EVANGELICAL TOURS TO THE HOLY LAND:
A STUDY ON THE THEOPOLITICS OF CHRISTIAN PILGRIMAGES

BY

YANIV BELHASSEN

B.A Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2001
M.B.A. Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2004

DISSEPTION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Leisure Studies in the Graduate College of the
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2007

Urbana, Illinois
AKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to all my family, friends, colleagues and superiors in Israel, South Africa and the United States for their support and patience over the last three years. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Carla Santos, for believing in my abilities, for choosing to work with me and for giving me the opportunity to study in this great university. I would also like to thank all the members of my superb committee, Jon Ebel, Tom Schwandt, Bill Stewart, for the time and effort they have devoted to reading my work, for their constructive advice and their willingness to share insight. I would also like to thank Arie Reichel and Natan Uriely from Ben-Gurion University of the Negev for inspiring and encouraging me to pursue an academic career. Special thanks to my friend Kellee Caton for helping me to better execute my ideas in English. Many thanks are also due to both administrative staff and faculty in the Department of Recreation, Sport of Tourism for providing me with the supportive environment in which to conduct my research. I would like to extend thanks to Ben-Gurion University of the Negev for funding my studies and for inciting my academic curiosity as a young student.

I am also grateful to the pilgrims and the tour organizers who shared with me their memories, belief and experiences. Without them this dissertation could not have been completed. Finally, and above all, I would like to express my gratitude to my wife Orly for her love, encouragement and patience. I cannot imagine that I could have completed my studies without her support and understanding.

_Toda Raba_ to all of you!
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ..............................................................vii

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION ...................................................1
  Blurring the Boundaries between Pilgrimage and Tourism...............3
  Conceptualizing Pilgrimage in Tourism Studies .........................11
  The History of Christian Tours to the Holy Land: Faith, Travel and Politics............15
  Situating the Examined Tours within American Religious Landscape ...........26
  Research Goals and Structure.............................................29

CHAPTER II: “WHERE THE HISTORY OF THE FUTURE IS GOING TO TAKE
PLACE”: CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND AMERICAN EVANGELICAL PILGRIMAGE TO
THE HOLY LAND..............................................................16
  Abstract..............................................................................16
  Introduction.........................................................................17
    The Roots of Christian Zionism.........................................19
  Christian Zionism and Evangelical Pilgrimages to Israel..................28
    Evangelicals as Pilgrims....................................................32
    Politics and Evangelical Pilgrimage.....................................37
  Conclusions.........................................................................46

CHAPTER III: MY LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRISTIAN ZIONISM:
A REFLECTIVE NOTE ON REFLEXIVITY ....................................50
  Abstract..............................................................................50
  Introduction.........................................................................51
    Reflexivity in Qualitative Discourse.....................................54
  Three Reflexive Accounts....................................................61
    (1) My Entrance into Fieldwork..........................................61
    (2) My Intrinsically Reflexive Methodological Toolkit...............64
    (3) Understanding “My Role” in the Dispensationalist Eschatology......68
  Conclusion............................................................................75

CHAPTER IV: AN AMERICAN EVANGELICAL PILGRIMAGE TO ISRAEL:
A CASE STUDY ON POLITICS AND TRIANGULATION.............................80
  Abstract..............................................................................80
  Introduction.........................................................................81
  Theoretical and Historical Background...................................84
    Introduction to Evangelicalism............................................84
    Israeli Politics...................................................................85
    Triangulation, Validity, and Reliability..................................87
  Methods.............................................................................91
  Triangulating the Politics....................................................95
    (1) DT as a Means of Corroboration....................................95
# LIST OF FIGURES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>A structural outline of the dissertation</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>Jinji Bear’s Journey</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Heart to Heart from a Servant’s Heart</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The goal of Zionism, after all, hadn’t been to return us only to the land of Israel but also to the community of nations, to end the exile of the Jewish people from humanity. Thanks to Zionism’s healing effects on the Jewish psyche, I could now approach other peoples and faiths with the curiosity and self-confidence of a free person.

Yossi Klein Halevi, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden.*

**Preface**

In the summer of 2004, I arrived at Urbana-Champaign to start my doctoral education in Leisure Studies. Before coming to the United States, an Israeli professor recommended that I avoid speaking about religion and politics. He explained that in the United States these were very sensitive topics so I had to be aware that everything I said, or did not say, might be offensive or incite unpleasant arguments. Besides, as an Israeli, he said, you do not have the sense of political correctness necessary to speak about these issues. As shall become apparent, my fascination with both religion and politics and their intersection with tourism experiences conquered the need to be assimilated to the politically correct culture of America. While I did not end up taking the professor’s advice, it is nevertheless important for me to note at the outset of this dissertation that this research was conducted and written with no intention of offending anyone.

My first encounter with the people who are the subjects of this dissertation took place during one of my very first rides with my wife on the public buses of Urbana-Champaign. We were surprised when the bus driver recognized us as Israelis just from listening to us speaking in Hebrew. During the short ride, the driver enthusiastically related the events of the
trip he and his wife recently took to Israel. He described this trip as a humanitarian pilgrimage, and insisted that we exchange phone numbers and meet up again to discuss it.

Soon enough, the friendly driver contacted us and invited us to our first Thanksgiving dinner at his home with his family and friends. Initially, we felt uncomfortable accepting this invitation because we did not feel at ease with being called the “chosen people,” a title the bus driver occasionally conferred upon us and upon Israelis in general. We also had heard and read in the media that the central concern of groups like the one with which this bus driver was affiliated was to bring about a messianic era in Israel, an era they saw as inextricably intertwined with the return of Christ. In addition, from reading on the Internet about evangelicals who love Israel; we read that these Christians usually believed that the Third Temple would be built in Jerusalem, and that they at times seemed oblivious to the political and territorial realities surrounding this situation. However, our curiosity superseded all of these concerns, and we eventually decided to accept the invitation and join them for Thanksgiving lunch.

Not long after Thanksgiving, while taking a bus ride to campus, I saw the friendly bus driver again, and he gave me the phone number of the couple that organizes the pilgrimages to Israel, who I will henceforth refer to as the B’s. He told me that they also ran Christian radio stations in Urbana-Champaign and that they were key figures in the local Christian community. The first interview with Mrs. B was, symbolically enough, held on Christmas Eve in a local coffee shop on campus. I was fascinated by her love for and devotion to Israel, and I was eager to understand this phenomenon which embodied all the things that I have always been fascinated with when encountering other people: traveling experiences, culture, politics, and spiritual search. As noted earlier, this dissertation is the product of my curiosity
and my efforts to understand this grassroots organization of tours to Israel by integrating all these components into a cohesive dissertation.

In exploring the phenomenon of evangelical pilgrimage, I have personal interests that should be acknowledged. As an Israeli, I want to understand what it is that attracts Americans to spend their free time and money in Israel and contribute to one of the most important growing industries in the Israeli service sector. In 2005, for instance, tourism comprised 15% of the national income from exports of services (Israel Tourism Annual Report, 2005). The United States is a key market for Israeli inbound tourism and typically provides the largest number of tourists. In 2006, for example, 493,653 American tourists arrived to Israel, and they comprised 27% of the total tourists who arrived to Israel (Israeli Ministry of Tourism, 2007). For most of these Americans tourists (54%), including those who are not classified as pilgrims, religious motives were of great relevance when traveling to Israel (IPK Report for the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, 2006). Clearly, associating Israel with religiosity and holiness is not something unique to the American market. Since the establishment of Israel, pilgrimage was always a stable and important segment in the Israeli tourism inbound market. In 2005, 17% of tourists arriving to Israel were classified as pilgrims by the Israeli Ministry of Tourism; from the American segment, 18% were classified as pilgrims.

Along with the importance to the Israeli tourism industry, my subjects’ support for my country was another issue that spurred me to embark on this research. Before my arrival to the United States, like many Israelis, I was exposed through the Israeli media to similar groups of Christians who loved Israel. The topic is frequently presented as an interesting yet marginal anecdote in the Israeli media. Such enthusiastic support for Israel is often received
with the skeptical rationale that “we [Israelis] have never had the privilege of choosing our friends.” This study is my attempt to understand the friendship and the unconditional love of these Christian pilgrims for my country. In this context, I find it relevant to mention that during my past experiences traveling abroad, I learned that my nationality is not the first thing that I should present to people I encounter. In a period in which the legitimacy of the existence of Israel is challenged by many liberals and by some world leaders, and in a period in which some members of British academia frequently suggest boycotting Israeli scholars, a supportive attitude toward Israel is unique, and I believe it requires a better understanding.
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1970s, tourism and pilgrimage have become increasingly attractive both to conservative evangelicals in America and to Israeli officials, as a means for celebrating and supporting the Israeli nation-state, economically and spiritually. In his book *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend*, Timothy Weber (2004) suggests a theopolitical framework for the examination of this relationship between conservative evangelical tourists and the Israeli government, by examining how the central role of the nation-state of Israel in the evangelicals’ eschatological beliefs influences their political attitude toward Israel. In this regard Weber argues that this relationship started gaining momentum at the Jerusalem Conference on Biblical Prophecies held in June 15-18, 1971, and was further spurred by the Likud Party victory in 1977. Later on, an important development in Israeli politics occurred after the 1977 election, when Prime Minister Menachem Begin (1913-1992) established, for the first time, a right wing coalition. Begin’s government embraced Biblical terminology to view the territories that were occupied during the Six Day War as “Judea and Samaria,” names that were abolished in the second century by the Roman empire and replaced by “Palestina” in order to belittle the exiled Jews by commemorating the Biblical Philistines. In addition to the symbolic aspect of this new terminology, the results of the 1977 election included official encouragement of settlers in these areas, who at times propounded religious-messianic justifications for their settlement. Arguably, the sympathy between the fundamentalist wing of the American evangelical camp and Begin’s government illustrates the inherent theopolitical nature of the relationship between American evangelicalism and the nation-state of Israel.
Prime Minister Begin recognized his American allies and cultivated this relationship by developing a special bond with evangelical leaders, such as Jerry Falwell, with whom he had a warm relationship (Ariel, 1991). Both sides recognized tourism as a potentially compelling way to express and develop these relations, and Falwell was probably one of the first evangelical leaders to organize evangelical pilgrimages to Israel. According to Grace Halsell (1986), Falwell’s tours were used to indoctrinate the pilgrims to view the political conflict in the Middle East through the eyes of Begin’s government. Weber (2004) notes that the Israeli Tourism Ministry acknowledged the importance of this alliance in the early 1980s by beginning to “actively recruit evangelical religious leaders for ‘familiarization’ tours at no cost to them” (p. 214). Weber suggests that these promotional tours aimed to allow people “of even limited influence to experience Israel for themselves and be shown how they might bring their own tour group to Israel” (2004, p.214). It is important to note that the Israeli Ministry of Tourism organizes such tours for other opinion leaders (e.g., journalists, tour operators) from all over the world as part of its marketing strategy to popularize the image of Israel as a tourism destination.

The place of tourism in the relationship between Christian evangelicals and the state of Israel developed further with the election in 1996 of Likud party leader Binyamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister. Donald Wagner, a strong critic and religious opponent of Christian Zionism (this term will be explained fully in the second chapter), reports that following Netanyahu’s election, the Israel Christian Advocacy Council, which operates through the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, made a concerted and official effort to officially celebrate relations between Christian Zionists and the state of Israel. In this regard, he suggests that bringing evangelical pilgrims to Israel was part of an Israeli strategy that arose
from “the potential power of the evangelical subculture and Israel’s desire to mobilize it as a base of support that could influence American foreign policy” (Weber, 2004, pp. 220-222). I believe that such an interpretation overemphasizes the minor role of American evangelical pilgrimage to Israel and mainly emanates from Wagner’s political agenda. In his other writings, Wagner writes more explicitly about a conspiracy theory according to which the Israeli government, with the help of the American fundamentalists, secretly plans to take over the West Bank. He suggests that since American fundamentalists believe that Israeli sovereignty in Judea and Samaria is a prerequisite condition for the Second Coming, they collaborate with the Israeli policy in the West Bank (Wagner, 2003). I believe that such an approach to the study of American fundamentalist pilgrimage (which is also suggested by Grace Halsell) oversimplifies the examination of these relationships. A less suspicious way to look at the cooperation between evangelical leaders and the Israeli Ministry of Tourism was recently suggested by the former Israeli tourism minister, Abraham Hirchson (currently the Treasury Minister), who was asked about the far-reaching consequences of the theological roots of evangelical tourism: “I'm not a theologian, I'm the minister of tourism, and I'm not interested in the politics of our tourists as long as they come here. They come here as tourists, and they're friends of Israel” (Urquhart, 2006). Similar attitude is manifested in a recent press release of the Israeli Ministry of Tourism about the visit of the current Minister of Tourism (Isaac Herzog) to the National Religious Broadcasters conference held in February 2007. Like Hirchson, Herzog explains:

The [American] evangelical market is highly influenced by Christian broadcasting. ….The [Israeli] Ministry of Tourism reorganizes its [marketing] efforts because it acknowledges the potential of this segment to contribute to tourism to Israel. I believe that the National Religious Broadcasting conference will enable a significant exposure to Israel (Israeli Tourism Ministry Press Release, February 15, 2007).
In other words, Israeli Tourism officials hold that since the evangelical segment is an important and stable segment, it is the role of the Tourism Ministry to develop a relationship between Israel and those who practically and potentially can organize such tours. The political connotations and ramifications of this relationship should always be understood in this context.

The growing market of evangelical pilgrimages generates some specialized travel books from which one can learn about destinations to which evangelicals make pilgrimages (Dyer & Hatteberg, 2000). American evangelicals, like their secular neighbors, have free income and free time which are both prerequisite conditions to the development of tourism demand. As churchgoers, it is natural that they seek to incorporate in their travel experiences related to their religious belief. Some evangelicals are interested in following the footsteps of the Apostle Paul in Greece and Turkey; other are attracted to visit Jordan and Egypt to see Biblical sites. As Protestants, evangelical also travel to what can be regarded as Protestant heritage sites in Germany and Switzerland, where the events of the Reformation unfolded. Like their Catholic counterparts, Christian evangelicals are also interested in visiting places associated with the birth of Christianity and the life and teaching of Jesus. The current study focuses on such tours, which include visits to Israel, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan, an area frequently referred to collectively as the Holy Land.

More specifically, this study aims to shed light on a grassroots organization of evangelical pilgrimages to the Holy Land in East-Central Illinois. Given the central role of Israel in the evangelical worldview, it examines the relationship between theology and Israel as a tourism destination. The fieldwork is located in Central Illinois, where an evangelical couple organizes trips to Israel as part of a larger set of religious activities they coordinate as
managers of a local evangelical radio station. The organizers frame their tours using Isaiah 40:1 “Comfort ye my people says your God,” and seek to create an environment of “humanitarian” aid among the pilgrims and/or to promote a view that considers the establishment of the state of Israel as a fulfillment of biblical prophecies. During the research, I was exposed to similar tours organized all over the United States by evangelical leaders. As such, the examination of the case study in Illinois can serve as a lens through which an insight can be gained about this new emerging type of pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

Mr. and Mrs. B belong to the fundamentalist wing of the evangelical movement in the United States. Fundamentalism emerged as a religious movement in the 1920’s, as a reaction against modern influences on both Christian theology and American culture (Marsden, 1980). What Marsden calls ”a militant opposition” to modernist ideas, such as liberal interpretations of the Bible and Darwinism, became the hallmark of fundamentalist Christianity, whose adherents emanated from different evangelical denominations. The theological agenda that reflects fundamentalists’ views on liberal theology and that informed their separatist stance on cultural issues can be found in a twelve-volume set of articles known as The Fundamentals, after which the movement was named, published in 1910-1915. Social historian Joel Carpenter (1997) provides an illuminating explanation about the development of the movement in the twentieth century, where he notes that the movement maintained its cohesiveness through the development of a rich separatist sub-culture that was sustained and managed by interdenominational institutions and activities, such as Moody Bible Institutes, Youth for Christ, numerous radio broadcasts, radio stations, and more. Through all these institutions and activities, the fundamentalist sub-culture offered its members cultural support which functioned to protect them from being exposed to cultural
products that were not in concert with their religious belief. At the same time, however, fundamentalist leaders were highly effective in employing new technologies, such as radio broadcasting, popular books, and film, for promoting their message. In line with Carpenter’s analysis, I view these tours as an additional para-church activity through which evangelicals maintain their interdenominational sub-culture. Visits to Israel, in this context, are contextualized within evangelicals’ dispensational beliefs as visits to the place “where the history of the future is going to take place,” and the humanitarian aspect of the trips corresponds with their social welfare agenda. Moreover, these tours also help to meet the needs of the laity to travel abroad while ascribing socio-religious meanings to their trips.

As with other categorizations of social groups and/or beliefs, the task of creating an absolute set of categories with which I can refer to the people I study is beyond reach. In her study on the evangelical group Women’s Aglow Fellowship Marie Griffith insightfully notes that “anyone writing about the multifaceted and overlapping traditions of American evangelicalism encounters difficulties in terminology, owing as much to elasticity of the words used to describe various constituencies as to the intertwining of the traditions themselves” (1997, p. 21). Given the dynamic development of contemporary American evangelicalism in general and dispensationalism in particular, such a mission becomes even more complicated. Thus, and notwithstanding the various historical background and connotations of each one of the various labels used in this study, it is important to note that I use terms such as conservative evangelicals, fundamentalists and Christians, interchangeably. Following Griffith, I use the label evangelical to indicate the larger sub-culture to which my subjects belong. I use the labels “dispensationalist” and “Christian Zionist” loosely to refer to general shared tenets in the religious ideologies held by the participants in this study.
The preliminary process of data collection for this study started in December 2004 and continued throughout January 2007. In December 2004, Mrs. B, who can be regarded as my key informant, exposed me to how she, together with her husband, started organizing trips to Israel after traveling with Kay Arthur’s evangelical groups. In my meetings with her, she also shared with me the schedules and locations of meetings planned before and after the trip with the pilgrims; this information later became an important source of data for this study. In addition, I joined a group of pilgrims who traveled in June 2005, during which I conducted several informal interviews. All the procedures that involve human subjects have been approved by the College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee, which approved the research on February 22, 2005, as part of course work under the guidance of Professor Schwandt (which is the reason the process was done through the College of Education). Given the dynamic nature of fieldwork, there were some new procedures of data collection, as well as new concerns, which I did not address in my original request. A second request was approved on November 2, 2006 (see Appendixes A, B).

**Contextualizing Christian Zionism within the evangelical movement**

Recently, evangelical support for Israel has been frequently described as Christian Zionism, which can be broadly defined as a religious disposition that connects the existence of the nation-state of Israel to the Biblical Israelites, or which displays a supportive attitude towards the Zionist endeavor based on religious grounds (this last is also known as Biblical Zionism). This study follows this approach by considering Christian Zionism as the core ideology that guides the organizers of the examined tours. One may assume from the label “Christian Zionists” that a historical review of such support should start in the late
nineteenth-century, with the official establishment of the Zionist movement. For example, in his book *The Politics of Christian Zionism*, Merkley (1998) suggests that the friendship between Theodor Herzl, the founding father of political Zionism, and William Hecheler, a British Clergyman who was committed to the restoration of a Jewish homeland in Palestine, can be seen as “the first encounter between the official (Herzlian) Zionism and Christian Zionism” (1998, p. 3). However, taking this encounter as the point of departure for examining interactions between Christianity and Zionism and the state of Israel ignores the history of connection between Christianity and Judaism, which dates to the days of Jesus—a connection in which modern Christian Zionist notions are inherently rooted. Additionally, it ignores the history of proto-Zionist activities (where “proto-Zionism” is taken to mean advocacy for the restoration of a Jewish State before the establishment of the Zionist movement) undertaken by Christians throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a point which Merkley himself notes. Besides, Hecheler was not an adherent of dispensationalism, a popular theological doctrine among American evangelicals, which, as shall become apparent, clearly explains the role of the Jews in the worldview of its adherents.

While I have no intention of denying the existence of other forces in shaping attitudes toward the nation-state of Israel, it is my view that the late nineteenth-century events in American evangelicalism, which I consider to be highly important to our understanding of contemporary evangelical attitudes toward Israel, did not come out of thin air, but were in accordance with the literal approach to biblical interpretation which preceded them. Specifically, this study accepts the common assumption that the roots of evangelicalism, and thus their Christian Zionist ideology, can be traced to England, and more specifically to the Puritan movement. The reign of Oliver Cromwell in England was characterized by a
generally sympathetic attitude toward the Jews, whom Cromwell recognized as God’s chosen people, in line with the literal interpretative approach that was embraced by the Puritans. As Sharif (1976) suggests, the political and economic problems of Puritan England limited the manifestation of sympathy to the Jews to merely a supportive immigration policy and religious tolerance. A similar approach to the historical contextualization of the development of pro-Zionist attitudes within Protestantism can be found in Ian Murray’s book *The Puritan Hope* (1971), in which he explains how the notion of the restoration of a Jewish homeland in Palestine became a prominent idea among the Puritans of seventeenth century England. In summary, Puritan England can be regarded as having been proto-Zionist, in the sense that the idea of the restoration of the Jews to Israel was popularized, but concrete political actions were not undertaken in order to execute this religious vision.

The eighteenth century plays an even more important role in the historical examination of modern evangelicals’ attitude toward Israel. Specifically, the canonical narrative of American religious history refers to a period known as the First Great Awakening (1GA), which can be described as a “series of religious revivals in the 1730s and 1740s,” as a key moment in the emergence of modern evangelicalism (Heyrman, 1997, p. 10). The central figures in this period are metaphorically presented as the “new light,” and their opponents described as the “old light.” Specifically, the “new light” is represented by those reformist ministers who called for a fundamental transformation of the way religion was managed and performed by the Anglican Church and of the manner in which it was experienced by individuals. Among these ministers, the most renowned are John Edwards (1703-1758), George Whitefield (1714-1770), Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764), and James Davenport (1716-1757) (for relevant historical documents, see Bushman, 1970). By
confronting the “old” church and by encouraging people to organize their religious lives for themselves, the early revivalists foreshadowed the political dimensions and the social activism of modern evangelicalism as illustrated in the humanitarian activities of the pilgrims in Israel.

