Qumsiyyehs and Rishmawis are members of the same *hamula* and are affiliated to the same church so failure to attend each other’s funerals is a visible assertion of division.