The series of revivals in the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries in which the historical roots of contemporary evangelicalism are typically argued to lie strengthened the Protestant interpretation of the Bible, which considered the covenant between the Jews and God to be valid, as opposed to the supersessionist view, which considered this covenant to be invalid due to the rejection of Jesus by the Jews. The Puritan roots of American evangelicalism may also explain the fascination of American Protestants with speculating about the end-times according to biblical prophecies. This fascination with the end-times was also a strong element in the religious proliferation of nineteenth-century America and was expressed in the theologies of the Shakers, Mormons, Millerites (and their descendants, the Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah’s Witnesses). Nevertheless, all of these millennial denominations were located at the fringe of American Christianity and did not succeed in drawing adherents as powerfully as evangelicalism did (Hatch, 1989).

Again, it is important to put my argument in the right historical context. Evangelicalism, broadly conceived, was not the most dominant force in the beginning of nineteenth-century in the United States. For example, in Southern Cross: The Beginning of Bible Belt, historian Christine Heyrman estimates that “…by the most generous estimate, less than one-fifth of all southern whites over the age of sixteen and fewer than one-tenth of all African Americans had joined Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian churches by 1810s” (1997, p.5). In addition, Heyrman argues that it was only during the 1830s that half of the white
adults in the South were attuned to the evangelical message. “In other words,” she continues, “almost a century elapsed between the 1740s, when evangelicals started actively proselytizing in the South, and the middle of the nineteenth century, when they may have won the attention, if not the allegiance, of the majority of southern whites…among blacks, acceptance came more slowly” (p. 6). Taking Heyrman’s estimation, which resonates with the careful approach suggested by Butler (1992), it is reasonable to argue that the late nineteenth century should be seen as the most influential timeframe for the examination of evangelical pro-Zionist attitudes. Chronologically, in the end of the nineteenth century, the evangelical community in the United States was significantly influenced by the theology of dispensationalism (Marsden, 1980; Sandeen, 1970; Weber, 1979). Indeed, dispensationalism is usually used by many scholars to explain the roots of modern evangelical support for Israel (e.g., Weber, 2004). More recently, such a support has been labeled as Christian or Biblical Zionism.

**Theological Vs. Cultural Lenses to the Examination of Evangelicalism**

In putting Christian Zionism at the heart of this study, I am wary of falling into the trap of theological reductionism, which is, I believe, a common problem, based on previous examinations of Christian evangelicals (for a critique of such tendencies see Marsden, 1980). Thus, the premise of this research project is that a relationship exists between evangelicals’ eschatological belief system and their general approach toward Israel, but this relationship is not necessarily theologically deterministic and ultimate. Accordingly, it can be contended that the complexity of evangelical Christians’ attitude toward Israel views cannot be
adequately captured by purely theological explanations; cultural, social, and organizational factors must be considered as well.

A recent example of a cultural approach to the examination of American attitude toward Israel can be found in a book by Melani McAlister - *Epic Encounters: Culture and U.S. Interests in the Middle East 1945-2000*. McAlister highlights the role of cultural products – such as films, novels, media coverage, and museum exhibitions – in shaping the American attitudes toward the Middle East. McAlister’s work has value for this study because it helps to elucidate the significant role that the nation-state of Israel plays in the American cultural discourse. Although not focusing only on evangelicals, McAlister illustrates the importance of avoiding theological reductionism in the examination of evangelicals’ attitudes toward Israel. However, it is important to note that McAlister’s broader approach to culture products is limited in its ability to explain fundamentalist’s separatists subculture (Carpenter, 1997). In other words, the examination of popular cultural products does not necessarily provide an adequate perspective on the cultural context in which the tours to Israel lie. Consequently, in this study I try to contextualize evangelical support toward Israel theologically and culturally in order to avoid reductionism of any kind.

**Research Goals and Structure**

My intention is to suggest a three-fold dissertation, in which I invite readers on a journey through which they can hopefully gain fruitful insights on the phenomenon of evangelical travel from the Midwest to Israel. In other words, I would prefer that the four chapters that comprise my dissertation be viewed as an invitation for a hermeneutical journey that reflects my attempt to make sense of the examined phenomenon. This journey is
hermeneutical in the sense that each chapter will hopefully equip the reader with additional information that will, in turn, influence his/her reading of subsequent chapters. At the same time, however, each of the three chapters that constitute the body of the dissertation can be also read as a cohesive essay (see figure 1).

**Figure 1: A structural outline of the dissertation**

I choose to open this journey with a chapter which focuses on the ideology that guides the organizers of these trips, namely, Christian Zionism. Like many other studies on travel practices, this paper should be seen as an attempt to address the motivations of the Christian tourists who participate in these tours. The decision to choose this ideology as the center of this paper emanates from my willingness to suggest a theopolitical reading of the examined phenomenon. In order to carry out this reading, the chapter is constructed from a historiographic account that sheds light on the religious roots of Christian Zionism and also from primary and secondary empirical evidence gathered during my fieldwork. Specifically, the first chapter aims to discuss the historical and theological roots of Christian Zionism, in order to try to suggest an historical explanation regarding the way this ideology has become so popular in my subject evangelical community in Central Illinois. In addition, the chapter provides a theoretical discussion of whether the evangelical tours should be viewed as
pilgrimages or as political tours; this latter possibility is suggested by previous studies which address comparable phenomena (Halsell, 1986; Wagner, 1998).

In their book *Key Themes in Qualitative Research*, Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003) devote a chapter to revisiting Howard Becker’s influential article “Whose Side Are We On?” (1967), examining its relevance to contemporary qualitative research more than three decades after its original publication and in light of important philosophical developments in social research methodology. They suggest that Becker’s formerly controversial argument that social researchers cannot avoid taking a side while studying social issues has become a common premise in the qualitative camp since the 1970s, largely because scholars have begun to recognize the value of reflexive thinking, in which researchers critically engage with their own role as constructors of their scholarship and interpreters of social reality, rather than attempting to take the role of “objective” observer.

One of the important developments in this regard is the self-reflective celebration of personal characteristics that used to be considered private and irrelevant to the research, such as health status, victimization experiences, racial/ethnic affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Interestingly, as Atkinson and his colleagues note, religion is perhaps the only dimension of identity that researchers continue to avoid being reflective about. As they put it, “Papers at conferences rarely start ‘As a Baptist,’ but frequently begin ‘As a cancer survivor,’ or ‘As a carer’ or ‘As a recovering alcoholic/bulimic/domestic violence victim’” (2003, p. 90). Thus, in Chapter 3, I would like to contribute to broadening the manner in which social researchers engage reflexively with their identities by discussing the relevance of my religious affiliation to an empirical social research project.
Specifically, in the third chapter, I aim to empirically engage with the methodological discourse on the notion of reflexivity, based on my experience with this ongoing research project. This chapter is organized around three working examples from the project, which aim to illustrate how reflexivity can be practically implemented in social research. It explores the personal, epistemological, and theoretical benefits, as well as the limitations, of employing reflexivity in the process of conducting and writing social research on a theopolitical issue. The paper concludes by discussing the practical challenges associated with exercising reflexivity and advocates various ways in which it can be promoted as a methodological asset in practice and in research.

The fourth chapter examines the political dimensions of American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel by employing data triangulation. Based on evidence from primary and secondary data, the study illuminates: (1) how tourism is utilized by pilgrims to promote their theological visions, which have some political ramifications for the host country, and (2) how the political circumstances in the state of Israel engender a noteworthy relationship between an extreme right party from Israel and the pilgrims. The findings regarding the political dimensions of these tours are organized around four functions generated through data triangulation. Using this organizational schema, this study attempts to provide new theoretical insights regarding the philosophical premises and the purposes traditionally related to the employment of data triangulation in tourism research.
CHAPTER II

“WHERE THE HISTORY OF THE FUTURE IS GOING TO TAKE PLACE”: CHRISTIAN ZIONISM AND AMERICAN EVANGELICAL PILGRIMAGE TO THE HOLY LAND

Abstract: In this article I intend to shed light on the emerging role of tourism as both expressive and formative of American evangelical Christians’ attitudes toward Israel. My argument is that though pilgrims find their trips to the Holy Land both religiously significant and, in some cases, life changing, their experiences and attitudes diverge significantly from those of tour organizers and from popular portrayals of Christian Zionist activism. To study Christian Zionist tours to Israel is to be confronted with the complicated, diverse theopolitical attitudes of American evangelicals expressed with reference to land that is to them undeniably significant and overwhelmingly sacred. Keywords: Christian Zionism, Israel, tourism, pilgrimage.

---

1 This paper is based on an article co-authored with Dr. Jonathan Ebel and planned to be submitted for review for a journal in the field of religious studies.
This is not about politics, this is about the Word of God…but the political ramifications are extremely dramatic. Scripture declares there will come a time when all the nations of the world will turn against Israel. It is … highly conceivable this could happen in our time....

Jack Hayford, “Why stand with Israel today”

Introduction

Christian Zionism is an ideology held by some Christians, mostly Protestants, which supports the notion of a state for the Jewish people in the geographical area referred to in the scriptures as the land of Israel. Within Protestantism, Christian Zionism is most closely associated with the Protestant evangelical movement, and even more specifically, with the fundamentalist wing of Protestantism. Christian Zionists believe that the return of the Jews to the Holy Land constitutes the fulfillment of biblical prophecies (e.g., Ezekiel 36, Daniel 9, Deuteronomy 30, Isaiah 43, Jeremiah 23, Amos 9, Zechariah 8), and that it is a prerequisite for the second advent of Christ, the consummation of history (For an extended discussion see Marsden, 1980). Thus, Christian Zionists view the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 as a signifier of the imminent return of Christ. Their affinity with the state of Israel and with the Jewish people more generally flows from this particular Christian reading of scripture and of history, and their support for both takes many forms.

Travel to Israel is an important and complex expression of evangelical faith and politics; tour organizers advertise their trips as responses to God’s call to “comfort ye my people” and as opportunities to participate in sacred history. This article seeks to relate Christian Zionism to contemporary evangelical pilgrimage to Israel and to examine the extent to which evangelicals making such trips understand their travel to be primarily religious in nature. Though engaged in an overtly theopolitical pilgrimage, travelers have a wide range
of experiences as well as sometimes divergent understandings of those experiences. The Christian Zionist framing of the pilgrimages is clear and constant, but the travelers often have a less focused sense of the relationship between Christian Zionism and their experiences of “the Holy Land.” The conclusions of this chapter are generally in harmony with those of Smith and his co-authors, that attention to the beliefs of lay evangelical Christians provides a more complicated picture of their theologies and political leanings than the rhetoric of conservative evangelical leaders conveys (Smith, 2000).

After a brief examination of the historical roots of Christian Zionism, we will focus our discussion on the political circumstances in Israel and in the United States that gave impetus to the relationship between Christian Zionist evangelicals and the State of Israel, and how both are manifested in evangelicals’ pilgrimages to Israel. To accomplish this second task we will describe and analyze tours to Israel organized by an evangelical couple – Mr. and Mrs. B – who also manage a Central Illinois radio station affiliated with the Moody Bible Institute in Chicago.² We conclude by reflecting on and refining common characterizations of evangelical tours to the Holy Land and their theopolitical tenor. The evidence provided in this study shows that the examined trips aim to promote dispensationalist understandings of the Jewish State, but the particular way in which tour organizers express their eschatology and pilgrims’ less than complete embrace of it complicate previous attempts to characterize evangelical pilgrimage and shed new light on the manner in which Christian Zionist ideology is expressed among evangelical Christians in the United States. Though our conclusions are based on the activities of one couple and not

---

² The Moody Bible Institute is an inter-denominational higher-education organization that has had evangelical characteristics from its inception until today.
on a broad national survey, they are nevertheless helpful for understanding the manner in which Christian Zionism is expressed as a living ideology in many evangelical communities in the United States.

_The Roots of Christian Zionism_

For most of the first fifteen centuries of Christian history, Christians interpreted the biblical prophecies regarding the return of the Jews to their homeland through a supersessionist lens (Supersessionism is also known as Replacement Theology). Christians believed that the Jews had ceased to be God’s chosen people when they failed to accept Jesus as the Messiah and were subsequently dispersed as punishment. Scriptural passages referring to “Israel” were believed for allegorical, tropological, and anagogical purposes to refer to “the Church” and not to the pre-Christian, biblical Israel (for a historical contextualization of supersessionism within the relationship between Jews and Christians see Caroll, 2002). This exegetical strategy effectively read “the Jews” out of salvation history and read “the Christians” in. During the Protestant Reformation, greater access to the Bible allowed some Christians to read the biblical history of the Jewish people for themselves. Using a newly literalist approach to the interpretation of biblical prophecies, some Christians and Christian theologians concluded that God’s covenant with the Israelites was eternal and that the prophecies regarding the restoration of Israel referred to the Jewish nation (Ariel, 1991; Bar-Yosef, 2003). The combination of interpretive protocols that favored a literal reading of the Bible and the assumption of the Bible’s inerrancy generated the idea that God’s covenant with the Jews was, in fact, still valid. It is important to note, in this context, that there are also some contemporary evangelical theologians who express similar views, such as
postmillennial theologians Loraine Boettner (1957) and William Hendriksen (1968), who strongly reject the dispensationalist interpretation (to be discussed below) of the biblical prophecies regarding the returning of the Jews to their land.

One of the earliest works to challenge supersessionist doctrine, an essay entitled "Apocalypse Apocalypseos", was published in 1585 by Thomas Brightman (1562-1607). Brightman suggested reading prophetic texts concerning Israel in a literal manner and argued that biblical prophecies can be traced in the present time through a search for prophetic signs which can be deciphered accordingly. Using biblical prophecies as his guide to the future, Brightman argued that the return of Jews to the land of Israel and the rebuilding of the Third Temple were the signifiers of the Messianic age. Although Brightman withdrew and rejected the controversial treatise as a result of a contentious debate in the Anglican Church, it was one of the earliest instances of proto-Zionist notions among Christians. In 1621, Henry Finch (1558-1623), a member of the British Parliament, published his book *The World’s Great Restoration – Or Calling of the Jews* (Pragai, 1985). Prior to the publication of the book, Finch preached for the establishment of a Jewish settlement in Palestine in accordance with the prophecy of Ezekiel. Finch utilized two theological justifications which, from that point on, became the dual foundation of Christian Zionism. First, he suggested, like Brightman, that according to the Bible, restoration of the Jews to their land would be the obvious signifier of the Messianic era. Second, Finch drew attention to Genesis 12:3, in which God promises to bless those nations that will support the people who would emerge from Abraham (For more details about the role of apocalyptic eschatology in British Protestant Reformation see Bauckham, 1978; Firth, 1979).
The restoration of a Jewish homeland in Palestine was also a prominent idea among some Puritans of seventeenth century England (Ball, 1975; Capp, 1972; Christianson, 1978; Murray, 1971; Toon, 1970). The reign of Oliver Cromwell in England was characterized by a generally sympathetic attitude toward the Jews, whom Cromwell recognized as God’s chosen people. Cromwell’s sympathy for the Jews is evident in his 1655 decision to permit Jewish immigration from Europe following the activities of Manasseh Ben Israel, the rabbi of Amsterdam, who proposed to resettle the Jews in England three and a half centuries after they had been expelled in 1290. Cromwell’s decision indicates the existence of proto-Zionist sentiment in Puritan England (Puritan New England was a different, less hospitable environment), yet no concrete political actions were taken to realize this religious vision. As Regina Sharif suggests, the political and economic problems of Puritan England limited the manifestation of sympathy to the Jews to a supportive immigration policy and religious tolerance (Sharif, 1976). Given the crucial role of the British Empire in world politics in the years that were to come, particularly with the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the popularization of the view that the Jews should be restored to Israel can be seen as a key moment in which pro-Zionist notions were planted in the collective mind of religious Protestants in England.

During the nineteenth century, several English theologians and clergymen carried forward the tradition of interpreting biblical prophecies literally and continued to popularize the notion of the restoration of the Jews to their ancient land. Lewis Way (1722-1840), an Anglican clergyman tried to promote the idea that Jews should return to the Holy Land as

---

3 The Balfour Declaration refers to a letter from the British Foreign Minister (A.J. Balfour) to the Zionist Federation, in which he acknowledges the British government’s support for creating a “national home” for the Jews in Palestine.
written in the biblical prophecies (Sandeen, 1970, p. 19). As the founder and director of the missionary group, the London Society for Promoting Christianity among the Jews, and the editor of a popular journal, *The Jewish Expositor*, Way succeed in gaining entry to important circles in the mainstream Anglican Church, as well as to certain key intellectual circles (Jacobs & Neumann, 1958).

At the end of the nineteenth century, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a British clergymen, developed a millennial doctrine that, while related exegetically to the proto-Zionist thought of sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestants, also exhibited several innovations. Like most Plymouth Brethren of his day, Darby read Biblical prophecy through a futurist lens. Darby also, like fellow Englishmen Brightman, Finch, and Way, argued that the Jews would play a crucial role in the coming end-times. His most significant departure from these rather common trends was to first separate “Israel” and “the Church” and thus to view Christians as the biblical “gentiles” and, second, to divide history into seven ages or dispensations. Darby believed that this world was living in the sixth dispensation, the final age before the Messianic dispensation (i.e., the millennium), in which Christ would reign for one thousand years. It is important to note in this context that like many other components in Darby’s dispensationalism, the idea that human history is dived into ages was not new in Christian thought and can be traced to the second century (McGinn, 1979).

Darby placed the Jews and Israel at the center of his end-times theology. His dispensationalist outline of the past and the future suggested that after the restoration of the Jews in Israel, the Antichrist - a figure from the prophecies in the Book of Revelation - would come to power and lead the world into a war between Christ’s believers and non-believers. This war is known as the battle of Armageddon, a site located in the north of Israel. Before
this battle, during the second arrival of Christ, only a small number of Jews (144,000) would be able to recognize him as the Messiah and would be harshly rejected by the vast majority of the Jewish people. Later on, a short period of judgments and punishments known as the Great Tribulation (this term derives from the prophecy in Mathew 24:21) or the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, would begin, and all those who were not true believers in Jesus would remain on earth to suffer this period. The true believers (i.e., the Church) would be “raptured” (lifted into the air/heaven to meet Christ) and would not suffer this ordeal. Only about a third of the Jews would survive the Great Tribulation and, realizing that the rejected 144,000 Jews who accepted Jesus at the beginning of the Great Tribulation were actually right, would join the church. Futurist premillennialists were and are divided over how the “true” Church will experience the Tribulation -- whether those who believe in Christ will remain on earth to suffer the Great Tribulation. Pretribulationists, like Darby himself, believe that those who truly believe in Christ will be raptured before the Great Tribulation begins and that the rapture of the “true” Church could happen at any moment. Midtribulationists contend that the rapture will take place during the Tribulation, while posttribulationists argue that Christ’s true believers will be raptured only after the Tribulation has concluded (Weber, 1979). Pretribulationist dispensationalism is now the most significant millennialist school in conservative evangelical thought and constitutes the theological lens through which many conservative and fundamentalist Protestants construct pro-Israel attitudes (see Weber, 2004, pp 9-14).

---

4 Darby based his assumption regarding the rapture on Thessalonians 4: 16-17. However, this idea is also claimed to be part of a private revelation that Darby himself had.
The powerful influences of New England Puritanism and Protestant evangelicalism on the religious and intellectual culture of the United States helped create fertile soil for Darby’s particular approach to reading scripture and history. From the typological imagination of the Puritans to the widespread tendency to view the new nation as a new Israel, American Protestants were both familiar with and drawn to Biblical readings of their own history and, to be sure, of cosmic history as well.\(^5\) Darby advanced his doctrine in seven visits to the United States between 1862 and 1878, during which time many mainstream theologians adopted his eschatology (For an historical overview of the spread of dispensationalism among the evangelical community in America see Marsden, 1980; Sandeen, 1970; and Weber, 1978).

Among Darby’s followers in America were C.I. Scofield, D.L. Moody, W.E. Blackstone, and A.C. Gaebelein. In 1909, Scofield published a reference Bible in which dispensationalist eschatology played a crucial role in the footnoted interpretations of the scripture (Marsden, 1980). The popularity of Scofield’s reference Bible facilitated the development of dispensationalism as a prominent eschatology among American evangelicals. In addition, the American dispensationalists became a dominant power in the Niagara Bible Conference, which is considered by American religious historians to be one of the most important theological conferences in the development of Protestant evangelicalism. Dispensationalists were also an important force in the early fundamentalist movement in the 1910 (Marsden, 1980).

Darby’s teachings proved attractive to many American church-goers. Dispensationalism became popular mostly in denominations associated with nineteenth

\(^5\) An excellent collection of documents tracing the long arc of thinking about America and Americans as a new Israel is Cherry, 1998.
century revivalism – Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists – and today is the most significant millennialist school in American evangelicalism. Best-selling books such as Hal Lindsey’s *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Lindsey & Carlson, 1970) and Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins’s *Left Behind* series have further popularized pretribulationist dispensationalist eschatology while keeping readers attentive to the role of Israel and the broader Middle East in the end times.⁶

Christian Zionism is the current coin of the realm among America’s public evangelical pastorate and exerts some influence (vast by some accounts, minor by others) on perceptions of United States foreign policy if not on policies themselves (Davidson, 2005; Northcott, 2004). Vocal Christian Zionists such as Pat Robertson have attributed various ills that have befallen Israeli politicians to their willingness to cede lands to Palestinians or, more to the point, their unwillingness to run their country according to the dictates of a Protestant Christian reading of biblical prophecy. Christian Zionism is not, however, only the currency of Robertson and his ilk.⁷ A group of organizations in Israel and a network of tour organizers in the United States work to cultivate Christian Zionist teachings and to frame “experiences” of “the Holy Land” with futurist, pre-millennialist teachings and eschatological expectations.

The International Christian Embassy in Jerusalem (ICEJ), founded in 1980, is one of several Israel-based organizations espousing Christian Zionist ideology (others include the

---

6 The most successful book in this 15 volume series is *Left Behind: A Novel of the Earth's Last Days* (1995). The Canadian film production company Cloud Ten Pictures produced three films based on the series (2000, 2002, 2005), which also popularized the pretribulationist view in contemporary America. Following the success of the three films, the fourth film is currently in production.

7 To a great extent, academic interest in the roots of Christian Zionism has emanated from the central role evangelicalism plays in American politics. Given the pivotal role of the Jews in dispensationalism and the popularity of dispensationalism among modern
International Christian Zionist Center (ICZC), Bridges for Peace, and The Institute of Holy Land Study. ICEJ is a self-described Christian Zionist organization which sees itself as “an evangelical Christian response to the need to comfort Zion according to the command of scripture” (ICEJ, 2006). Though its official web-site declares, “[w]e are not trying to fulfill an end-time agenda,” and the rapture is not a part of their teachings, the web-site also makes clear that ICEJ views Israel as far more than a nice place to visit.

We proclaim a message to Zion that her modern day restoration is not a historical accident, but the fulfillment of God’s word (Ezekiel 36:24-26; Luke 21:24). A time of great glory awaits Israel even though dark times may precede the break of day. Vision will not fail and from a Jewish Jerusalem, the Lord’s law will go out and the "nations shall not learn war anymore" (Isaiah 2:1-4).

There are, thus, historical, current, and futurist reasons for ICEJ’s support for Israel. ICEJ believes the role of the Jews in the end-times to be significant and, perhaps, sufficient to demand the support of Christians. ICEJ stresses further the extent of Christianity’s

---

8 The ICEJ was founded after the pass of an Israeli law which declares East and West Jerusalem as the united Capital of Israel. As a result, the United Nation Security Council passed Resolution 478, asking all its members to remove their embassy from Jerusalem. All nations but Costa Rica and El-Salvador answered this Resolution and the ICEJ, under the leadership of the Dutch theologian and pastor Jan Willem van der Hoeven. For more details see Merkley (2001). The original name of the Institute of Holy Land Study was the Israel-American Institute of Biblical Studies. ICZC rationalizes trips to Israel using the prophecies of Zechariah: “Thousands of years ago, Israel’s prophets foretold that people from around the world would one day come up to the land: “Yes, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD” (Zechariah 9:22).

9 In a special issue about Christian Zionism in the Messianic journal Mishkan, Baruch Maoz, the National Coordinator of Lausanne Consultation on Jewish Evangelism (LCJE), suggests that a more moderate approach toward Zionism should be taken, rather than the approach advocated by the ICEJ, see Maoz, (1990). In another publication in the same issue, Maoz provides the official “Statement on Christian Zionism” of the Israel chapter of LCJE: “We rejoice in every expression of love toward Israel, be it in evangelistic, social,
historical and theological “debt” to Judaism: “Paul affirms that everything we hold dear as Christians has come from the Jewish people,” and emphasizes the need for Christians to repay this debt with “support, prayers, and ministry of comfort.” The organization reminds all comers that Jesus proclaimed, “Salvation is of the Jews.” In other words, the biblical “Israel” remains covenanted; no evangelism is necessary. Indeed, the ICEJ has been criticized by both evangelists and Messianic Jews (i.e., Jews who follow Jesus without abandoning their religious heritage) for neglecting the important mission of proselytizing among Jews (for a discussion on the tension between the theological need to evangelize the Jews and Christian Zionism, see Ross, 1990 and Fruchtenbaum, 1990). Some have attributed this reluctance not to a principled theological stance, but rather to their fear from the Israeli government’ response which can hinder their cozy relations.10

Tourism is an especially valuable economic and religious tool by which ICEJ and other Christian Zionist organizations choose to express their support for Israel. Thanks to the efforts of the ICEJ and similar organizations and the marketing efforts of the Israeli government, tourism has emerged as a major platform for the expression of Christian Zionism. In the past three decades, many evangelical leaders have become tour leaders to Israel, and many evangelical institutions and churches have started organizing such tours (Weber, 2004). Some scholars have examined tour groups led by Jerry Falwell, but little research has focused on tours organized by less prominent evangelical leaders and communities in the United States. In this regard, Timothy Weber suggests that Falwell used these tours “to build a popular base of support for the Jewish state.” (Weber, 2004, p. 219).

---

10 economic or political terms; but we hereby register our concern over the tendency to equate love for Israel with a political platform: The Gospel does not necessarily imply any one position on Zionism” (Maoz, 1990, pp. 6-7).
Grace Halsell conducted a fieldwork on evangelical tours by joining two of Jerry Falwell’s tours to Israel in 1983 and 1985. Halsell criticized the tours for being political and not religious and for completely ignoring the Palestinian people, and more specifically the Christian Arabs who lived in tour destination cities such as Bethlehem and Nazareth (Halsell, 1986).

**Christian Zionism and Evangelical Pilgrimages to Israel**

Christian Zionist thinking provides the motive for and shapes the itinerary of evangelical pilgrimages to Israel; the tours themselves serve to reaffirm or, in some cases, to cloud, the Christian Zionist lens through which pilgrims view events in the Middle East.

The trips described and analyzed here were organized by Mr. and Mrs. B, an evangelical couple based in central Illinois. They first organized a trip in November 2002 and since then have kept a pace of roughly four trips per year. Their tours usually last ten to twelve days and range from 12 to 72 pilgrims. Prior to traveling, pilgrims meet at least once or twice to learn the details about the trip and, in most cases, the humanitarian work in which they will engage. Pre-trip meetings also include a time for questions, sometimes with past pilgrims, and a worship service (for example of documents distributed in these meetings see Appendixes F, G, H and I). Some pilgrims pay the $2800 for their travel entirely out of their own funds, but trip organizers encourage “delegates to build support team to hold them up in prayer, to hear their stories upon their return, and assist them financially.” Many listeners of

10 Such an explicit accusation was made for example by Fruchtenbaum (1990) and by Maoz (1990).
the radio stations managed by Mr. and Mrs. B also donate money for prospective pilgrims.\textsuperscript{11}

There are many pilgrims who have traveled with the couple more than once; some of them have joined up to six trips so far. The itinerary for the tours varies, but such loyalty to the same organizers who lead groups to the same basic destination is quite rare in the tourism industry.

Figure 2: The picture “Jinji Bear’s Journey” was painted in 2003 by Kathleen Jennings, inspired by her participation in a humanitarian pilgrimage organized by Mr. and Mrs. B. in October 2002.

Mr. and Mrs. B organize between three to four tours to Israel annually. Each trip has different theme but the Christian Zionist ideology, broadly defined, is evident in the

\textsuperscript{11} In case of regular, or what the couple call “spiritual pilgrimage,” the payment is not tax-deductible. The humanitarian trips are considered to be “part mission, part pilgrimage” and the “mission part” ($1400) is tax-deductible.
preparations and during each trip. The “spiritual” summer trips do not usually involve pre-planned volunteer work, but organizers stress that simply traveling in Israel lends vital economic support to the nation and its people. Humanitarian trips involve significant volunteer work, much of it framed by Christian Zionist ideology. The observations recorded here were collected from a group that traveled to Israel on a “humanitarian” trip in November 2005; their trip was titled “Cargo of Care & Bucket Brigade: The 2005 Painting Pilgrims” (see Appendixes F and G). As is the practice before each humanitarian trip (the trips that Mr. and Mrs. B plan for November usually have a humanitarian focus) the prospective pilgrims collected various items to donate while visiting Israel including 347 teddy bears, 750 Beanie Babies, and hundreds of other toys, clothes and housekeeping articles (see Appendix J for the list of items donated in November 2004). The November 2005 trip was “part mission, part pilgrimage” and focused only on sites in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. Three days of this trip included volunteer work in “care centers and neighborhoods of the poor, sick elderly, and perhaps even terror victims to serve them through fellowship, light tasks, yard work, painting, and repairs.”

12 Each pilgrim was part of a team that worked in one of several centers (see Appendix I for a descriptions of some of the organization as distributed in a pre-trip meeting): Beit Talia, Tiberius, a boarding home for at-risk children, ages 7-12; Kinneret Project Infant & Pre-School Center for Endangered Children, Tiberius, ages newborn-7; Beit-Zas: a senior citizen center for Russian immigrants, Tiberius. The whole group went to visit HaEmek Medical Center located in the city of Afula or “in the valley of Armageddon” as described in the pamphlet; Magen David Adom (the Israeli equivalent for the Red Cross), Jerusalem where some of the pilgrims who were able and willing donated blood; Shevet

12 From one of the pamphlets for November 2005 trip.
Achim, Jerusalem which is a Christian group that brings Palestinian children with heart problems to Israeli hospitals for free surgery and care; a visit in chess club of Christian Russian immigrants in the city of Arad. In addition, during the trip, the pilgrims were given the opportunity to plant trees. The non-mission part of the trip includes visits to Jerusalem, the Sea of Galilee and Jordan River (where baptism/re-dedication is conducted), Eilat and the Red Sea, and the Dead Sea. The November 2005 trip concluded in a Lebanese Restaurant in Abu-Gosh (Muslim-Christian Arab Village near Jerusalem).

The preliminary process of data collection for this study started in December 2004 and continued throughout July 2006. In December 2004, Mrs. B, the main source, described how she and her husband started organizing trips to Israel after traveling with Kay Arthur’s evangelical group. She also shared the schedules and locations of meetings planned before and after the trip with the pilgrims; this information later became an important source of data for this study. In addition, the first author joined a group of pilgrims who traveled to Israel in June 2005 and conducted several informal interviews with pilgrims before and after their trips. The primary and secondary data about the November 2005 trip was collected between September 2005 and July 2006. Initial data came from a transcript of participant observation of a preparation meeting with seven key pilgrims who were assigned as “team captains.” The captains were very excited about the opportunity and openly discussed their motivations. At a post-trip meeting the pilgrims shared experiences and photographs and discussed the significance of the trip to them; six of the pilgrims in attendance sat for informal interviews. In this meeting, informal interviews with six pilgrims were conducted. After the trip, pilgrims received a list of written questions to answer and return via mail or email (the

13 For more detail on Arthur’s trips and activities see: http://www.precept.org.
pilgrims were provided with stamped envelopes and informed consent letters see Appendixes C and D. From a list of 38 participants in the November trip, 26 replied (response rate 68%). To contextualize the pilgrims’ motivations and reactions, we have also drawn on a body of literature including booklets, brochures and pamphlets, and original materials created for the pilgrims and their hosts during the last five years. Among these was the ideological essay by Jack Hayford, quoted at the outset of the article, “Why to stand with Israel today?” (n.d.).

**Evangelicals as Pilgrims**

The relationship between pilgrimage -- a particular form of religious journey in which the motives to travel are rooted in one’s beliefs (Rinschede, 1992) -- and tourism is a matter of debate among both scholars and travelers. When is a trip only a trip? When does a trip become a pilgrimage? When a Christian Zionist travels to Israel, is the line between “pilgrim” and “tourist” distinguishable? (Badone & Rosman, 2004; Cohen, 1974; Turner, 1973). Eric Cohen has argued that combining elements of “ordinary tourism” in one’s travels makes one a tourist, but such a rigid view of categories and experiences does not harmonize with the realities of modern travel to Israel. Not only do the World Tourism Organization and the Israeli Ministry of Tourism -- not to mention airlines and hotels -- treat pilgrims as a subset of “tourists,” but the travelers themselves hold diverse understandings of what they were doing (for a comprehensive discussion on tourist definitions see Leiper, 1979). Boris Vuconic’s more pliable definition of pilgrimage is more appropriate to the hybrid realities of modern travel. Vuconic defines pilgrimage as “an organized visit or

---

14 There are many definitions of the term “tourism” in the literature which differ from each other in their perspectives, focuses and the goals that they serve. For the purpose of this paper tourism can be holistically seen as a “system involving the discretionary travel and
journey, organized at least in the sense that there are religious motives for going to a place and that the contents of that place include religious rituals.” (Vukonic, 1996, pp. 117-118).

Although for Vukonic pilgrimage is primarily a religious act, his definition does not preclude other motives for and implications of the visit.

The religious orientation of the tours organized by Mr. and Mrs. B. is evident in much of the literature relating to the tours. One letter to prospective pilgrims outlining the trip’s itinerary and offering suggestions for preparation provides a particularly clear example of the religious motives of at least the tour’s organizers.

May all your preparation be completed with excellence and holiness, walking in a manner worthy of God’s calling. We are preparing to embark on an incredible adventure for the Lord. We are going to be the hands, the face and the eyes of Messiah to His own people. We are going to represent His heart to them as we comfort them with our presence, kindness, love and care. It will be a joy to travel together to serve the King of kings and the Lord of lords in the Land that His feet have trod.

From packing and preparing to travel and interaction with Israelis, travelers are encouraged to think of themselves as members of the body of Christ, quite literally. While representing “His heart” to “them” no aspect of the experience can be fully divested of religious motive. The trips also have a more inwardly directed religious purpose. Specific sites, for instance Gethsemane, are included in the itinerary for their affective potential. Evangelical travelers are supposed to sense and appreciate the “joy” of being in “the Land that His feet have trod.”

All trips organized by Mr. and Mrs. B also involve participation in religious rituals from the

temporary stay of persons away from their usual place of residence for one or more nights, expecting tours made for the primary purpose of earning remuneration from points en route.” (Leiper, 1979, pp. 403-404).
dramatic -- baptism (or re-dedication) in the Jordan River, a sermon in Gethsemane – to the
more common – sermons and prayers.15

For the most part, participants in the November 2005 “Cargo of Care” trip shared the understanding that their trip was a pilgrimage and that they were pilgrims. When asked if they would define themselves “as a tourist, as a pilgrim, or as a volunteer?” most respondents accepted all three definitions, but mentioned the pilgrim role as being the most important.

For example, a woman in her fifties wrote, “I would like to be thought of as a pilgrim with a mission. I don’t want to be just a tourist. I went to experience the Holy places where Jesus lives and feel the closeness with Him. I also went to show the people of Israel we Christians care about them.” The correspondence between the “official” portrayal of the outward and inward religious dimensions of the trip and this woman’s response is nearly exact. She saw herself as living out a modern Christian Zionist mandate to bring comfort to Israel and confessed to having felt a high degree of personal comfort in her experience of the sacred sites of the Holy Land. But in spite of the attempts of trip organizers to frame the experience as a pilgrimage, some participants in the “Cargo of Care” seemed somewhat uncomfortable thinking of themselves as pilgrims. One pair of participants who had formerly served as missionaries in the South Pacific stressed the humanitarian aspect of the trip as their main motive for traveling to Israel and refused to be labeled as pilgrims.

15 Both Mr. and Mrs. B stressed that the baptism/re-dedication event and the visit to Jerusalem are the only common characteristics of all the tours that they organize and, therefore, that they could be regarded as rituals. However, they felt it important to mention that they prefer conducting baptisms in various locations in nature, while avoiding what they called “industrial” places or predetermined locations. However, due to various constraints, such as time of day, weather, and physical ability of participants, they are sometimes forced to use established Christian facilities.
I didn’t quite feel a pilgrim as the organizer [the full name was replaced] seemed to view us. Perhaps that was my hang-up. I felt I was a tourist and a volunteer because that was what we were doing.

The respondent did not explain this “hang-up” any further. It could reflect a discomfort with the traditionally Catholic resonances of the term “pilgrimage” within Christianity. It could simply reflect a preference for the other labels. It might, however, indicate a divergence from tour organizers and other pilgrims on a basic assumption about the destination and its place in sacred history. Travel, sightseeing and charitable work were not, for this respondent, inextricably interwoven with a sense of the sacred. They were, quite simply, travel, sightseeing, and charitable work.

The importance of defining and understanding both this kind of travel and the thoughts and actions of those engaged in it is political as well as academic. Christian Zionists and their opponents both use tourism to inculcate a theopolitics, while also using characterizations of opposing tours to substantiate their theopolitical claims, and to argue for the value of their own tours over and against those led by others. For instance, Reverend Stephen Sizer, a political and theological opponent of Christian Zionism who is based in England, divides Protestant pilgrims to the Holy Land into three groups: Evangelicals, Fundamentalists and the Living Stones.(Sizer, 1999). He suggests that “Evangelicals” visit places with biblical significance to enrich their knowledge, suggesting that these tours are educational, not religious in their essence. He also claims that these tours do not address “either the present Middle East conflict or necessarily [engage] in theological praxis” (1999, p. 85).

He claims further that “the presence of an ancient and oriental Christianity is either ignored, misunderstood or … criticized for desecrating the archaeological sites with what are often regarded as pagan shrines.” The “Fundamentalists”, Sizer argues, are driven by
the same motives “but with the added eschatological dimension, believing themselves to be witnessing and indeed participating in the purposes of God, at work within Israel in these ‘Last days’.” Sizer states further that contrary to “the ignorance of many Evangelicals and the harm caused by Fundamentalists,” the Living Stones pilgrimages that he organizes “include opportunities to meet, worship with, listen to and learn from the spirituality and experience of the indigenous Christians.” (Similar argument is suggested by Halsell, 1986).

Figure 3: “Heart to Heart from a Servant’s Heart” was painted in 2006 by Kathleen Jennings, inspired by the November 2005 Cargo of Care, in which the pilgrims visited Shevet Achim and HaEmek Medical Center.

Such categories are not true to the experiences they seek to explain. Some “Cargo of Care” pilgrims expressed eschatologies that would put them in the “Fundamentalist” category, but reflected sympathetically on the Palestinian plight. In addition, the pilgrimages examined here included benign interactions with “indigenous Christians” and with Christians
who immigrated to Israel from former Soviet Union. During the “Cargo of Care” trip, the pilgrims met Arab Christians in the Arab cities of Israel, e.g., Nazareth, and also stopped at the city of Arad (a majority Jewish city) to support the local chess club for Christian Russian immigrants. These encounters with local Christians in Arab and Jewish cities should further qualify assertions that Christian Zionist pilgrims are myopic when it comes to the lives and plights of non-Jews in Israel (Sizer, 1999). A large percentage of the “Cargo of Care” pilgrims understood their trips to be educational, constructive, and religious. What many failed to see was the political aspect of their trips.

**Politics and Evangelical Pilgrimage**

Tourism and pilgrimage have been attractive to both conservative evangelicals in America and Israelis as a means for celebrating and supporting the Israeli nation-state (for historical review of the early connection between political Zionism and Protestantism in the late nineteenth century until the establishment of the state of Israel see Merkley, 1998). This relationship between conservative evangelicals and Israelis – with roots reaching at least as far back as J.N. Darby – gained momentum at the Jerusalem Conference on Biblical Prophecies held in June 15-18, 1971 and was further spurred by the Likud Party victory in 1977 (Weber, 2004). After his election in 1977, Prime Minister Menachem Begin established a right wing coalition that enthusiastically embraced religious tendencies to view the territories that were occupied during the Six Day War as the biblical “Judea and Samaria.” The results of the new election included the cultivation of Jewish messianic settlers, who propounded religious justifications for their settlement of these areas. The American Christian Right was fond of this new theological discourse and supported the new Israeli
policy. Prime Minister Begin cultivated this relationship by developing a special bond with evangelical leaders such as Jerry Falwell (Weber, 2004). Both sides recognized that tourism was a potentially compelling way in which to express and develop these relations. Timothy Weber notes that the Israeli Tourism Ministry began to acknowledge the importance of this alliance in the early 1980s by starting “actively recruit[ing] evangelical religious leaders for ‘familiarization’ tours at no cost to them” Weber suggests that these promotional tours aimed to allow people “of even limited influence to experience Israel for themselves and be shown how they might bring their own tour group to Israel.” (all quotes from Weber, 2004, p. 214).

The place of tourism in the relationship between Christian Zionists and the State of Israel developed further with the election in 1996 of Likud part leader Binyamin Netanyahu as Prime Minister. Donald Wagner reports that following his election, the Israel Christian Advocacy Council, which operates through the Israeli Ministry of Tourism, made a concerted and official effort to celebrate officially relations between Christian Zionists and the state of Israel (Weber, 2004; Wagner, 1998). Similarly, Weber suggests that bringing evangelical pilgrims to Israel was a part of an Israeli strategy that derived from “the potential power of the evangelical subculture and began to mobilize it as a base of support that could influence American foreign policy.” (2004, p. 220).

The emergence of the Religious Right as a prominent political force in the United States gave both energy and more discernible political tones to Christian Zionism and the evangelical tourism industry (Martin, 1996). The Religious Right was never focused only on Israel, but the movement hid neither its pro-Israeli attitude nor its dispensationalist leanings. Jerry Falwell’s notes from the early days of the Moral Majority show that, although not a central issue, the United States’ policy toward Israel was a topic that should be addressed by
the new organization, “[W]e announced that Moral Majority was a political organization, not a religious one, and that we welcomed Jews and Catholics and Protestants and Mormons and even non-religious people who shared our view on the family and abortion, strong national defense, and Israel.” (Martin, 1996, p. 204). The establishment of Moral Majority was an important junction in the evolution of the Religious Right, and pro-Israel ideology was an integral component in this movement from its outset.

Tour organizers Mr. and Mrs. B identify themselves as “right wingers” in American politics. They are both well aware of the potential political implications of their tours to Israel. Mr. B explained during a July 2006 interview that he wants pilgrims to grow in their understanding of how God used ‘Geo-Political’ means to raise up people and events to accomplish His will.” Mrs. B also revealed her political orientation in an interview, explaining at length her motives for bringing Americans to Israel:

Well, I want people to know where the history of the future is going to take place. Everything that is happening in the world now – the key is Israel. Everything. I can’t say this aloud to everybody, but I believe with all my heart that…our dear president George Bush is – I voted for him twice and I gave him money- he understands this too about Israel. He has been there…Ariel Sharon has taken him in a helicopter. He has taken him above the Golan Heights and said: “this is where they used to shoot down at us. Look at how skinny this strip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the West Bank is.” George Bush knows this. I think that is why he is doing this in Iraq and maybe next Iran. …I want to get them over there to meet the people and to start understanding like…the complexity of the relationship. And to see what even the Palestinians…they are sweet, nice people if they didn’t have such a lousy leader…a normal education. I mean they just…What they are teaching them is evil. We are primarily…our heart is with the Jewish people.

The literature that Mr. and Mrs. B. provide to prospective pilgrims exhibits a similar and self-conscious fusion of religion and politics. During a promotional meeting held at a Midwestern evangelical church, attendees received Jack Hayford’s article “Why stand with
Israel today?” (n.d.).16 Hayford, an evangelical pastor based in California, describes with considerable urgency Israel’s current situation and lists five ways in which Christians can “stand up for Israel:”

1) Equip yourself with reliable information, avoiding bigotry and disallowing “blind spot.” Recognize the disposition of popular press….

2) Accept with continuing faithfulness the Bible’s call to “Pray for the peace of Jerusalem” (Psalm 122:6), and pray that our Nation will govern in the light of Genesis 12:1-3…”I will bless those who bless you…”

3) Prayerfully consider visiting Israel as a point of practical support.

4) Show friendship toward Jewish friends. Affirm that you, as a believer, stand with Israel as a point of your Bible-based commitment to God.

5) While acknowledging the terrorist habits of radical Muslims, be gracious to other.

Hayford presents religion and politics as tightly interwoven, though not coterminous, and appeals to true Christians to express their faith in ways that are undeniably political. Among the five ways of standing with Israel – one of two over which readers are asked to pray – is “visiting Israel.”

“Cargo of Care” pilgrims did not understand their experiences in Israel to be political in any significant way. Their travel, they believed, was an expression of religious belief and duty, not of politics. In response to the question “What are the political aspects of the humanitarian tour to Israel?” one pilgrim answered: “there is no political connotation to this trip. Israel is truly God’s chosen people and I feel closer to them as a people. My opinion remains supportive.” Another pilgrim wrote:

There are no connections between these trips and politics. I feel that the state of Israel is a God given gift to the Jewish people. As to my feelings about Israeli people or Jewish people, I don’t think I differ with either, I know that the Bible says that God gave the Jewish people the land.

16 Jack Hayford is a very activist pastor who leads and manages the Living Way Ministries in California, the Living Way radio station, The King's College and Seminary, The Jack W. Hayford School of Pastoral Nurture, The Hayford Bible Institute.
This is not to say that the pilgrims on the Cargo of Care trip were not Christian Zionists or political activists. They were clearly both. Their understanding of their time in Israel was, however, so thoroughly integrated with what they understand to be “true Christianity” that “politics” was to them an inadequate, indeed a profane descriptor. Their unequivocal support of Israel’s right to exist and their belief that God’s promise to the Israelites is sufficient justification for the contemporary nation-state of Israel were not, in their eyes, political statements. They were, rather, statements of faith. This was a common premise among all pilgrims.

The theopolitical relationship of conservative evangelical Christians to the nation-state of Israel has led many to criticize the former for being uncritical in their support of the latter, particularly where the Palestinian question is concerned. One might expect, then, that conservative evangelical pilgrims to Israel would exhibit either ignorance of or insensitivity to the plight of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Though the overwhelming majority of “Christian comfort” during the “Cargo of Care” trip was directed toward Jewish Israelis, the pilgrims traveling from Illinois were aware of the plight of the Palestinians during their trips and the organizers arranged for a presentation about Shevet Achim, a Christian organization that “helps bring Arab children to Israeli hospitals for life saving heart surgeries” (Shevet Achim, 2006). At a post-trip meeting, one of the pilgrims noted that she and her husband had decided to donate money to the organization after returning home. Her husband also mentioned this organization in a letter describing the trip.

I support the concept of an Israeli homeland. God loves the Palestinian people also. I deplore the dreadful violence that both groups feel they must use and pray for a peaceful solution to their disagreements. My wife and I made a significant gift to Shevet Achim which helps to improve relations between individual Jews and
individual Palestinian families. I do not believe I feel any closer to the Israelis or to
the Palestinians as a result of the trip nor do I feel that my political opinion about
either side changed because of the trip. But my hope for the future took a leap
forward because of the work of Shevet Achim. I only wish that there were many,
many more activities similar to Shevet Achim.

His affection and hope, felt equally for Israelis and Palestinians, is hardly harmonious with
depictions of the Christian Zionist as an apocalyptic zealot; his apparent appreciation for the
daunting complexity of interpersonal, intercultural, and inter-religious relations in Israel and
Palestine is a significant development on the analysis offered by tour organizers.

Given the long-standing affinity among dispensationalist eschatology, conservative
evangelical Christianity, and Christian Zionism, it is far from surprising that tour organizers
and most pilgrims had end-times on their mind to some extent. Mr. and Mrs. B. described an
eschatology that was shared, at least in part, by most participants in their tour. In response to
a question about her eschatological beliefs, Mrs. B. wrote:

…the bottom line for us concerning Eschatology is that G-d is in control (not man),
and that things will unfold in G-d's timing and in G-d's way. We get to watch and
see Him work. When we read the Bible and see that the Jewish people will return to
Israel, we rejoice, we believe it, and we see that G-d is faithful to His Word. We
want to help in any way we can, motivated by love, not by hastening Yeshua's return.
When His Word says that Temple will be rebuilt on the Temple Mount (it's in
Ezekiel, the Hebrew scriptures) we believe this as well, though we haven't a clue as to
how G-d will orchestrate the events to have this done, since there are indeed two
gigantic mosques up there.

Mrs. B’s insistence – stated at least five times in different ways – that God alone knows when
the end-times will come and that human actions will not hasten God, has a deeper meaning
within the Christian Zionist community. She is making it clear that she is not among the
radicals who would resort to violent acts against the “two gigantic mosques up there” in
order to force modern events into alignment with prophecy. That kind of action is, according
to her, only for God to initiate. (One must wonder, though, whether she believes such actions will be entirely supernatural and, if not, who the “righteous” human instruments will be) In a description of her dispensationalist beliefs that is, at once more concrete and more supernatural, Mrs. B. wrote:

We align ourselves with many of the dispensationalist doctrine, but not fully... I believe that the rapture will come first (i.e., that Yeshua will meet those who love Him in the air), that the antichrist will call himself G–d (and I never have read in the Bible or anywhere else that he'd be Jewish) and set himself up in the Temple, that will have been built there. (By the way, this is the time period when I believe that the Jewish people in Israel will flee to Petra, to escape what's to come, i.e., the time of Jacob's trouble, two periods of 3.5 years.) Then Yeshua, King of Kings and Lord of Lords returns to earth to set up His kingdom. He returns with all the saints before, including Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Isaiah, etc, etc, etc, as well as those who believe in Yeshua and who came after Yeshua's birth, death and resurrection (like me).

The Cargo of Care pilgrims, though much less aware of dispensationalism, held beliefs –a “proper” reading of the Bible included seeing contemporary Jews as the biblical Israelites; the imminent arrival of Jesus; the Great Tribulation – that may have been either dispensationalist components or beliefs shared also by less eschatologically focused versions of conservative Protestantism. No pilgrim described the doctrine of dispensationalism in its Darbyite entirety, but some did make reference to the eschatological outline suggested by dispensationalism and to some specific markers on that outline, such as the rebuilding of the Third Temple before the arrival of Christ (for the possible Theo-political ramifications of premillennial eschatology on Middle-Eastern politics see Ariel, 2001). Pilgrims do not embrace Darbyite dispensationalism and its elaborate eschatology uniformly and completely. While many expressed a sense of the importance of Israel in the end times, they were not inclined toward personal acts of apocalyptic radicalism.
Christian Zionism has many opponents within and without Christian circles. These opponents point to the particular and peculiar origins of Christian Zionism in Protestantism while working within previously-defined theological, political, and ideological roles. The Palestinian Christian organization Sabeel believes that exegetical clarity and alternative theological developments will help dissolve Christian Zionism as an obstacle to peace in the Middle East.

[we] recognize that one of the places a clear understanding of the message and threat of Christian Zionism is badly needed is in the seminaries and the religious studies programs of American colleges and universities. As a first step in addressing this issue Sabeel is seeking to find out what, if anything, is currently done in these various programs to address the issue of Christian Zionism. To that end we have initiated the Sabeel Theological Education Program to reach key persons on the faculties of seminaries, colleges, and universities (both public and private) who might be sympathetic to our concerns and who might be able to help us put together a picture of efforts to counter Christian Zionism that currently exist. We are especially anxious to get acquainted with persons from as many denominations as possible in order to gain as complete a picture as we can. Our hope is that we can assist those willing to address the issue in college and seminary classes. We are also seeking funds that would allow seminarians to travel to Palestine to study the issue for themselves. (FOSNA, 2006a).

Those who disagree with Christian Zionist ideology also understand the political ramifications – potential and actual – of tourism in the Holy Land, and labor to counteract the itineraries and the ideologies developed by Christian Zionists suggests that one of the important concerns in this context is whether the belief in the rebuilding of the Third Temple will lead some adherents to look for ways to hasten the arrival of Christ by destroying the two mosques that are currently located on the Temple Mount (Ariel, 2001). The Palestinian organization Sabeel, a self-defined “ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians,” is a harsh critic of Christian Zionism. Sabeel was established in 1989 by the Anglican priest and Israeli citizen Reverend Naim Ateek. Similar to the Christian Zionist trips examined in this study, Sabeel, through its North American branch – FOSNA (Friend of Sabeel in North America) - offers tours to the Holy Land for American
church-goers. These tours, also known as “International Witness for Justice and Peace Visit[s],” focus on Palestinian cities such as Bethlehem, Ramallah, Nablus, Jenin, and Tulkarem and include meetings with Sabeel’s representatives (FOSNA, 2006b).

Further research would be required to determine the extent to which the participants in these trips are exposed to Sabeel’s political agenda. But some of the literature published by Sabeel demonstrates how a liberationist reading of scripture and of history generates a depiction of Israel that diverges sharply from the Christian Zionist view and offers hints as to how the theopolitical tone of such tours might also be different. In a special Lenten message published on April 6, 2001, Naim Ateek, wrote:

Here in Palestine Jesus is again walking the via dolorosa [sic]... He is with them when their homes are shelled by tanks and helicopter gunships…In this season of Lent, it seems to many of us that Jesus is on the cross again with thousands of crucified Palestinians around him. It only takes people of insight to see the hundreds of thousands of crosses throughout the land, Palestinian men, women, and children being crucified. Palestine has become one huge golgotha [sic]. The Israeli government crucifixion system is operating daily. Palestine has become the place of the skull (Ateek, n.d.).

The theopolitical picture being painted here is, to say the least, quite different than the one developed for and by “Cargo of Care” pilgrims. American pilgrims traveling with Sabeel would journey not to see the land where Christ will one day walk again, but to see where new Pilates condemn new Christs everyday. Their religious call – their Christian duty – would not be to comfort Israel, but to comfort victims of the “Israeli government crucifixion system.”

---

17 Between 14-18 April 2004 Sabeel held a conference in Jerusalem’s Notre Dame Center entitled “Challenging Christian Zionism: Theology, Politics, and the Palestine-Israel Conflict.” Sister Elaine Kelley reported that over “600 people from 32 countries, half from the U.S., reflecting the ecumenical diversity within Sabeel” attended the conference.17 During the conference, Donald Wagner, the director
Conclusions

This article has developed three interrelated points that shed light on the expression of Christian Zionist ideology in American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel. First, Christian Zionists support the existence of Israel as a Jewish State on religious grounds. This shared belief of pilgrims, tour organizers, essayists, and institutions is based on the view that contemporary Israelis are the heirs of the biblical Israelites. In this context, the rejection of supersessionism as the lens through which the Bible should be read can be seen as the premise upon which all Christian Zionists function. Second, dispensationalism plays an important role in shaping the Christian Zionist ideology, as demonstrated by the presence of dispensationalist elements in Christian Zionist discourse (e.g., the rebuilding of the Temple as a prerequisite for the second arrival of Christ and beginning of the Millennium). Then again, it seems that contemporary institutions affiliated with Christian Zionism (e.g., ICEJ) and the organizers of the Cargo of Care tour do not accept dispensationalism as the entire doctrine which guides their Christian Zionist ideology. Instead, one can find various dispensationalist components in the tours, such as the visit to Petra, Jordan, where it is believed that the Jewish people will flee during the Great Tribulation. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, the organizers of the tours represent a passive approach toward dispensationalism, in the sense that they do not see themselves as catalysts of the futurist outline suggested by dispensationalism. In contrast to portrayals of Christian Zionist dispensationalists attempting to hasten war and Armageddon in the Middle East, the pilgrims and organizers of the tours considered here, at least overtly, view peace in the Middle East as

---

of the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Chicago's North Park University and a prominent opponent to Christian Zionism, argued that Christian Zionists “embrace[s] a war theology” and functions as a determent for peace in the Middle East.
a goal to which Israel should aspire. Third, individuals labeled by either themselves or others as Christian Zionists have a difficult time distinguishing between politics and religion. For them, contemporary politics reflect God’s will and not human actions. Such an approach to politics reflects the historic evangelical fusion of politics and religion, colored by a rejection of direct means for implementing God’s plan. Interestingly, this ambiguity between Zionism and religion resembles (Jewish) religious Zionism, which is a minor branch within the Zionist movement, in the sense that the establishment of Israel is viewed as the signifier of the Messianic era. Such similarity served as the theopolitical ground of the collaboration between the former Israeli tourism minister, Binyamin Elon, a religious Zionist, and evangelical groups who travel to Israel (Belhassen & Santos. 2006).

Some in Israel have criticized the collaboration between Israel’s Ministry of Tourism and American evangelicals based on the end-times prophecies and missionary activities affiliated with dispensationalism. As noted, both the ICEJ and Mr. and Mrs. B stress publicly that they are motivated by neither a willingness to hasten the second arrival of Jesus nor a willingness to convert Jews. This collaboration is, however, quite understandable apart from theology. The loyalty and stability of the evangelical pilgrimage “segment” makes it especially valuable in a region that has known its share of violent instability. Former Israeli tourism minister, Abraham Hirchson, expressed this sentiment perfectly when he stated recently, in response to a question implying the far reaching consequences of the theological roots of evangelical pilgrimage, “I'm not a theologian, I'm the minister of tourism, and I'm not interested in the politics of our tourists as long as they come here. They come here as tourists, and they're friends of Israel” (Urquhart, 2006).
A recent volume published by the Palestinian Christian organization Sabeel attempts to counter such pragmatism by underscoring what Sabeel believes to be the inherent anti-Semitism of Christian Zionism. They hope to convince Christians and Jews to examine their theologies and their politics and to ask themselves if Zionism as expressed by the modern Israeli nation-state is or could ever be “Christian” and why Jews would wish to consort with those whose vision of the end-times includes the destruction of some Jews and the conversion of all others. Other groups have added a dash of early-twentieth- and early-twenty-first century anti-Jewish propaganda to their anti-Christian Zionist efforts, sounding echoes of the conspiratorial Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion to alert “true” Christians to the diabolical nature of “Judaizers” and giving a favorable reading to the Iranian President Ahmadenijad’s call for Israel to be wiped off of the map (Carlson, 2005). Perhaps more potentially disruptive to Christian Zionist thought than theological education or recycled conspiracy theory is its long-standing relationship with the right wing of American politics. Contemporary critics of Christian Zionism and the Bush Administration have argued that dispensationalist pre-millennialism is the religious key that unlocks the secret goal of George W. Bush’s foreign policy (Davidson, 2005; Northcott, 2004). Support for Israel in all of its actions against internal and external threats has, indeed, been one public hallmark of the administration. If support for Israel comes to be seen as “right wing” or as always an expression of Christian Zionism, being “pro-Israel” may become less attractive to those appealing to and serving moderate and left-wing voters. In this way the very strength of Christian Zionism among American evangelicals could become its greatest weakness.

While Christian Zionist ideology may suffer if theological and political opposition to it grows, Christian Zionist tourism has so far proven impervious to developments that often
have dramatic effects on overseas travel. Mr. and Mrs. B’s pilgrimages have taken place regardless of the military and political situation in Israel and the Middle East. The Second Intifada and, more recently, the war between Israel and Lebanon brought no significant change in levels of participation and altered no itineraries. In fact, though many of the sites on the itinerary for the November 2006 trip have been bombed since July, not one of Mr. and Mrs. B’s pilgrims has withdrawn from the trip. Such stability and loyalty are rare characteristics in international tourism and have been rewarded by the Israel Ministry of Tourism which recently announced plans, developed in conjunction with some American evangelical churches, to build a Holy Land Christian Center on the northern shores of the Sea of Galilee (see for example Prusher, 2005). The Israeli government seems to recognize that American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel will continue until – indeed because of – the end of time.
CHAPTER III:

MY LOVE-HATE RELATIONSHIP WITH CHRISTIAN ZIONISM:
A REFLECTIVE NOTE ON REFLEXIVITY

Abstract: This article aims to empirically engage with the methodological discourse on the notion of reflexivity, based on the author’s experience with an ongoing research project on American evangelical pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The paper is organized around three working examples from the project, which aim to illustrate how reflexivity can be practically implemented in social research. It explores personal, epistemological, and theoretical benefits, as well as limitations, of employing reflexivity in the process of conducting and writing social research on a theopolitical issue. The paper concludes with a discussion of practical challenges associated with exercising reflexivity and advocates various ways that it can be promoted as a methodological and academic asset.

Keywords: Reflexivity, identity, evangelical pilgrimage, religion, tourism
Introduction

The main theoretical concern of this essay regards the concept of reflexivity, generally referred to as a researcher’s understanding that he/she is part of the social phenomenon under his/her own investigation. It is commonly suggested in the methodological literature that such understanding signifies not only the quality of the research report, but also its credibility as a scholarly account. In this essay, I intend to engage in this discourse and provide my perspective, based on my ongoing fieldwork on Christian Evangelical pilgrimage to Israel, conducted in 2004-2006. My approach here follows Schwandt’s suggestion (2001) that epistemological examination of qualitative-related knowledge or, in other words, engagement in a discourse about the practice of qualitative inquiry, should be based on “understanding specific cases of qualitative inquiry in particular circumstances and dealing with all the complexity, ambiguity, emotion, and volitions entailed in these circumstances” (2001, p. xxv). Such an illustrative approach is based on the idea that qualitative inquiry is not a fixed set of principles, but rather, “a contested site of multiple practices” (2001, p. xxxi) and approaches, which are based on different ontological, epistemological and methodological premises (see Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000). In light of such diversity in the qualitative camp, I do not attempt to suggest a comprehensive summary of the notion of reflexivity as reflected in what can be labeled qualitative research; rather, I intend to thematically discuss the principal premises behind this notion by drawing on empirical evidence from research about American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel. In so doing, I aim to address questions such as, How has exercising reflexivity contributed to my understanding of the examined phenomenon? What functions can be achieved by applying reflexivity? And what are the limitations of such practice?
In their book *Key Themes in Qualitative Research*, Atkinson, Coffey and Delamont (2003) devote a chapter to revisiting Howard Becker’s influential article “Whose Side Are We On?” (1967) to examine its relevance to contemporary qualitative research more than three decades after its original publication and in light of important philosophical developments in social research methodology. They suggest that Becker’s formerly controversial argument that social researchers cannot avoid taking a side while studying social issues has become a common premise in the qualitative camp since 1967, largely because scholars have begun to recognize the value of reflexive thinking, in which researchers critically engage with their own role as constructors of their scholarship and interpreters of social reality, rather than attempting to take the role of “objective” observer. One of the important developments in this regard is the self-reflective celebration of personal characteristics that used to be considered private and irrelevant to the research, such as health status, victimization experiences, racial/ethnic affiliation, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Interestingly, as Atkinson and his colleagues note, religion is perhaps the only dimension of identity that researchers continue to avoid being reflective about. As they put it, “Papers at conferences rarely start ‘As a Baptist,’ but frequently begin ‘As a cancer survivor,’ or ‘As a carer’ or ‘As a recovering alcoholic/bulimic/domestic violence victim’” (2003, p. 90). Thus, in this paper, I would like to contribute to broadening the manner in which social researchers engage reflexively with their identities by discussing the relevance of my religious affiliation to an empirical social research project.

As advocated by Peshkin (1988), awareness of subjectivity may illuminate, for both researchers and readers, the impacts of identity on research development. Taking Peshkin’s conclusion as my point of departure, I attempted to conduct a systematic monitoring of my
subjectivity while studying evangelical pilgrimages from the earliest stages of the project. After reflecting on almost two years of this research process, which has included both fieldwork and engagement with pertinent literature, it is clear to me that issues related to my identity played a significant role in this project from its beginning. Specifically, I found that both my nationality as an Israeli and my religious/ethnic affiliation as a Jew facilitated my interactions with my initial respondents and opened the way for extensive research to be conducted. It is important for me to note at the outset of this essay that during this research process, I was forced to answer, both to myself and to those who took part in this study, personal questions about identity related issues, such as my Zionist ideology as an Israeli, my religious beliefs as a Jew, and my political stance towards the ongoing conflict in the Middle East. Admittedly, this dialogical nature of my interactions with those I studied was one of the greatest challenges this research posed to me, both academically and personally. While numerous examples exist which could demonstrate the role of my identity in the research process, I do not intend to provide here an inclusive detailed report, but rather to use selected examples to illuminate a discussion on reflexivity, which is the focus of this essay. In addition, the paper aims to engage with questions such as to what extent reflexivity should be part of the final report, what are the goals achieved by exercising reflexivity, and how reflexivity can be promoted as a research practice.

The rest of the essay proceeds as follows. First, it provides a critical discussion of pertinent literature concerning the notion of reflexivity and its role in qualitative research and discusses the ways reflexivity can be contextualized within the philosophy and practice of social research. Second, three working examples from my fieldwork are presented, in order to examine the effectiveness of the practice of exercising reflexivity and to discuss what was
accomplished by being reflective. These examples aim to illustrate how reflexivity can be practically implemented in social research and to explore the personal epistemological and theoretical benefits, as well as the limitations, of employing reflexivity in the process of conducting and writing social research. Finally, I will discuss the practical challenges associated with exercising reflexivity and advocate various ways that it can be promoted as a methodological asset.

Reflexivity in Qualitative Discourse

Reflexivity has become an important term in the methodological jargon of social inquirers and, more specifically, of those who practice qualitative research, broadly conceived. Given its heterogeneous characteristics, it is not surprising that the notion of reflexivity has been used in various ways in the qualitative camp, depending on the approach from which a given research project is conducted. However, as Alvesson and Skoldberg suggest, all qualitative research involves the act of interpreting data, and the notion of reflexivity refers to “interpreting one’s own interpretation, looking at one’s own perspective from other perspectives, and turning a self-critical eye onto one’s own authority as interpreter and author” (2000, p. vii). Thus, at least when taken in this basic sense, reflexivity appears to be a valuable exercise that can benefit all types of qualitative research.

Douglas Macbeth provides a broad definition that may illustrate the view of reflexivity as a mode of thinking by referring to reflexivity as “a deconstructive exercise for locating the intersection of author, other text, and world, and for penetrating the representational exercise itself” (2001, p. 35). A more detailed explanation is suggested by Michael Patton who argues that “reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to
and conscious of the cultural, political, social, linguistic, and ideological origins of one’s own perspective and voice as well as the perspective and voices of those one interviews and those to whom one reports” (2002, p. 65). As reflected in the last part of his definition, Patton refers to reflexivity in the context of what he calls “triangulated inquiry,” which encompasses the intersection between the three research actors: the author, those studied, and the audience. He suggests a series of questions that social inquirers should address in their attempt to be reflective. In his approach, Patton not only stresses the need for a systematic procedure by which reflexivity can be part of the means used to establish the trustworthiness of research, but also the importance of presenting the “products” of this activity to the audience in the research report.

Patton’s explanation reflects a common proposition that by acknowledging their role as mediators between the object of investigation and the audience, scholars increase the credibility of their research, since “there is no such thing as unmediated data” (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2000, p.9). Thus, and perhaps in line with Schwandt (2001), who also discusses reflexivity as a means to establish validity in critical research (where the values of the researcher are intrinsically put forward), Alvesson and Skoldberg hold that even in non-critical qualitative research, there is a need to engage a reflective mode of thinking in order to increase the validity and the quality of the research, since the researchers’ values are always present. In accord with Alvesson and Skoldberg, I would like to additionally note that the personal dimension of traditional “qualitative” data collecting tools (e.g., interviews, observations, focus groups) renders the researcher a direct, active agent of data collection and analysis and, thus, renders every scholarly work a subjective construction of social reality, broadly conceived.
Early discussions of the concept of reflexivity often occurred in the context of concern over the evaluation of qualitative research, as exemplified by Lincoln and Guba’s early (1985) work on this matter, in which they advocated the creation of an alternative set of criteria for assessing the quality and credibility of qualitative (or, in their terms, “naturalistic”) inquiry, anchored by the concepts of “dependability” and “authenticity.” While dependability refers to the need for researchers to report the systematic process followed during their investigations, authenticity refers implicitly to the notion of reflexivity, citing it as a key criterion that should be taken into consideration when evaluating qualitative research. Interestingly, these two criteria reflect yet another struggle of social researchers to justify their work as trustworthy and academic. The dependability criterion reflects an attempt to show that social inquiry does not lack the rigor of other academic endeavors, and the authenticity criterion reflects the unique characteristics and challenges of studying other humans.

In addition to the establishment of research trustworthiness, reflexivity has also been discussed as a useful tool for expanding inquirers’ perceptions about their own understandings of examined phenomena. This is to say that self-awareness of the various intersections in Patton’s “triangulated inquiry” (authors, those studied, audience) also has an epistemological value. By being reflective about the research process, researchers may ask themselves genuine questions about how the ways that research questions were written, research designs were planned, “raw” data were analyzed, or research products were presented to an audience may have influenced the construction of their scholarly work.

Judging from the popularity of the term in research discourse, it seems that most scholars in the qualitative camp would agree that reflexivity is an important virtue which
allows scholars to apply self-awareness to the process of conducting and writing social research. However, as reflected in various qualitative papers (in the field of tourism, for example), disagreements still exist about the role of reflexivity in the research report. Said differently, I believe that most scholars accept reflexivity as an important mode of thinking about the practice of conducting social research, but there is little agreement about the way it should be presented when writing the research report. Such disagreements, I believe, emanate from the diverse philosophical premises that guide social researchers. Some approaches in social research are inherently reflective, while others do not overtly require reflexivity. For example, regarding inherently reflective approaches, in his development of the ethnomethodological perspective, sociologist Harlod Garfinkel (1967) suggests that scholars must assume that they are bringing their own meanings to their analyses of the actions of their subjects. In fact, Garfinkel advocates that social researchers should be reflective about their role as interpreters of other humans who hail from different backgrounds and hold different values. Similarly, the approach of philosophical hermeneutics, and more precisely, the hermeneutic circle as a methodological and ontological notion, as developed by philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, is inherently reflexive, in the sense that it puts the researcher in the center of the interpretative process that guides not only social inquiry but the essence of being human. The hermeneutic circle is a concept that positions the human action of interpreting and understanding texts as a continuous, dynamic and existential process, and the notion has been applied in social research to explain the process of researchers interpreting human behaviors and social phenomena. Philosophical hermeneutics recognizes that while interpreting, we are always influenced by our previous knowledge and by our own attempts to understand various aspects of examined phenomena (for a discussion
of the hermeneutic circle see Schwandt, 2001). Therefore, we can never claim that our understanding/interpretation is an independent or objective description of the examined phenomenon. In addition, it can be argued that the meanings social inquirers ascribe should always be understood in the context of their cultural and academic backgrounds. In other words, philosophical hermeneutics requires an ontological reflexivity from scholars who embrace it as their framework of choice.

Conversely, the post-positivistic tradition which governed social research during the second half of the twentieth century and which still has numerous supporters in many social research circles, advocates systematic efforts to minimize the influence of the researcher in the production of research findings, as well as his/her presence in the final description of the examined phenomenon. It is important to note that many core tenets of contemporary post-positivism are not necessarily incommensurable with the idea of reflexivity. For example, post-positivists are non-foundationalists, in the sense that they acknowledge the fact that there are no secure foundations for the knowledge that we humans are creating (Baronov, 2004). They recognize the fallibility and provisionality of knowledge claims, realizing that both the generation and evaluation of research products are mediated by humans. These premises, along with post-positivists’ aspiration for methodological rigor and academic integrity, can be seen as an acknowledgment that the researcher is not a passive translator of objective reality, but an active agent in knowledge production. Similarly, the requirement that researchers report thoroughly about the theories and methodologies employed in their work can be seen as an acknowledgement that research findings are inevitably biased by the lenses through which researchers examine phenomena, as well as by the tools they select for data analysis. Despite these admissions, however, there has been very little room in the post-
positivistic tradition for deliberate deconstructive reflective discussions on the influence of researcher values and identity on research processes and outcomes, even though reflexivity would seem to be a valuable tool for a research philosophy that recognizes the inevitability of researcher bias and seeks to minimize its effects. This tension may be partially explained by two aspects of post-positivism, the first of which involves an overt premise of its philosophy and the second of which is more subtle and has more to do with the tradition’s place in a broader evolving discourse of social research as a cultural act. Regarding the first issue, post-positivism overtly embraces an objectivist epistemology, meaning that it views objects of knowledge as existing independently of the knower. Citing the goal of research as the attainment of understanding of such independently existing phenomena, post-positivists may argue the inclusion of extensive reflective accounts to be superfluous and self-indulgent on the part of the researcher, as such passages draw attention away from the issue under focus. Thus, the inherent tension located in holding an objectivist epistemology while also acknowledging the perspective and value-laden nature of knowledge production can be superficially resolved by promoting reflexivity as a valuable mode of thinking to engage in while conducting research, while simultaneously eschewing the inclusion in the final research report of such blatant evidence of human involvement as would necessarily be manifested in extensive reflective accounts. A second explanation for post-positivism’s reticence to fully embrace reflexivity can be found in a consideration of the broader technocratic mode of social functioning (Howe, 2005) under which this perspective evolved. This technocratic mode is characterized by a belief in the efficiency and superiority of bureaucracy, labor specialization, and hierarchy, combined with skepticism towards merging the personal with the professional. Since the Enlightenment, the discourse of scientific
discovery has been very much bound up with this technocratic ideology, and post-positivism
is the product of this legacy. It is thus logical that the notion of formally including in
research reports reflective discussions, in which researchers engage with their identities and
dedications and reveal the ways they are personally intertwined with their projects, has a
tendency to provoke unease in a research culture which advocates the value of
professionalism and is suspicious of approaches which emphasize the researcher as a unified
being who is engaged personally and contextually in investigations he/she undertakes. Thus,
while some of the premises behind the notion of reflexivity would appear to be implicitly
evident in post-positivist thinking, issues of philosophy, history, and academic culture
combine to render it problematic in written practice.

One research approach which holds an objectivist epistemology, which evolved under
the influence of the technocratic tradition, and which I am admittedly influenced by, is
ethnographic realism, which construes the researcher’s task as one of providing rich and
detailed descriptions of the phenomena they examine. This tradition, described by Denzin as
“modernist” (1997, p.139), is frequently criticized for its non-reflexive tendencies, in the
sense that the researchers use empirical “evidence” in order “to impose a narrative line on
disparate images” (Didion, 1979, p. 11, quoted in Denzin, 1997, p.140). In other words,
realist ethnographers are criticized for abusing their authority as experts to construct a story
without acknowledging their role in the creation of what they present as reality, or for not
being reflexive. As one who uses the writing technique of ethnographic realism, I can
understand, though not completely agree with, the argument that it is quite obvious that any
research report is only one perspective and not an ultimate depiction of reality (i.e., thus there
is no need to be reflexive in the final report). However, given ethnographic realism’s
commensurability with the premises behind reflexivity and the benefits of such practice to the research and the researcher, I feel that ethnographic realists, and perhaps the entire post-post-positivist camp, should reconsider their opposition to the inclusion of reflexive accounts in research reports. As illustrated in this discussion, such a transformation would not necessarily undermine any of the core premises of post-positivism, but rather, would enhance their expression in the final report.

Three Reflexive Accounts

(1) My Entrance into Fieldwork

In order to trace my initial encounter with the phenomenon I am investigating, I returned to re-read the earliest notes I wrote during the process of initiating my fieldwork about two years ago. I found that these early notes were the best tool for recalling this process, since they constitute what Clifford Geertz might call “a thick-descriptive account” of my experiences and thoughts, written in a first-person reflexive style. For this reason, I found these notes to be an authentic porthole to the past through which I could evaluate the way my understanding of and relationship with the people I study developed throughout the last two years18:

During one of our first rides on the MTD Urbana-Champaign busses, my wife and I had a conversation with a bus driver who recognized us as Israelis. By the end of the short ride from the campus to Orchard Downs, the driver had told us about his and his wife’s recent trip to Israel, which he described as a humanitarian pilgrimage trip, and he insisted that we exchange phone numbers and meet up again to discuss his trip. Soon enough, the friendly driver contacted us and invited us to a Thanksgiving dinner at his home with his family and friends. Initially, my wife and I felt uncomfortable with

18 The following section was originally written as a report for a graduate method class (EPSY 590, Schwandt, T.) in January 2005.
accepting this invitation because we did not feel at ease with the “chosen people” title that the bus driver attributed to us, in particular, and to Israelis at large. We also heard from our educated neighbor that the central concern of groups like the one with which this bus driver was affiliated is to bring about a messianic era in Israel, an era they see as inextricably intertwined with the return of Christ. We also heard that such Christians usually believe the third temple should be built in Jerusalem and appear, at times, to be oblivious to the political and territorial realities surrounding this situation. The political reverberations of their perspectives are far-reaching. However, our curiosity superseded all of these concerns, and we eventually decided to go.

Meanwhile, my wife had begun volunteering as a Hebrew teacher in a local synagogue in Champaign. We were both surprised to find that all of her students in the synagogue were Christians who showed an unusual interest in Israel and in learning the Hebrew language. Moreover, most of them reported to my wife that they had traveled to Israel more than once. Furthermore, they all regarded their experiences as tourists in Israel to have been life-changing, and since their travels, their leisure activities had become focused entirely on Israel and Jewish-related issues. In addition, they all expressed the desire to revisit Israel. When we mentioned this issue at our bus driver’s Thanksgiving party, we were told that my wife’s students belong to his same community of evangelicals, which partakes in yearly organized humanitarian pilgrimages to Israel.

Not long after Thanksgiving, while taking a bus ride to campus, I saw the friendly bus driver again, and he gave me the phone number of the couple that organizes the pilgrimages to Israel, whom I call the B’s. He told me that they also run Christian radio stations in Urbana-Champaign and that they are key figures in his community. At this point, I went to speak with my advisor and told her that I had found an interesting topic for research. In addition, I started to look for relevant protocols about evangelical tourism in different sources, such as the Israeli Tourism Ministry, the Israeli Parliament, Israeli newspapers, and some Internet websites. Since I have a background in qualitative research, I began preparing for my interview with Mrs. B. However, she was quicker than me, and on the 23 of December at 8:00 am, I got a phone call from her. After introducing herself, she explained that she could only meet with me for an interview that very afternoon, since she is usually a very busy person. She said that this was the one rare occasion when she would have a free day before Christmas. I was very happy and enthusiastic for this interview since I realized that it would constitute the beginning of my fieldwork. We scheduled an appointment for 15:00 at Panera Café, which meant that I had only a few hours to prepare topics and questions and to learn more about evangelical tourism to Israel. Mrs B. sounded very talkative on the phone, and I had very little previous knowledge about her community’s beliefs, so I decided to conduct a semi-structured interview. It appeared to me that it would be the most appropriate format in this case. Since the interview was supposed to be exploratory, and I was not familiar with the topic at the time, I thought I should encourage Mrs. B. to speak about all the
relevant issues that she thought were appropriate. In addition, I knew that we were not limited in time (she had allocated the whole afternoon for the interview), so I was sure that we could cover all the topics that I had prepared, in addition to other topics she might want to discuss. Mrs. B. came to the meeting with a big box filled with extensive data about the group, such as a video cassette, booklets, brochures, souvenirs from Israel, and plans for upcoming trips to Israel in June and November. Apparently, she had earned her Ph.D. at the University of Illinois, and she knew that I would like as many details as she could provide. I asked for her consent to record the interview, which lasted three hours. During the interview we talked about different topics, such as her biography, how the idea of taking groups to Israel had developed, the motives behind the organization of such trips, the religious and political aspects of the trips, and the main characteristics of the trips, and she also provided some anecdotal stories from the trips that she chose to elaborate on. At the end of the interview, she invited me to two lectures, which were to be held at a Midwestern church to promote future trips to Israel. During the process of transcribing the interview, I learned a lot, since I had to go back to the bible, as well as read other related information, in order to understand her stories and the connection she drew between Protestants, Zionism, Israel, and tourism. In addition, I had an opportunity to understand and evaluate the significance of her stories, but I still feel that I have a lot to learn.

After overcoming my initial embarrassment in reading this note, I realized that it was highly valuable for illustrating how my religious affiliation and nationality were interwoven with this project from its outset. This autoethnographic account is very personal drawing on my experiences while encountering the other that I want to study. It also demonstrates the complexity of my relationship with evangelicals who love Israel—a complexity that continues to characterize my interactions with them to this day. My attraction to talking with people who support Israel and love it passionately probably emanates logically from my own love of my country. However, I have also come to realize that while I respect my Jewish heritage, my love of Israel is mainly based on my own lived experience as an Israeli, which is largely constructed from non-religious moments. The evangelicals I study, however, love Israel for religious reasons which stem from their eschatological beliefs. Thus, traveling to Israel is probably a good way to
materialize this abstract love by becoming acquainted with the diversity and complexity of Israel as a modern state.

Through the process of reasoning about my early interactions with the evangelical community, it became clear to me that I would have to develop a relationship with key respondents before engaging in interviews. Since both my religious affiliation and my nationality would play a significant role in these people’s willingness to cooperate with me, and would also have a significant effect on the way they would communicate with me, I felt that it would be unethical to base my research on accidental encounters in churches where I could easily ask potential participants to sign letters of consent. Instead, I wanted to engage in political and theological discussion with them, in order to better understand if what I had read about them was a true description of their faith. The dilemma that such an approach poses me is how to represent my role in the fieldwork (i.e., my voice) while representing the voices (i.e., the “realites”) of my respondents at the same time (for an illuminative discussion about this tension see Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont, 2003).

(2) My Intrinsically Reflexive Methodological Toolkit

The second example from my work which I have chosen to discuss here concerns the methodological tools I am using. Specifically, I would like to argue that the interpersonal characteristic of the research tools used in this project (e.g., interview, observation, focus group, exchange of letters) contributes to the central role that elements related to my identity play in this project. As shall become apparent, using such interpersonal tools turns me into an active agent in the process of data collection. What I hear, the way I react, and the questions I
ask, all influence the nature of the empirical data I gather. Thus, the research tools I use are characterized by an innate reflexivity that helps to define their very essence.

One example to illustrate this point can be found in the semi-structured interviews I have conducted with several respondents. Being reflective on my role during the interview, I tried philosophically to adhere to the “symmetrical approach” to interviewing, which involves attempting to minimize hierarchy and distance between researcher and participants by allowing participants to have a hand in determining the direction of the interview conversation and respecting the ways they make sense of and articulate their perspectives. This approach tends to be compatible with a philosophical hermeneutic view of the research process, which contends that interpretation is fundamentally constitutive of the human experience; as such, meaning is always inextricably linked to both the sender and the receiver of meaningful action, who both influence and are influenced by the meaning-making process. Thus, in this perspective, interviews are best conceived as negotiated sense-making episodes in which the researcher and the interviewee both inherently risk the preconceived understandings they bring to the conversational encounter (Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont, 2003; Atkinson & Silverman, 1997). Furthermore, the view of the researcher as skilled extractor and recorder of the “truth” of the interviewee’s thoughts is rejected in this perspective; the meaning-making process is understood as being continually interpretive, so to speak of “reproduction” of meaning would be nonsensical in this framework, as there is no “original” to reproduce, only a constant stream of production. Philosophical hermeneutics also contends that humans can not be separated from our experiences, our traditions, and our sociohistoric subjectivities, as they are fundamentally constitutive of ourselves as individuals and are innately a part of the way we make and understand meaning through the course of
our encounters with others and with the physical world. Thus, this philosophical perspective is also compatible with the idea espoused by some practitioners of more symmetrical interviewing approaches that researchers should engage their subjectivities when holding conversations with interviewees, rather than futilely chasing the specter of neutrality. It is easy to see how reflexivity is not merely compatible with, but inherent in, this philosophical approach to interviewing.

As a consequence of taking this approach, my conversations with interviewees were genuine dialogues. The interviewees wanted to understand me and my motives, and I wanted to understand them. After reading more about American evangelical culture and becoming more familiar with their world, our conversations became more fruitful. I embarrassedly recall an informal interview conducted at one of the first post-trip meetings I attended, in which a respondent asked me if I had heard of Billy Graham, and I answered that I didn’t know him. I’m not sure what exactly crossed her mind when she realized how ignorant I was, but she was kind enough to tell me that I should read about him. I am not sure that we share the same views about Rev. Graham, but this dialogue taught me the importance of learning about the culture of the people I am studying in a broader sense and not only in the context of tourism. In other words, I realized that I cannot learn about evangelical pilgrimages without learning about evangelicals’ daily lives.

Another example of the way my identity is implicated in the qualitative tools I use involves an observation conducted at the first promotional meeting I attended. I arrived at the church where the meeting was being held with my wife, since Mrs. B. had invited both of us to attend. It was my understanding that the main part of this meeting would comprise two religious-scholastic lectures; therefore, I thought my wife’s presence at such meeting would
not impact my research. I was wrong. When the meeting ended, we discovered that some of my wife’s Hebrew students had been in attendance, and we learned that most of the students who attend weekly Hebrew classes at the synagogue were actually Christians who wanted to learn Hebrew for various reasons, such as to facilitate interactions with hosts on future visits to Israel and to grow spiritually by learning the language of the “Chosen People” and the Bible. When the students recognized my wife, an informal gathering arose. This casual conversation jeopardized the professional role that I wished to maintain in my first meeting with potential respondents, and my Weberian disposition, developed in my earlier studies, which calls for separation between the personal and the professional, was severely shocked by this encounter. I realized that attending these lectures with my wife could affect the meaning potential participants might ascribe to my interactions with them, as they might view my wife and I as potential candidates to promote the new gospel within Israel, or at least to accept Jesus as our personal savior. On the other hand though, I realized that the people at the church acknowledged the importance of Israel’s existence as a Jewish state. I was confused: If all Jews were converted, there would be no Jewish people. Yet, from the lecture, I learned that the existence of Jewish people and Jewish identity were considered by these people to be important and deserving of maintenance and cultivation. This personal puzzle bothered me for a long time and led me to look for answers in the literature, at which point I came across Yaakov Ariel’s book (2000) *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880-2000*, which thoroughly discusses these issues historically and theologically. I will return to the discussion of the importance of my Jewish and Israeli identities to the people I study in the following section, but for the purpose of my current argument, it will suffice to note that the experience of my wife and I engaging in social
conversation with the evangelicals after their meeting led me to become aware that because I am an Israeli Jew, I will never be viewed by those I study as an entirely neutral academic professional when I employ the ethnographic method of observation in this research context.

(3) Understanding “My Role” in the Dispensationalist Eschatology

As I mentioned in the previous section, I was initially quite confused by the realization that the people I study might wish to convert me, given that they acknowledged the importance of Judaism in their faith. While listening to the lectures, I realized that there was an historical relationship between Zionism and Protestantism in the minds of the people I was studying, which I had failed to fully grasp during my earlier interview with Mrs. B. In one of the lectures, for example, Israeli society, and particularly, Israeli academia were blamed for not paying tribute to the central role of Protestantism in Israeli history. The lecturer provided a survey of historical Protestant contributions to the existence of the nation-state of Israel. He also connected these contributions to biblical visions, citing the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah, presenting Protestants as the biblical “gentiles” in “God’s plan” to bring the “chosen people” back to their land. He finished his historiography of the state of Israel on an optimistic note, when he called attention to a new trend in Israeli academia, in which he claimed that “they” (Israeli-Jewish scholars) have begun to come to the inevitable conclusion that the traditional story of Zionism fails to fully explain the existence of Israel. After the lectures, I understood Mrs. B’s enthusiasm to be interviewed by (someone she considered to be) a potential Israeli scholar. I also began to understand sentences she had spoken in her interview, such as “I think God’s hands are on this, God’s hands are on you…I can see it, I can sense it…” Such an insight also helped me to
contextualize books I had come across, such the *The Politics of Christian Zionism, 1891-1948* (Merkley, 1998), which focuses on the historical roots of the collaboration between Protestants and Zionists, and which was written by a pro-Zionist evangelical scholar.

I eventually came to see that the evangelicals’ fascination with Israel was clearly related to their fascination with end-times prophecies. In one of my e-mails to Mrs. B., I asked her about her theological view in this regard, and she wrote:

We align ourselves with many of the dispensationalist doctrine, but not fully… I believe that the rapture will come first (i.e., that Yeshua will meet those who love Him in the air), that the antichrist will call himself G-d (and I never have read in the Bible or anywhere else that he'd be Jewish) and set himself up in the Temple, that will have been built there. (By the way, this is the time period when I believe that the Jewish people in Israel will flee to Petra, to escape what's to come, i.e., the time of Jacob's trouble, two periods of 3.5 years.) Then Yeshua, King of Kings and Lord of Lords returns to earth to set up His kingdom. He returns with all the saints before, including Abraham, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Isaiah, etc, etc, etc, as well as those who believe in Yeshua and who came after Yeshua's birth, death and resurrection (like me).

This information led me to the literature, as I realized that I would have to learn more about evangelical eschatology in order to understand their relationship with Judaism and their motivation to travel and volunteer in Israel. Eschatology, I learned, can be defined as the theological study of the future or the ‘end of the world,’ mainly based on the interpretation of Biblical prophecies. Learning the outline of dispensationalism, the guiding theological doctrine behind mainstream evangelical eschatology, has helped me to contextualize the religious motivation underlying evangelical pilgrimages to Israel.

Christian support for the return of the Jews to their ancient land and my respondents’ support for Israel can be traced to the development of eschatological beliefs in the early days of Christianity (McGinn, 1979). In order to understand the development of such support, it is important to juxtapose it with the philosophy of another Christian tradition known as.
supersessionism. During the fourth-century Roman Empire, the Catholic Church interpreted the biblical prophecies regarding the return of the Jews to their homeland through a supersessionist lens. Supersessionists perceive the Diaspora of the Jewish people as a form of punishment for their failure to accept Jesus as the Messiah. Subsequently, in this view, the group which had been considered to constitute the biblical “Jewish people” before the life of Jesus was seen as ceasing to exist, following its members’ failure to accept Christ. During the Reformation movement of the late sixteenth century, wide circulation of the Bible and its translation into various languages allowed Christians to read the biblical history of the Jewish people. This, in turn, engendered various readings that challenged the established Church and its related doctrines. By employing a literal approach to the interpretation of biblical prophecies, some Christian theologians concluded that the prophecies regarding the restoration of Israel referred to the Jewish nation because God’s covenant with them was eternal (Ariel, 1991, 2000; Pragai, 1985; Ross, 1990; Sharif, 1983, Weber, 2004). The combination of interpretive protocols which favored a literal reading of the Bible and the assumption of the Bible’s inerrancy generated the idea that God’s covenant with the Jews was still valid. This new reading of the biblical prophecies stood in contrast to supersessionism, which assumes that Christianity is God’s new Israel and that the Jews are no longer the “chosen people.”

During the nineteenth century, several millennial theologians and clergymen, who followed the tradition of literal interpretation of biblical prophecies, popularized the notion that the restoration of the Jews in the Holy Land, an event which is believed to constitute the fulfillment of biblical prophecies (e.g., Ezekiel 36, Daniel 9, Deuteronomy 30, Isaiah 43, Jeremiah 23, Amos 9, Zechariah 8), was a prerequisite for the second advent of Christ and
his 1000-year kingdom (this interpretive tradition is known as futurist pre-millennialism). Hence, the material instantiation of the Zionist ideology (i.e., the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948) is viewed by futurist pre-millennialists as a signifier of the imminent return of Christ. The term Christian Zionists refers to those Christians who perceive an affinity with the state of Israel, and with the Jewish people in general, and their support is manifested through various measures.

In the end of the nineteenth century, John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), a British clergyman, developed a distinct millennialist doctrine, which he named dispensationalism. During the twentieth century, dispensationalism has become the most significant millennialist school in American evangelicalism, and, in the context of this essay, this doctrine can be viewed as the ideology that guides the organizers of the tours I study. Therefore, understanding dispensationalism was an important task for my research, and in understanding it, I came to understand the role of the Jewish people, and thus myself, in this doctrine.

Based on a literal interpretative approach to biblical prophecies and a belief that they will be fulfilled in the future, Darby suggested an outline for the end of human history. Like other post-Reformation theologians who challenged supersessionism, Darby argued that the Jews would play a crucial role in the end-times. As reflected in Mrs. B’s answer to me, the premise of this interpretation of the Bible was that God did not abandon his chosen people (i.e., the Jews), and therefore that Christians should not be seen as God’s new Israel but as the biblical gentiles. This separation between Israel and the Church in the interpretation of biblical prophecies was what distinguished Darby from other futurist premillennialists (futurist premillennialists believe that Jesus will return to earth before (i.e., “pre-”))
establishing his millennial kingdom). In other words, Darby located the Jews and their role in the world’s future at the center of his theological doctrine. According to this interpretation, the dispensationalist future outline suggests that after the restoration of the Jews in Israel, the Antichrist (a figure from the prophecies in the Book of Revelation) will come to power and lead the world into a war between Christ’s believers and non-believers (this war is known as the battle of Armageddon, a site located in northern Israel). Before this battle, during the second arrival of Christ, only a small number of Jews (144,000) will be able to recognize him as the Messiah and will be harshly rejected by the vast majority of the Jewish people. Later on, a short period of judgments and punishments, also known as the Great Tribulation or the Time of Jacob’s Trouble, will begin, and all those who are not true believers in Jesus will remain on earth to suffer this period. The true believers (i.e., the Church) will be raptured (i.e., lifted into the air/heaven to meet Christ) and will not suffer this ordeal. With regard to the Jewish people, it is argued that only about a third of them will survive the Great Tribulation. These Jewish survivors will realize that the rejected 144,000 Jews mentioned above, who accepted Jesus at the beginning of the Great Tribulation, were actually right, and will join the Church. The historian Yaakov Ariel (1991) claims that this is the theological explanation of the paradox inherent among evangelicals who seek to spread dispensationalism among the Jews before the Great Tribulation. Ariel suggests that they assume that only a small number of Jews will be converted to Christianity, but at least some of them (144,000) will be able to understand the events correctly, due to their previous exposure to dispensationalism. This, I believe, might explain Mrs. B.’s enthusiasm to collaborate with me. Potentially, I could be one of those 144,000 Jews who would be able to
recognize Jesus; at the very least, I could potentially spread awareness of the
dispensationalist doctrine among other Jews.

With this in mind, I realized that for dispensationalist evangelicals, my religious
affiliation and nationality play a significant role in their willingness to cooperate with me,
either because they view Jews as playing a key role in their eschatology or (in the case of lay
people who are not familiar with the details of the dispensationalist doctrine) simply because
they are interested in meeting an Israeli Jew who lives in the land where Jesus is going to
show up eventually. In any case, I came to realize that in my studies, I suffer from a problem
which can be defined as over-willingness to cooperate with the researcher. As a Jewish
Israeli Ph.D. student, I play a role in the worldview of the people I study or, as Mrs. B. puts
it, “I have a part in God’s plan.” More specifically, as a Ph.D. student who intends to return
to Israel (and this question was asked of me by research participants on several occasions), I
can potentially be a part of the “new generation” in Israeli academia that will eventually
realize and reveal the role of the “gentiles,” in general, and the role of evangelical
“humanitarian pilgrimage,” in particular, in the existence of the state of Israel.

Obviously, as an Israeli, Zionist, Jew, and Ph.D. student, I am not keen to undertake
this mission. Nevertheless, the supportive approach of my respondents toward the existence
of the state of Israel, which is known in the literature as Christian Zionism, plays an
important role in my overall attitude toward them. As an Israeli, I find their understanding of
the Israeli position in the ongoing Israeli-Arab conflict very appealing. This feeling was
intensified in Summer 2006 during the crisis in the Middle East between Israel and Lebanon,
when the local evangelical community participated in a supportive gathering for the state of
Israel, held at a local synagogue. While the international media tended to portray Israel as
war-thirsty state, which led many liberals to criticize it for its reaction against Hezbollah and Lebanon, the evangelicals I study remained supportive of Israel. As a liberal Zionist, the process of getting to know Christian Zionism, its premises, and its opponents, poses a real challenge for me. On one hand, I realize that the liberal secular milieu of academia, which I tend to agree with on some issues, tends to criticize, and at times to mock, evangelicals and their theo-political worldview. On the other hand, I found that I could not remain indifferent toward the evangelicals’ understanding of Israel’s position in the Hezbollah conflict and toward their humanitarian projects in Israel. Nevertheless, I am aware that my evangelical respondents’ reasons for supporting Israel do not entirely fit with my worldview, and sometimes, they directly contradict it. Specifically, Christian Zionists strongly oppose the notion of territory for peace, a notion that I believe in strongly, not because it is easy to see my country surrender territory, but because I want to live in peace with my neighbors. Like the founding fathers of the Zionist movement, I believe that the existence of Israel should have its foundation in a moral, and not a Biblical, imperative. Therefore, Jerusalem’s holiness is not a sufficient argument, in my opinion, for refusing to negotiate about its future. Such opinions put me at odds with most of my respondents, and learning their theology illuminated this conflict of opinion for me. In addition to this political disagreement, I learned that I do not share the same views as my respondents on particular “family values” issues, such as homosexual rights and abortion. At times, I have found myself struggling not to express opinions that may compromise the ease of our relationship, and I try to avoid these issues because I do not feel that engaging in discussions about them will facilitate my research.
Thus, my identity has not only impacted my research by influencing the way I gather data and the analysis I produce; it has also powerfully shaped the way I am viewed by my respondents, positively impacted their willingness to cooperate with me (sometimes almost too much), and forced me to negotiate challenging ethical territory when I have repeatedly had to face the question of how much of the other aspects of my identity (e.g. liberal, secularly politically oriented) I should reveal to participants. It is my hope that being reflective about all of these issues and coming to understand the ways my identity has led me to develop a love-hate relationship with Christian Zionism will render me better equipped to produce balanced research reports that will neither belittle nor glorify my respondents and their worldview.

Conclusion

This essay aims to examine the notion of reflexivity as a research exercise by employing illustrative research accounts from a study on evangelical pilgrimages to Israel. Clearly, the aforementioned accounts reflect a unique research setting that may not allow generalization, in the traditional sense of this word, to other settings, and they should be seen in light of their limited context in a single research project. Nevertheless, I believe that generalization is still possible, in the sense that I can discuss the applicability of my research experience to other settings, as suggested by Schwandt (2001). In light of the multiple traditions in the qualitative camp, I would like to do that by positioning myself as a researcher, and from this position, advocating reflexivity as a crucial exercise in social research. In addition, I argue that the incorporation of reflexive accounts as part of the research report should be viewed not only as a methodological tool that increase the
authenticity of the research, but also as rhetorical tool with which authors should seek to strengthen their arguments and support their point of view.

My ontological view on the practice of social research can be described as one of pragmatic realism. This is to say that I assume that there is a social reality that deserves to be studied, and more importantly, I believe that there are some patterns or social structures/forces that influence individuals’ lives and the ways individuals make meaning from their lives. Thus, I believe that not everything is arbitrary or random in this mess that we call society. I think that it is my responsibility as a researcher to find such patterns and regularities, while simultaneously acknowledging the subjective nature of the way humans construct reality. Along with a realist orientation, my research approach is also influenced by other traditions in the qualitative camp. For example, I agree that people have different ways to ascribe meaning to reality (some might label such a view relativism). I also agree with Jurgen Habermas’ hermeneutic assumption that we all have our own way of interpreting phenomena, since we are all influenced by the culture that surrounds us, our personal knowledge, our history, and the ideologies that distort that way we interpret social reality. In light of all these philosophical influences, it is important for me to note that, technically, my research reports are usually influenced by the realist ethnographic tradition of academic writing. I use data from fieldwork in order to ground my perspective in empirical evidence and to convince my readers that the binoculars through which I look at reality are not a kaleidoscope. I feel, however, that this writing tradition fails to provide space for first-person descriptions about my role in the research. Reflexivity, in this context, helps me to acknowledge the fact that I am always standing in a particular place, which affords a particular point of view. This point of view may provide interesting insights, but it also
certainly has limitations. In other words, by taking a point of view, I become an active agent in the creation of the research I produce, since I am the mediator between what I “see” and what is presented in the final report. Thus, being reflexive about my research approach also helps me to understand my choices, regarding the manner in which I choose to present my research to others. In addition, employing a reflexive mode of thinking in the process of conducting research engenders my understanding that my intellectual labor should always be read as an invitation to look at reality from my perspective.

Consequently, what I would like to stress here is that even within my realist perspective, I believe that there is an important role for exercising reflexivity at different stages of the research process for reasons described by previous studies, some of which are summarized earlier in this essay. Furthermore, as noted throughout this essay, I have learned through my own personal experiences with fieldwork encounters like the ones described earlier, the value of exercising reflectivity in social research. I thus advocate engaging in an existential mode of reflexivity during the entire process of exploring any researched phenomenon since the researcher is always an active agent in the production of knowledge. As discussed earlier in this essay, the premises that engender reflexivity are familiar even to post-positivists and, therefore, I believe, reflexivity can be consciously employed by social researchers from various philosophical and methodological traditions.

The question is this: How can we (i.e. those of us who think that reflexivity is a crucial methodological asset) assure that reflexivity will be practiced by social researchers? Disagreement is rampant, regarding the extent to which reflexivity should be presented in final research reports, and even as one who fully acknowledges the value of this exercise, I must admit that I do not necessarily believe that extensive reflective accounts should always
be explicitly provided with research findings. Critics of the reflexive mode of writing would say that such a style focuses on the researcher instead of on the examined phenomenon and, therefore, can be considered self-indulgent. While I do not necessarily fully agree with this estimation, I do see many practical constraints to including lengthy reflective accounts in research reports. Perhaps the most obvious of these is that this mode of writing is still not accepted in all research circles. For example, the leading journal in my field of specialization, *Annals of Tourism Research*, has a strong realist orientation and does not accept articles written in the first-person style for publication. Additionally, the inclusion of substantial reflective passages in research reports would likely significantly increase their length, which would arguably make knowledge production more cumbersome, as intellectuals are only human and are limited in the amount of text they can reasonably be expected to absorb in a given timeframe. Lengthier articles also mean higher publication expenses, which translates to higher prices for universities with library budgets which are sometimes already severely stretched. Therefore, due to a variety of structural constraints, reflexivity may not always find its way into the final report, nor may it always be desirable for it to do so in a lengthy form. Some structural constraints to presenting reflexivity in research reports can and should be overcome, however, such as the eschewing of first-person prose, as these constraints seem to serve only ideological, rather than practical, ends. While writing a research report in first-person does not necessarily verify the quality of the research, neither does writing it in third-person necessarily guarantee “neutrality” or “objectivity.” Lastly, personal reflexivity, or the acknowledgment of our own ideologies/opinions/agendas, can be exercised explicitly when presenting our research in public (i.e. in classes, conferences, or the media), since all
intellectuals should be reflexive regarding their role in society and their status as experts in the public’s perception.

Consequently, I would like to advocate various ways that reflexivity can be promoted as a practice. The first way is to continue to encourage a reflective mode of thinking in the process of training graduate students. Specifically, I would like to suggest the adoption of practical training techniques, in which students are asked to be reflexive about their values, ontological point of view, etc., in their coursework. Second, in our engagement with our colleagues, we should attempt to provide each other with questions that require us to be reflexive about pertinent issues in our research projects. This can be achieved in all public speaking venues where researchers present their findings. It can also be achieved through the peer-review publication process, in which authors can be asked to provide critical discussions about their role in the construction of their scholarship.

I would like to close this essay by suggesting that reflexivity is also required in the classroom, where researchers who serve as course instructors have a convenient forum to discuss controversial issues. Because of the special status of social researchers as intellectuals, I believe that reflexivity about our opinions and ideologies is crucial for our integrity, as we typically engage with social issues which inherently involve diverse perspectives. A recent discussion with an undergraduate student in a social research department in my university taught me that students may sometimes not agree with their instructors but are in an underprivileged position to state their opinions in class. Thus, reflexivity should also be incorporated as part of social researchers’ teaching philosophies so that classrooms can become more open and egalitarian forums for intellectual growth and knowledge production.
CHAPTER IV
AN AMERICAN EVANGELICAL PILGRIMAGE TO ISRAEL:
A CASE STUDY ON POLITICS AND TRIANGULATION

Abstract: This article examines the political dimensions of American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel by employing the methodological technique known as data triangulation. Based on evidence from primary and secondary data, the study illuminates: (1) how tourism is utilized by pilgrims to promote their theological visions which have some political ramifications to the host country; and (2) how the political circumstances in the state of Israel engender a noteworthy relationship between an extreme right party from Israel and the pilgrims. The findings regarding the political dimensions are organized around four functions achieved by utilizing data triangulation. In so doing, this study attempts to provide new theoretical insights regarding the philosophical premises and the purposes traditionally related to the employment of data triangulation in tourism research. Keywords: Politics, Data triangulation, Pilgrimages.

19 This paper is based on an article co-authored with Dr. Carla Santos and published in the Journal of Travel Research, 44, 431-441.
Introduction

As noted by Lasswell (1936) politics is about power relations, who gets what, where, how and why. In this regard, several scholars have examined politics as an integral part of tourism since it involves power relations between different actors that take part in this industry (Burns, 2004; Cohen-Hattab, 2004; Dahles, 2002; de Kant, 1979; Edgel, 1990; Gibson & Davidson, 2004; Hall, 1994; Jeong & Santos, 2004; Mathews, 1975, 1978; Morgan & Pritchard, 1999; Richter, 1980, 1983, 1989). To a great extent, these studies have approached tourism and politics by examining political actions taken by the local authorities in an attempt to manage or influence tourism impacts (e.g., economic, social, cultural, environmental, political). In other words, as the effects of tourism have become significant, politicians have understood the need to intervene and control tourism-related impacts in line with their interests/agenda. Consequently, the research on politics and tourism covers various topics, such as policy making and planning (Burns 2004; de Kant 1979), travel restrictions (Edgel, 1990), physical planning and sustainable development (Morgan & Pritchard, 1999), empowerment and tourism development at local communities (Scheyvens 1999), destination marketing and representations (Gibson & Davidson, 2004; Pritchard & Morgan 2001), and international relations (Mathews, 1978). This large body of literature provides the research on the political use of tourism with insightful perspectives on the importance of understanding how tourism can be utilized as a political means. However, the literature focuses on the governments, while not acknowledging the way tourists and hosts may also use tourism to promote their own political and ideological interests.

Within this body of literature the studies which focus on the political use of tourism stress three different actors that may use tourism as political means to promote their ideology.
The first actor, as noted earlier, is the local government who may use tourism to promote a desirable image or political goal of their country, such as the case in the Philippine under Marcos’ regime when he used tourism to rectify the bad image attached to his dictatorship (Richter, 1980). The second actor in the tourism arena that may politically use tourism is the local population. In this case, tourism is usually described as a political battlefield in which rival groups in the host’s population compete for the tourism-related resources, such as money, meanings of the tourist site, and representation of each group within the tourist-related industry. Interesting historical analysis of such a use of tourism was recently presented by Cohen-Hattab (2004) who reviews the Arab-Jewish ideological conflict in Mandatory Palestine (i.e., under the British mandate) and the manner in which this conflict was reflected in the tourism industry. Finally, tourism can be used to promote the political goals of terrorist groups who see tourism as a symbol of western civilization and its related ideologies against which they want to protest. The shared characteristic of these studies is that tourists are usually portrayed as passive characters that can be easily manipulated. Arguably, this approach toward the tourists emanates from the non-political meanings traditionally assigned to tourism in Western societies. Considering the limited approach toward the political use of tourism, this research aims to expand the manner in which the political use of tourism is addressed in the literature. Specifically, this article seeks to explore the political dimensions of American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel by using the methodological technique known as data triangulation (DT). In this regard, this study aims to answer questions such as: what are the political aspects of American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel? As well as, how is tourism utilized as a political means in the examined case study, and by whom?
Along with its focus on the political dimensions of evangelical pilgrimages to Israel, this study should be seen in its broader context as a conceptual inquiry examining the methodological concept of DT and the way in which this technique can be applied in tourism field studies. In this regard, this article is also a methodological article since its secondary goal is to address the use of DT in tourism qualitative studies, and to provide an additional angle from which this technique should be viewed and employed. As such, this study utilizes this procedure in order to both examine the content of the triangulation process (i.e., the political aspects of the investigated phenomenon), and also to examine unexplored functions of DT. Specifically, this study seeks (1) to explore how politics is embedded in contemporary American evangelical tourism to Israel, (2) to provide theoretical and historical explanations regarding the political aspects of an evangelical pilgrimage to Israel, (3) to illustrate how the practice of DT can be implemented in the practice of tourism research, and (4) to present four functions of DT which expand the traditional goals achieved by DT.

In order to communicate both the empirical (i.e., the political use of tourism as expressed in the examined case study) and the methodological (i.e., the notion of DT) concerns of this article, the authors choose to incorporate this duality into the article’s structure. Specifically, the findings regarding the political dimensions of an evangelical pilgrimage to Israel are organized around four functions achieved by utilizing the technique of DT. In so doing, this study attempts to provide new theoretical insights regarding the philosophical premises and the purposes traditionally related to the employment of DT in tourism research. Accordingly, the article concludes with discussions on both the contribution of this article to the study of politics and tourism, and with three theoretical
insights which expand the theoretical premises upon which the traditional usage of DT is based.

Theoretical and Historical Background

Introduction to Evangelicalism

The term ‘evangelism’ is derived from the Greek word meaning ‘good news,’ which connotes the missionary orientation (i.e., spreading the good news) of this religious activity. In the same vein, the adjective “evangelical” usually refers to Protestants whose mission was to spread Christianity through missionary teachings of the gospel (Bosch, 1991). More specifically, evangelicalism is broadly defined as an activist movement which puts emphasis on the absolute authority of the bible and the atoning death of Christ. The historical roots of this movement in the United States emerged in the mid-eighteenth century in what is known as the first Great Awakening in the American colonies (for a historical review see Noll, Bebbington & Rawlyk, 1994).

Christian Zionism refers to ideology held by Christians (mostly Evangelists) which supports the notion of a state for the Jewish people in the geographical area referred to in the gospel as the land of Israel. It is important to note that such a view emerged before the modern establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 (Ariel, 2001; Bar-Yosef, 2003; Merkley, 1998). The premise of such a view is that the return of the Jewish people to their ancestral land is an essential stage before the second return of Christ and the beginning of the Messianic age. For premillenialists (those who believe in this deterministic vision) the rebuilding of the temple by Jews is a signifier of the Messianic era (i.e., Christ’s second return). Basing their beliefs on the gospel, the premillenialists recognize the contemporary
Jews as the people of Israel who are supposed to rebuild the temple according to their interpretation of the scripture. Dispensationalism is considered the most significant millennial school governing evangelical thought in the twentieth century. According to this school of thought, human history is divided into predetermined eras which are subjected to a divine plan. In this context, the eschatological era is the most pertinent to this article. The eschatological era is said to begin with an apocalyptical period when only those who are Christ’s followers will be “raptured” and rewarded with heaven while the sinners will remain on earth to suffer the Great Tribulation. Afterward, the “raptured” will come back to Jerusalem to strike the Antichrist (the Jewish leader in the eschatological era) and his people, and to help Christ create his kingdom for the next millennium (Jeffrey, 1990).

Israeli Politics

In Israel, the head of the biggest party has to put together a government which consists of other political parties. The assembled coalition then has to be legally approved by the majority of the Knesset (Parliament) members. Therefore, the biggest party has to collaborate with smaller parties in order to gain their support. At the end of this political negotiation, the parliamentary parties which vote for legalizing the government are usually those parties which are included in the government. Consequently, the political “cake” (i.e., the governmental ministries) is divided between the coalition’s members according to the amount of power/mandates they have. In this regard, tourism is traditionally considered as a marginal ministry. Moledet, a small and extreme right wing party established by Rechavam Ze’evi in 1988, is mostly associated with the concept of the voluntary transfer of the Palestinian population to the state of Jordan. It brings together both secular and religious voters who are usually separated in Israeli politics. As the smallest party on the far-right wing
coalitions, *Moledet* received the Ministry of Tourism twice over the last ten years -- an office considered insignificant in the Israeli political scene. Most recently, in 1999, *Moledet* united with two other far right wing parties to form the National Union (*Ikhud Leumi*). In March 2001, the National Union joined the government of Ariel Sharon as a coalition party, and Rechavam Ze’evi was placed in charge of the Tourism Ministry. In October 2001, Ze’evi decided to resign as a result of political disagreement. A day after he sent his letter of resignation, he was assassinated. Consequently, Ze’evi’s resignation was not valid and Binyamin Elon, the second parliament member of *Moledet*, was appointed as the Minister of Tourism.

In March 2002, Elon resigned from the Tourism Ministry after the Israeli government accepted the international solution that the murderers of Ze’evi would be judged by the Palestinian Authority. Following elections in February 2003, Elon returned to the Ministry of Tourism until he was dismissed in June 2004 on the grounds of political disagreement with the Prime Minister regarding what is known as “the disengagement plan”. It was during these years that Elon developed a relationship with American evangelical pilgrims. From the article published in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* by Avshalom Vilan (2005) one can gather that this relationship has received a lot of criticism from Israeli left-wing politicians. The left wing party, to which Vilan belongs (i.e., *Meretz*), represents precisely the other end of the Israeli society’s value spectrum represented by Elon’s party (*Moledet*). This salient difference between the two parties rests on their attitude regarding the geopolitical aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While Elon’s political party does not support any territorial “surrenders” to the Palestinians, Vilan’s party supports an Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied in the 1967 Six-Day War.
Triangulation, Validity, and Reliability

The term triangulation can be traced back as a generic name for three different navigating techniques that seek to establish the location of a given geographical location (Berg, 2004; Blaikie, 1991; Massey, 1999). The first technique is based on the geometrical assumption that one vertex of a triangle can be exactly located by knowing the exact positions of the two other vertexes (Massey, 1999). Similarly, the other two techniques, which are not presented here, have a strong geometric orientation (see Berg, 2004). Based on this geometric metaphor, the term triangulation in qualitative research focuses on the various (usually three) techniques used to validate research results. This type of triangulation is known as “method triangulation” and is the most popularly used in social science (Denzin, 1978). The initial use of the practice of triangulation in social science is usually traced back to the concept of “multiple operationism” coined by Campbell and Fiske (1959). In short, Campbell and Fiske (1959) claimed that in order to confirm that variations presented as findings are not overly influenced by the researchers’ tool, scholars must use more than a single method (Jick, 1979). In addition to method triangulation, Denzin (1978) also identified data, theory, and investigator triangulation. DT is the generic term for the usage of various sources of data in order to check and establish the validity and the credibility of the gathered data. Noticeably, such an approach is ontologically rooted in a realist perception of reality in a sense that it assumes that (1) reality exists and (2) that it can be revealed through the use of multiple techniques. Theory triangulation is the generic term for the employment of various perspectives to understand a single set of data. Such a technique assumes that explaining the gathered data from different approaches may contribute to our understanding of the nature of the researched phenomenon. It also acknowledges the influence of the
theoretical lens from which the data is addressed on the conclusions drawn from the data. Methodological triangulation is the generic term for using multiple systemic tools (i.e., methods) to investigate the phenomenon. For example, combining qualitative and quantitative tools is usually employed in order to overcome the limits of one method (Connidis, 1983). The underlying assumption of such a practice is that integrating multiple methods covers up the inherent weaknesses of an individual tool. In the current study there are three different tools employed in the methodological act: formal and informal interviews, direct observations, and the analysis of secondary data. Finally, investigator triangulation is the generic term for the practice of using different researchers, observers, or evaluators of data. This type of triangulation aims to partially resolve the investigator’s biases during the different stages of the research process.

DT is therefore directly related to the two latter techniques described above (i.e., methodological and investigator triangulations) and, as such, Denzin’s classification (1978) should be seen as an analytical tool rather than a categorization of discerned empirical tools. In particular, the process of DT is usually based on data produced from various methods (i.e., method triangulation). For example, in this study the results from tools such as document analysis, participant observation, film analysis, and interviewing are not naturally comparable. The process of DT can, therefore, be regarded as a process of comparative analysis. However, given these definitions, what is the basis for a comparison between evidence drawn from different tools? As noted by Jick (1979), unlike quantitative methods, where this process is computed by statistical means, qualitative studies lack such systematic tools. As such, in qualitative studies the decisions of what evidence will be employed and what should be considered as ”significant difference” is subject to the researcher’s personal
preference (Jick, 1979). This problem is thought be resolved by the procedure of investigator triangulation, since employing multiple judgments may decrease the biases which arise from basing data decisions on one’s preference. In addition, multiple investigators may also contribute to the heterogeneous characteristic of the data in the process of collecting the data. Specifically, since qualitative data is directly influenced (some say created) by the data collector, various collectors produce different data even in the same site.

Furthermore, the term triangulation is discussed in the qualitative-related literature as a means to establish trustworthiness, which can be defined as the soundness of the research. Trustworthiness is traditionally measured and addressed by the criteria of validity and reliability. In this respect, validity is frequently regarded as “the measure that an instrument measures what it is supposed to” (Black & Champion, 1976, p.232) or as the “degree of approximation of ‘reality’” (Johnston & Pennypacker, 1980, pp.190-191). While reliability is usually defined as the agreement between two equivalent measurements of the same object or simply as the stability and accuracy of the measuring tool (Hammersley, 1987; Kerlinger, 1964). Nevertheless, some assert that these are not the right tools to measure trustworthiness in qualitative research (Massey, 1999). This approach is based on the subjective characteristic of the tools and the findings gathered through these tools. Conversely, others argue for using similar criteria for qualitative and quantitative research regarding the fundamental concept of trustworthiness. Lincoln & Guba (1985) refer to this difficulty of applying the traditional validity and reliability to judge the trustworthiness of qualitative data by providing an alternative set of criteria to measure the trustworthiness of qualitative data -- it should be noted that they adhere to the traditional terminology of trustworthiness (i.e., validity and reliability). The first two criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) are
based on a separation between internal and external validity. First, credibility measures the truthfulness of specific findings and, therefore, can be paralleled to the internal validity. Second, transferability measures the applicability of the findings to a different setting and, therefore, can be paralleled to the external validity. Dependability is the qualitative equivalent and it measures the consistency and the reproducibility of the research results. Finally, conformability refers to the objectivity of the research findings and the extent to which the investigators shape and influence the results. Trustworthiness can be achieved by utilizing these criteria through various means, triangulation being one of them. Therefore, when using triangulation, trustworthiness is gained by incorporating several sources of data, methods, investigators, or theories. The fundamental assumption underlying this practice is that by using more tools to base their research-related components (e.g., data gathering, analysis, findings, and conclusions) scholars increase the trustworthiness of these components and reduce the uncertainty related to the triangulated component. The premise of this assumption is related to philosophical approaches, such as positivism and objectivity frequently regarded as the philosophical roots of triangulation (e.g., Blaikie, 1991; Berg, 2004). Specifically, objectivists accept the possibility of measuring and describing the examined reality thought systematic tools and positivists (and also post-positivists) assume that what can count as legitimate knowledge must be verifiable through systematic tools.

In a related matter one could claim that, by employing DT, qualitative researchers accept the realistic ontology regarding the existence of ultimate reality (Guba, 1990). In other words, by relying on multiple sources of data researchers attempt to provide accurate descriptions of the examined reality. Therefore, as Blaikie (1991) points out, the usage of DT as a methodological tool by qualitative scholars, who traditionally reject the realist ontology,
may involve some internal logical mistakes (see also Massey, 1999). In light of these possible internal mistakes, this study aims to examine whether the usage of DT may serve different purposes other than increasing the validity and reliability of the research. In so doing, the “ontological contraction” implicitly pointed by Blaikie (1991) may be reconciled and the usage of DT by qualitative scholars can be rationalized.

Methods

The methodological logic of this study is to seek references in the gathered data which illuminate the relationships between politics and evangelical pilgrimages to Israel. The secondary data aims to contribute to the understanding of these relationships. It is important to take our own unfamiliarity with the researched phenomena at the outset of data gathering into account when considering this process’ explorative characteristics. In this regards, the political aspects of American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel surfaced during the ongoing process of data collection and was not acknowledged as a central theme prior to entering to the field. To be more specific, politics initially appeared as an important aspect in the life of the key informant who is one of the trips’ organizers and, therefore, a key figure behind these trips. Since the authors decided to focus on the political dimension of this particular case, this theme became the center of interest in the process of data collecting. During this process, the authors looked for additional evidence in order to understand how politics may be related to pilgrimages. Moreover, these explorative characteristics refer to the preliminary role of this project as groundwork for broader empirical research.

From the outset the authors found themselves with overflowing amounts of data thanks to the helpful collaboration of the key informant. It was in this context that the
practice of DT was acknowledged as a pertinent methodological technique by which the study can make a systematic understanding regarding politics as a central theme in pilgrimages. Accordingly, the study incorporates findings derived from several sources of data, such as informal and formal interviews, field notes from observations in a pilgrimage trip to Jerusalem, Israel, a promotional film, the transcript of a televised interview, a newspaper article, a religious ideological article, and field notes from two observations of promotional meetings. In this regard, the assembled data can be roughly divided into primary and secondary data. While the primary data were obtained specifically for this study, the secondary data were originally compiled for purposes other than this article.

The initial process of data collecting for this particular project commenced in December 2004 and continued throughout the first half of 2005. The earliest encounter with the subject of evangelical pilgrimages was based on a spontaneous encounter with one of the “ex-pilgrims” who led us to the key informant of this project. In turn, the key informant exposed us to how she, together with her husband, became pilgrimage organizers after traveling to Israel with an evangelical group. In addition, she described their central role in the local evangelical community as co-managers of an evangelical radio station. As central figures behind these trips, she also described the schedules and locations of the promotional meetings -- which later became additional sources of data for this study.

One of the first promotional meetings attended was held in a church in the Midwestern U.S. The meeting was composed of two lectures given by two guest speakers from a protestant church in Jerusalem, Israel. The first lecturer spoke about the Jewish roots of Christianity and focused on the theological aspects of these roots. The second lecture surveyed the relationships between Protestantism, Judaism, and Zionism since the
Seventeenth Century. The speaker claimed that the assistance of the “gentiles” (i.e., non-Jewish) to the establishment of the state of Israel is actually the fulfillment of a biblical vision. The second meeting attended was held in another Midwestern town. In this meeting, our interviewee was the visiting minister. The sermon focused on two topics: 1) a specific episode from the life of Jesus in the Sea of Galilee; and, 2) pilgrimage trips to Israel. The sermon was followed with slides of various sites in Israel. In both these meetings tape-recorders were not used since the meetings took place inside a church. Instead, extensive field notes were taken and tried to capture the essence of both the lectures and sermon. It should be noted, however, that on several occasions during the sermon, there was the opportunity to write down the speaker’s direct words. Therefore, the findings are presented as they appeared in the field notes -- a synopsis of the general content of the speaker’s words, as well as some direct quotes.

Finally, in June 2005 the first author joined an evangelical group of pilgrims, organized by the same trip coordinators, in a visit to Israel. It is important to note that this group was unique for two main reasons and, therefore, the representativeness of this group can be questioned. First, this group was the first males-only trip that the coordinators organized, rather than the usual mixed group. It is beyond the scope of this article to explain and describe the reasons behind organizing such a group and all the special characteristics of such group; however, it is important to acknowledge several differences, such as the content of the religious teaching component of the trip and the fact that this trip did not include extensive volunteering activities in Israel like other trips organized by these coordinators usually do. Nonetheless, the religious agenda behind this trip (i.e., evangelicalism) was the same. The first author also attended a preparation meeting held in a church two days before
their departure to Israel in order to become familiar with the group and their families. In both the meeting, and the trip, the author wrote down field notes which are used as an additional source of data in this study. During the visit to Jerusalem the author also conducted some informal interviews.

The secondary data of this project consists of a promotional movie, an ideological essay, a transcript of a televised interview with the former Israeli minister of tourism (Binyamin Elon), and an article which appeared in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, written by a Parliament member (Knesset member Avashlom Vilan). The secondary data for this project was directly influenced by the primary data in three ways. First, the promotional film was willingly provided by the key informant. This film lasts seven minutes and was produced for the purpose of promoting American pilgrimages to Israel -- additional details regarding the film cannot be revealed for the sake of the confidentiality of its participants. The film consists of eclectic video shots from a humanitarian evangelical pilgrimage to Israel. In the film, the main ideology behind the trip, which is humanitarian and religious, is presented. Second, the ideological essay “Why to stand with Israel today?” (Hayford, 2006) was collected from a sales table during the first promotional meeting attended. Third, the transcript of an interview (in Hebrew) with the former tourism minister of Israel (Binyamin Elon) was found on the Internet site of his political organization *Moledet*. This piece was particularly relevant to this study because not only was it referenced several times during interviews, but also because during his time in the ministry of tourism. Binyamin Elon was known to often meet and speak with pilgrims during their visits to Israel. Pictures of these meetings between Binyamin Elon and evangelical pilgrims were displayed during both promotional meetings attended. Finally, the article “Dangerous and destructive alliance”
published (in Hebrew) on February 22, 2005 was also collected. Both the transcribed televised interview and the newspaper article were translated into English and were verified by a bilingual translator (English-Hebrew).

**Triangulating the Politics**

Outlining all the functions that DT fulfills in this research is not a simple undertaking. Nonetheless, there are some recurrent tasks that can be categorized into four functions: (1) corroboration, (2) exploration, (3) understanding, (4) and enriching the findings. In order to demonstrate these functions in action, examples are provided. Although each of the four functions is discussed separately, each function and its illustration contain reflections of the others. In this way, a holistic picture regarding the contribution of each function to the research project is provided. By utilizing the format of the four functions achieved by DT, this section also aims to reveal the multifaceted ways in which politics are embedded in American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel.

*(1) DT as a Means of Corroboration*

The prominent role of DT in this study focuses on corroborating various facets regarding the political features of the researched phenomenon. This process enables the determination of the centrality of the political aspects in the studied phenomenon. Two reasons question the centrality of the political aspects in these trips. First, the largest part of the literature on pilgrimage stresses the religious aspect of such tours as the main motive and characteristic. Second, as one of the investigators is from Israel, it was important to verify that the political issues which initially appeared during the interview did not surface merely
due to his identity as an Israeli. For example, when asked why her main goal is to get as many people as possible interested and involved in Israel, the trip organizer answered:

Well, I want people to know where the history of the future is going to take place. Everything that is happening in the world now – the key is Israel. Everything. I can’t say this aloud to everybody but I believe with all my heart that, that… our dear president George Bush is – I voted for him twice and I gave him money- he understands this too about Israel. He has been there…Ariel Sharon [Israel’s Prime-Minister] has taken him in a helicopter. He has taken him above the Golan Heights and said: “this is where they used to shoot down at us. Look at how skinny this strip of land between the Mediterranean Sea and the West Bank is.” George Bush knows this. I think that is why he is doing this in Iraq and maybe next…Iran. But, o.k. so the history of the future is…Then I want to get them over there to meet the people and to start understanding like…the complexity of the relationship. And to see what even the Palestinians…they are sweet nice people if they didn’t have such a lousy leader…a normal education. I mean they just…What they are teaching them is evil. We are primarily…our heart is with the Jewish people.

Another incident illuminating how an Israeli identity may have influenced the interview and the entire study was when the interviewee proudly revealed her affiliation with an extremist Israeli political party. Following the interviewee’s reference to the former Minister of Tourism as her friend, her knowledge as to his political agenda was inquired:

Q: Did you say that you met with Benny Elon?
A: He spoke to our group when he was the Minster of Tourism at the Hyatt in Jerusalem.
Q: At the Hyatt?
A: Yes. That is where we stay!
Q: You know that the former Minster of tourism was murdered in the Hyatt 3 years ago?
A: We stayed there because of that. And I stayed on the same floor [where he was murdered]. And I know that it’s sacred ground [long pause]. Anyway, Benny Elon when he came, he…we did our day, we ate, then we had Magen David Adom [the Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross] come and we donated blood that night. We donate blood now every time we go, and it’s really very meaningful to us…. to give blood in Jerusalem and to know that part of me is over there, you know.

When the interview was over, there was the need to look for additional sources of data in order to understand the relationship between politics and these religious trips. As
such, to reexamine the political aspects of these trips a promotional film provided by the respondent during the interview was examined. The film summarizes one of the pilgrimages to Israel and was produced as a promotional video. It was presented in the annual convention of the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB). Surprisingly, the strong and undoubtedly outright political stance of the interviewee did not appear in this film. Instead, sentences such as: “it is important to show our support to Israel”, and “it is very safe to travel to Israel”, reveal a political tone without ever making such a claim. Next, the role of politics in these trips was examined during direct observations at a promotional meeting held at a Midwestern church. During the meeting, an essay entitled “Why stand with Israel today?” was distributed to the audience. It is important to note that it was the trips’ organizer who chose to use this essay as a promotional tool. Hence, this essay functions as a corroborating means for the interview’s content. In addition, the promotional role of the essay points to the relationship between the interviewees’ political opinion and these trips. In the essay, Hayford (2002) refers to the political consequences of his recommendation to stand with Israel:

This is not about politics, this is about the Word of God…but the political ramifications are extremely dramatic. Scripture declares there will come a time when all the nations of the world will turn against Israel. It is so highly conceivable this could happen in our time that is critical to outline: why we should stand with Israel today (2002, p.2)

Hayford proceeds to gives eight reasons for standing with Israel and suggests pilgrimage as one of five actions one can take to “stand up for Israel” (2002, p.8). The promotional role of this essay in the meeting not only corroborates the worldview of the interviewee, but also points out the relevance of this view to the context of the trips to Israel.

Three additional sources from which the role of politics in these trips was examined are informal interviews with pilgrims before, during and after the trip. In this regards, the
first author joined a group of pilgrims for one day of traveling (organized by the same coordinators) in Jerusalem, Israel. Although the arrival at holy sites in Jerusalem mostly drew religious comments from the pilgrims, politics was an integral part of this day. For example, while visiting Temple Mountain one of the pilgrims explained to the investigator why he thinks that the Third Temple should be rebuilt exactly where the Temple Mountain used to be. Other joined him and explained that they understand the political consequences of such an action but this is, they believe, the signifier for the second return of Jesus. To be more specific, they clearly know that the mosques on Temple Mountain have been built on the ruins of the previous temple and, therefore, would have to be removed in order to execute such vision. These findings support Ariel’s (2001) explanation of the evangelical vision regarding Temple Mountain. It is important to note that Ariel (2001) points out the danger of radical individuals who tried in the past, and may try in the future, to execute this vision by different attempts to destroy the Muslim mosques on Temple Mountain. Admittedly, after reading the article by Ariel (2001) regarding the potential danger of Messianic groups in Jerusalem, the authors sought to understand whether this warning is relevant to the examined group. In order to do that, and in light of the importance of this question, the authors systematically and carefully examined this issue by relying on multiple sources of data. Therefore, the important observation of Ariel (2001) and its relevancy to the Midwestern pilgrims was one of the topics that the authors sought to triangulate. Based on their familiarity with the examined pilgrimage, the authors find that it is important to make a clear note that such a danger is not relevant in the case of the examined pilgrimage. This inference is based on extensive engagement during promotional meetings with pilgrims who traveled to Israel, organizational meetings, several informal and formal meetings with the trips’
coordinators who choose the people who travel in their groups, and during the day trip in Jerusalem.

(2) DT as an Explorative Tool

The second function of DT in this project refers to the explorative role that it has fulfilled. To be more specific, the usage of different sources of data in order to reexamine the role of politics in these trips contributes to a broader understanding of the relationships between religion and politics in the context of evangelical pilgrimages to Israel. For instance, groups traveling to Israel associate themselves with a broader evangelical movement which seeks to support Israel. By using multiple sources of data, the study found that political ramifications of these religious tours are clear to the pilgrims and to Israel’s tourism authorities, as well. The explorative role of DT is also achieved by utilizing one source of data to reach other sources of data. In this project, the relationships between the sources of data can be described as “hyperlinked” since one source led to another. The interviewee, who was the first source of data, invited the researchers to the promotional meetings. In the first promotional meeting, the researchers found an ideological essay which they decided to analyze. The interviewee also exposed them to the relationship between Binyamin Elon and the evangelical pilgrims. This led them to seek out secondary data in the Israeli media regarding this relationship.

The various sources of data also provided an opportunity to examine the political aspects of these trips from multiple perspectives. For example, the first promotional meeting consisted of two lectures given by guest speakers who are well known among the worldwide Evangelical community. During these lectures, the speakers discussed the ideology underlying these trips. This ideology can be summarized as a wish to support Israel in order
to bring about the second arrival of Jesus. The two lecturers also addressed the historical, political, and religious background regarding the link between Christianity and Zionism. According to both lecturers, this link is the premise for supporting Israel and for traveling to Israel. During the lectures, historical evidence regarding the relationship between Zionism and Protestantism further illuminated the political aspects of such trips. It was the reappearance of such political issues during the lectures that drew our attention to the political aspects inherent in these trips. In the second lecture, which was quasi-academic, the speaker addressed the political contributions of the Evangelicals to the establishment of the state of Israel and the Israeli academia was blamed for not paying enough tribute to the central role of Protestantism in their history. In addition, this speaker provided a historical survey of contributions of Protestants to the existence of the state of Israel from the seventeenth century up until today. The historical facts were connected to biblical visions from the books of Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah. In this context he considered Protestants as the biblical “gentiles” in “God’s plan” whose purpose is to bring the “chosen people” back to their ancient land. Such a worldview precisely expresses what was described earlier in this paper as Christian Zionism and premillennialism. The actual process of finding this link was a gradual one while going back and forth from the literature to the data. Without under-appreciating this long process, what is relevant to our discussion is the central role of DT in establishing this link.

(3) DT as a Means of Understanding

The third role which DT fulfills in this project is by enabling interpretive understanding regarding the action and worldview of the pilgrims. In other words, by using multiple sources of data the researchers gained a vantage point which exposed them to the
additional contexts in which the respondents act. This function can be related to the hermeneutic tradition and the term of *verstehen* which can be defined as interpretive understating (Baronov, 2004; Schwandt, 2000). As pointed out by Baronov (2004, p.120), *verstehen* can be employed as a data-gathering tool mainly in order to understand the hidden meaning which rests behind human actions. For example, in this study the authors employed DT in order to revisit the respondent’s worldview. More specifically, in order to reexamine the trips’ coordinator worldview, the authors sought to base their interpretation on data derived from a setting different from the interview. In this respect, the second promotional meeting, where the trips’ organizer gave a sermon, provided a unique opportunity for being exposed to the interviewee’s stories and worldview. In this context, it is important to note that the study did not seek to determine the truthfulness of the interview’s content by hearing the interviewee speaking about the trips in a different setting. Instead, the goal was to observe how the key-informant presented her stories about the trips and her political worldview when speaking to potential pilgrims. In this way, the present study complies with the approach that the interview’s accounts should not be solely evaluated for their veracity, but that they should instead focus on questions such as: Why did the informant chose to present the facts in a certain way? (e.g., Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont 2003; Dean & Whyte, 1958). Accordingly, DT should not be simply seen as a tool which aims to increase the credibility just by answering the question “Is the informant telling the truth?” (Atkinson, Coffey & Delamont 2003, p.120) since informants never do, due to the subjective essence of informants’ narratives.

The significance of the “new setting” to the process of reexamining the way the political aspects of these trips are presented by the key-informant arises from the
fundamental difference between data derived from the interview versus from the sermon. To begin with, the interview is an intimate situation where the interviewer-interviewee interaction influences the content of the conversation. In this regard, “good chemistry” between the interviewee and the interviewer may encourage or impede the interviewee to speak about sensitive topics, such as politics. Second, the interview results in an interaction which is usually influenced by the interviewer’s response -- which directs the conversation -- whereas a sermon is usually a pre-prepared monologue solely controlled by the speaker. In this respect, on several occasions during the sermon it was evident that the sermon was prepared by the speaker. One example is that the speaker read from notes during the long sermon. Another example is the perfect timing between the lecture and the slides, which require careful planning of fitting the pictures to the content. Lastly, the announcement about the lecture with its title was published in a local newspaper implying that the speaker knew what she was going to speak about in advance.

During the sermon no explicit remarks regarding the political ramifications of the trips were found; however, three implicit references which can be interpreted as political were found. The first reference to politics was at the opening sentences of the sermon:

The state of Israel is isolated from Western states and we can learn from it in the way the international media covers the Middle Eastern news. And “We”, on the other hand, “love God’s people” and want to show the Israelis that they are not alone.

The terminology used in this short quote demonstrates the predominant religious tone that characterizes the entire sermon. Accordingly, the political aspects, like other elements of the sermon, were implicitly suggested. The second reference to politics was much more implicit since it was not verbal but visual. The speaker showed the audience a map of Israel without making any reference to the Palestinian authority. She said that they would be visiting
Samaria and Judah -- controversial regions within the Israeli society and among the international community. In short, these territories became part of Israel after the Six Day War of 1967 and they are known as the occupied territories. Nowadays, there are some Israelis that do not travel to these areas for political and/or security reasons. It was, therefore, quite surprising that the speaker did not mention these problematic aspects (i.e., security, political) in traveling to these areas. The third and final reference to politics was, though verbal, also implicit and hidden in an allegorical story based on the speaker’s experience in the holy land:

In our humanitarian activities in Israeli hospitals we encountered a group of Christians who go to Gaza to bring people that have serious problems with their heart to Israeli hospitals. In the hospital, Jewish physicians volunteer to operate on these Palestinians, “who are their enemies”, and “to fix their hearts”. Then the Christians bring back the recovered patients to Gaza.

This story was situated in the heart of the sermon. Although this story is based on actual facts, we should examine it with special care since it was the only direct reference to a Palestinian side in the sermon. By using “fixing hearts” as an allegory during the sermon, the speaker seeks to implicitly portray a political picture of the situation in the Middle East. There are three roles in this story: the Palestinians, the Jewish physicians, and the Christian groups. Each of these groups represents its own religious group. The Palestinians patients represent the Palestinian nation as having an ailing heart that should be fixed. A heart, in this context, should be seen as symbolic of the nature of its owner. The Jewish physicians and their willingness to help their “enemies” allegorically suggest the kindness of the Jewish nation. The Christians represent the pilgrims since both of them share the same religious affiliation. By using this extraordinary story, the minister communicates her political stance with the audience without having to explicitly “speak politics” during the religious sermon.
From these three examples it becomes clear that the informant chose not to address the political aspects of the trip during the sermon. Instead, the sermon focused on a religious story from Jesus’ life (based on Mark 4, 35-38) which was incorporated through pictures and anecdotal stories from Israel. The lack of a direct reference to politics in the sermon can be explained in two ways. First, a sermon is a religious lecture and the informant did not want to “contaminate” its sanctity with mundane politics. In this regard, the informant might have assumed that her audience shared her political view and, therefore, talking about it is redundant. Second, being aware of the promotional dimension of this sermon, the informant tried to avoid controversial issues, such as politics in the Middle East. The second explanation may also explain the absence of politics in the promotional film and in the booklet as mentioned earlier in this study.

(4) DT as a Means to Enrich the Findings

Utilizing the secondary data exposes the complexity of the political use of tourism by the host country (i.e., Israel). Such political use of tourism is illustrated by triangulating a televised interview with the former Israeli Minister of Tourism (while he was in office), and a newspaper article written by an Israeli parliament member. Particularly, the data shows how the relatively negligible role of the Ministry of Tourism in the Israeli political arena is connected to the political use of tourism by the Israeli Minster of Tourism. It seems that the allocation of the Tourism Ministry to the far-right party of Moledet fostered a relationship between the Israeli and the American right who share a similar religious-based political agenda.

Extant literature regarding the political use of tourism (e.g., Hall, 1994; Jeong & Santos, 2004; Richter, 1980) serves to further affirm the political ramifications of these trips.
Generally speaking, this body of literature stresses the political use of tourism by the host country. The data of this study not only indicates that tourists can also utilize tourism to promote their political vision, but it also illustrates the complexity of the hosts’ side regarding the linkage between tourism and politics. The political use of tourism by the later is discussed here in the setting of the Israeli parliamentary democracy. The interview with Binyamin Elon, the former minister, was broadcasted on February 21st, 2004 in the central program of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority on a Saturday night program which focuses on international news. In this particular week, the show was dedicated to broadcasting an episode from the American television program *Sixty Minutes* produced by CBS. The title of the *Sixty Minutes* episode was the “Rise of the righteous army” by Morley Safer. Originally, this episode was broadcasted in the U.S. on February 8, three weeks before the Israeli broadcasting. Following the *Sixty Minutes* program, the interviewer introduced the Minister of Tourism, Binyamin Elon. The fact that he was the only interviewee invited to comment on the *Sixty Minutes* program indicates Elon’s association with evangelical groups visiting Israel. Moreover, this interview reveals that this close relationship is criticized by the Israeli Media, as evident from the following quotes from the interview:

…you have very close relationships with the Evangelical Christians, and it seems that you meet them at least once a month or once in two months. Aren’t you worried with what you have just seen (from the *Sixty Minutes* program)?

Much more concrete criticism has recently been written by the leftist Knesset Member Avashlom Vilan in a newspaper commentary (Vilan, 2005). In this article, Vilan criticizes Elon’s collaboration with the “fundamental Christianity” of America. Vilan asserts that the relationship of the Israeli extreme right with the American Evangelical movement acts against the Israeli and the American aspiration for stability in the Middle East. He accuses
Elon of risking the Israeli interests (i.e., peaceful existence) and of not understanding the actual American interests in the Middle East (i.e., oil). In his article, Vilan implicitly addresses the notion that the current American president is influenced by his religious affiliation with the Evangelical church, but he stresses that these relationships will not change American interests:

Recently, I was in Washington for few days as a member in a delegation of the Knesset. We met with senators, congress members, and governmental personnel from whom we heard comprehensive surveys regarding the political interests of Americans. We also partook in a multi-participants breakfast in which the president of United State also participated. In all of these meetings, it was made crystal clear that the conflict between the pragmatic-political interests of the U.S. in the Middle East… and the new messianic Evangelicalism on the other hand, will be resolved by knockout for the political interests.

In addition to his references to the tension between politics and religion, Vilan’s article disagrees with Israeli politicians regarding the developing relationship with Evangelical church groups. Specifically, he disapproves of the close relationship on the grounds of the need to adhere to rational politics. It is important to note that he did not directly address the issue of pilgrimage. Yet, he makes an explicit reference to the former Minister of Tourism and his relationship with Evangelical groups:

…The peak of this weird alliance can be found in the recent book of the former minister Benny Elon. The book is written in English and explains in simple words why we have the right to retain the whole land of Israel, and why we should not give up an inch [here he utilizes the rightists’ terminology] from the holy land.

Vilan’s article, as well as the interview with Binyamin Elon, contributes to this project by revealing the complexity of the political aspects of Evangelical pilgrimages to Israel. In other words, both of these secondary resources illustrate that the common approach toward the political use of tourism by host governments (e.g., Jenkins and Henry 1982; Richter 1980) may prove to be too simplistic. In addition, these resources put the local phenomenon of
Evangelical Midwestern groups, which is the focus of this inquiry, in its broader political and religious context.

To sum, the process, referred to as triangulating politics, sheds light on the relationship between politics and pilgrimage in two particular ways. First, it enables us to determine how politics play a central role in these religious trips. In this respect, it demonstrates how tourism, used by tourists and hosts to promote their religious visions, has considerable political ramifications. Second, it enriches the findings of extant research by portraying the complexity of the political use of tourism by the host country. More specifically, the data show how the negligible role of the Ministry of Tourism in the Israeli politics is coupled with the political use of tourism by the Israeli Minster of Tourism and by the tourists themselves.

Conclusions

The Political Use of Tourism in Pilgrimage

This paper aims to explore the political dimensions of a case study in contemporary pilgrimage, namely, evangelical pilgrimages from the Midwestern U.S. to Israel. In this regard, the findings illuminate two important themes. First, that tourism is used by evangelical pilgrims to promote their ideology in Israel. Second, that marginal political groups from Israel utilize tourism as a political tool to promote their ideology. Although the literature shows that the collaboration between Israeli right wing and American evangelicalism groups initiated before the ministry of tourism was assigned to Moledet (e.g., Merkley, 1998), it is suggested here that the political circumstances which led to the combination between the extreme Israeli right wing and the Ministry of Tourism, facilitate...
this specific collaboration. The authors suggest that when evangelical pilgrimages were recognized by Moledet as an important power behind the political process in the Middle East, the political leadership choose to focus on this segment of tourism to promote their ideology.

In a related matter, it is suggested that tourism has become an important tool to promote Moledet’s ideology for the last decades based on two basic grounds which are named here as: political-circumstantial and theological similarity. First, from a functional point of view, the assignment of a marginal ministry to Moledet compels Moledet to find ways to influence within a relatively limited ministry in the Israeli politics, such as the tourism ministry. In other words, the politicians of Moledet had to take advantage of their political power in a governmental ministry because that is what politicians do. Second, from a theological-ideological point of view, the evangelical pilgrims share with Moledet voters, and particularly with Elon, some common characteristics. Specifically, both Elon and the evangelical pilgrims believe that we are living in a pre-Messianic era. The difference between the two, as articulated by one of the pilgrims is the “identity of the Messiah and the timing of the arrival”. In other words, evangelicals believe that there is going to be the second arrival of the Christ while the orthodox Jews await for the first arrival of an anonymous Messiah. The resemblance between Elon and the pilgrims is also based on their common belief that the right of the Jewish nation to keep the “land of Israel” is based on a divine promise expressed in the bible. Therefore, it is suggested here that the tourists in this context should not be seen as passive consumers which are easily manipulated by the hosts’ politics as illustrated by previous studies on the political use of tourism by host countries (e.g., Hall, 1994; Richter, 1980). Instead, this case study illustrates how both sides utilize the same tours to promote some similar and some different agendas. While Elon wants to
promote his ideology regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by influencing an important political power in the U.S., the pilgrims want to promote their premillenial ideology which eventually will lead to the rebuilding of the temple by Jews and to the beginning of the Messianic era. This relationship can also be related to the political collaboration between Evangelicalism and Zionism -- also known as Christian Zionism (Ariel, 2001; Bar-Yosef, 2003; Merkley, 1998). Tourism, in this context, should be seen as a platform in which Christian Zionism is taking place in contemporary society.

This study also highlights the need to explore the political ramifications of religious tours in other destinations. As illustrated in this case study, religion plays an important role in contemporary politics and, obviously, in pilgrimages. It should be noted that pilgrimages are experiencing a significant resurgence in the last few decades due to a renewed interest in religion within the emergent global culture and economy (Murray & Graham, 1997; Poria, Butler & Airey, 2003; Vukonic 1996). This renewed interest has given the dynamics and relationships surrounding tourism and pilgrimage a new urgency, captivating the attention of scholars from across a variety of disciplines (Cohen, 1992; Digance, 2003; Nolan & Nolan, 1992; Rinschede, 1992; Stoddard, 1997). Fundamental to the understanding of the dynamics surrounding tourism and pilgrimage is the notion that social, political, and cultural factors all contribute to shape both the tourism and pilgrimage experience (Collins-Kreiner & Kliot, 2000; Jackowski & Smith, 1992; Uriely, Israeli, & Reichel, 2001). As a result, most conceptual and empirical investigations of the relationship between tourism and pilgrimage have concentrated on the individual, ritualized quest for the sacred highlighting pilgrimage as a predecessor to modern tourism, and tourism as a form of religion. This study, though,
proposes that a conceptual and empirical investigation into pilgrimages provides a valuable context for a discussion regarding the political aspects of pilgrimages.

The Relevancy of Data Triangulation in Qualitative Inquiry

The central argument of this section is that the four functions demonstrated in this study can be utilized to expand the philosophical premises upon which DT is based. Accordingly, it is argued here that the way the findings are presented and analyzed illuminates the relevancy of DT to qualitative inquiry, in spite of the allegedly ontological difference between the two as implied by the traditional conceptualization of DT versus qualitative inquiry. In so doing, I would like to reconcile the problem pointed by Blaikie (1991) that the usage of DT by qualitative researchers, who reject the realist ontology, may involve some internal logical mistakes.

As shown, DT is a fruitful tool which contributes to various dimensions of the research process that go beyond the limited function of verifying the truthfulness of the suggested description. Specifically, the application of DT in this study facilitates the researchers’ interpretive understanding of the respondents’ actions by contextualizing these actions within various frames derived from various sources of data. For example, the corroboration of politics as a central theme in evangelical pilgrimages was based not on verifying the truthfulness of the interview but its clarifying role in revealing the relevant contexts of the researched phenomenon. Likewise, the interpretive understanding as illustrated by the revisiting of the respondent’s world view in different settings (i.e., observations) should be seen as a tool for understanding the significance and the meaning ascribed to politics in these trips, rather than merely a validation of whether the informant is
simply restating a worldview. This function is clearly opposed to the traditional meaning ascribed to DT’s use which considers it merely as a tool of validation. Similarly, the failure to achieve conformity between different sources of data should not be seen as a threat to the research’s veracity. As shown, a failure to find similarity between various sources of data may reveal a hidden aspect or provide an alternative standpoint regarding the examined issue. Such a “failure” not only enriches the data but also opens the researcher to additional standpoints for examining the researched phenomenon. In so doing, one can claim that the trustworthiness of the research is established through this “failure” and not in the face of it.

Furthermore, explicitly using DT as an investigating tool allows scholars to reflect upon the process of interpreting the respondents’ actions. To be more specific, by acknowledging the multiple resources upon which the interpretation is based and the “background” of each source of data, researchers become more reflective toward the subjective nature of their interpretation. Such subjectivity stands in contrast to the traditional view toward DT that views it as a tool to ensure accuracy in the process of discovering an objective reality. Arguably, this approach can be related to the viewpoint of the philosopher Gadamer toward philosophy of social science as expressed in his seminal work *Truth and Method* (1994). First published in 1960, Gadamer’s (1994) book laid the foundations to two major philosophies behind qualitative inquiry, namely, interpretivism and hermeneutics (Baronov, 2004; Schwandt, 2000). Therefore, it is argued here that DT can be coherently applied by interpretivism and hermeneutics scholars without necessarily involving an internal mistake as suggested by Blaikie (1991). That is to say, although DT has its roots in post-positivist ontology, this study shows the relevancy of this procedure to studies conducted
under the frameworks of interpretivism and hermeneutics -- philosophies that partly dominate the qualitative inquiry.

Finally, concluding from the explorative role of DT in this research project, a distinction should be made between strategic vs. tactic uses of DT. In a strategic use, the researcher employs DT as a tool to contextualize the researched phenomenon and to enter an unfamiliar fieldwork by basing his/her conclusions on evidence originating from multiple points of view. Such a use does not aim to increase the truthfulness of the data. Tactic use of DT, on the other hand, refers to the need for substantiating the evidence by relying on multiple sources. Fascinatingly, both of these uses maintain the geometric origin of DT where reference points help navigators to verify locations.
REFERENCES


Atkinson, P., A. Coffey and Delamont, S. (2003). How do you know if your informant is telling the truth? In Key themes in qualitative research (pp. 119-140). Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.


New York: Oxford University.


Massey, A. (1999). Methodological triangulation, or how to get lost without being found out.


