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An American Evangelical Pilgrimage to Israel: A Case Study on Politics and Triangulation

YANIVA BELHASSEN AND CARLA ALMEIDA SANTOS

This article examines the political dimensions of American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel by using the methodological technique known as data triangulation. Based on evidence from primary and secondary data, the article illuminates (1) how tourism is used by pilgrims to promote their theological visions that 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 using data triangulation. In so doing, this article attempts to provide new theoretical insights regarding the philosophical premises and the purposes traditionally related to the use of data triangulation in tourism research.

Keywords: politics; data triangulation; pilgrimages

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; Dahles 2002; de Kant 1979; Edgell 1990; Gibson and Davidson 2004; Hall 1994; Jeong and Santos 2004; Mathews 1975, 1978; Morgan and Pritchard 1999; Richter 1980, 1983, 1989). To a great extent, these studies have approached tourism and politics by examining political actions taken by local authorities in an attempt to manage or influence tourism impacts (e.g., economic, social, cultural, environmental, and 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 or agenda. Consequently, the research on politics and tourism covers various topics, such as policy making and planning (Burns 2004; de Kant 1979), travel restrictions (Edgell 1990), physical planning and sustainable development (Morgan and Pritchard 1999), empowerment and tourism development at local communities (Scheyvens 1999), destination marketing and representations (Gibson and Davidson 2004; Pritchard and 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 used as a political means. However, the literature focuses on the governments, while not acknowledging the ways 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 article aims to answer questions such as the following: What are the political aspects of American evangelical

pilgrimages to Israel? 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 article 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 used. As such, this article uses the DT procedure to examine the content of the triangulation process (i.e., the political aspects of the investigated phenomenon) and to examine unexplored functions of DT. Specifically, this article 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 that expand the traditional goals achieved by DT.

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 using the technique of DT. In so doing, this article attempts to provide new theoretical insights regarding the philosophical premises and the purposes traditionally related to the use of DT in tourism research. Accordingly, the article concludes with a discussion on the contribution of this article to the study of politics and tourism and with three theoretical insights that expand the theoretical premises on which the traditional use 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 that 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-18th century in what is known as the first great awakening in the American colonies (for a historical review, see Noll, Bebbington, and Rawlyk 1994).

Christian Zionism refers to ideology held by Christians (mostly Evangelists) that 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 premillennialists (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 premillennialists 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 20th century. According to this school of thought, human history is divided into predetermined eras that 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 apocalyptic 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 that 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 to gain their support. At the end of this political negotiation, the parliamentary parties that vote for legalizing the government are usually those parties that 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 or mandates they have. In this regard, tourism is traditionally considered 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. The party 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 during the past 10 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. One 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 (i.e., *Meretz*), to which Vilan belongs, represents precisely the opposite of Elon's party (Moledet) in the Israeli society's value spectrum. 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 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 vertices (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 claimed that 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. Data triangulation is the generic term for the use of various sources of data 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) reality can be revealed through the use of multiple techniques. Theory triangulation is the generic term for the use 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, a combination of qualitative and quantitative tools usually is used 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 this article, there are three different tools used 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.

Data triangulation is therefore directly related to the two latter techniques described above (i.e., methodological and investigator triangulations), and as such, Denzin's classification should be seen as an analytical tool rather than a categorization of discerned empirical tools. In particular, the process of DT usually is based on data produced from various methods (i.e., method triangulation). For example, in this article, 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, in which 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 used and what should be considered as significant difference is subject to the researcher's personal preference (Jick 1979). This problem is thought to be resolved by the procedure of investigator triangulation, since using multiple judgments may decrease the biases that arise from basing data decisions on one's preference. In addition, multiple investigators also may contribute to the heterogeneous characteristic of the data in the process of collecting the data. Specifically, since qualitative data are 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 and Champion 1976, p. 232) or as the "degree of approximation of 'reality'" (Johnston and Pennypacker 1980, pp. 190-1), 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 and 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 using 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 through systematic tools, and positivists (and also postpositivists) assume that what can count as legitimate knowledge must be verifiable through systematic tools.

In a related matter, one could claim that by using 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 use 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 article aims to examine whether the use of DT may serve purposes other than increasing the validity and reliability of the research. In so doing, the ontological contraction implicitly pointed out by Blaikie may be reconciled, and the use of DT by qualitative scholars can be rationalized.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological logic of this article is to seek references in the gathered data that illuminate the relationships between politics and evangelical pilgrimages to Israel. The secondary data aim 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 regard, the political aspects of American evangelical pilgrimages to Israel surfaced during the ongoing process of data collection and were not acknowledged as a central theme before entering 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 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 this article can reach a systematic understanding of politics as a central theme in pilgrimages. Accordingly, the article 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 article, 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 expilgrims who led us to the key informant of this project. In turn, the key informant exposed to us how she and 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 comanagers of an evangelical radio station. As central figures behind these trips, she also described the schedules and locations of the promotional meetings that later became additional sources of data for this article.

One of the first promotional meetings attended was held in a church in the midwestern United States. 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 17th 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 meetings, tape-recorders were not used because the meetings took place inside a church. Instead, extensive field notes were taken that 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, on 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 a 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 as 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 2 days before the departure to Israel to become familiar with the group members and their families. During both the meeting and the trip, the author wrote down field notes that are used as an additional source of data in this article. 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 written by a parliament member (Knesset member Avashlom Vilan) that appeared in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*. The secondary data for this project were directly influenced by the primary data in three ways. First, the promotional film was willingly provided by the key informant. This film lasts 7 min 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 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 article not only because it was referenced several times during interviews, but because during his time in the Ministry of Tourism, Binyamin Elon was often known to 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 the following four functions: (1) corroboration, (2) exploration, (3) understanding, and (4) enriching the findings. 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.

Data Triangulation as a Means of Corroboration

The prominent role of DT in this article 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 of 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 that initially appeared during the interview did not surface merely because of 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, OK, 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 article 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 questioned:

> Q: Did you say that you met with Benny Elon?
> A: He spoke to our group when he was the minister of tourism at the Hyatt in Jerusalem.
> Q: At the Hyatt?
> A: Yes. That is where we stay!
> Q: You know that the former minister 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 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 (2006) 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 it is critical to outline: why we should stand with Israel today.

Hayford proceeds to give eight reasons for standing with Israel and suggests pilgrimage as one of five actions one can take to "stand up for Israel" (2006). 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 regard, the first author joined a group of pilgrims for 1 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. Others 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 to execute such a vision. These findings support Ariel's (2001) explanation of the evangelical vision regarding Temple Mountain. It is important to note that Ariel 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 regarding the potential danger of Messianic groups in Jerusalem, the authors sought to understand whether this warning is relevant to the examined group. 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 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.

Data Triangulation 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 use of different sources of data 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 that seeks to support Israel. By using multiple sources of data, the article 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 also is achieved by using 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 because 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 that 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 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 were 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 17th century 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 article 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 underappreciating this long process, what is relevant to our discussion is the central role of DT in establishing this link.

Data Triangulation as a Means of Understanding

The third role that DT fulfills in this project is 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 that 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 used as a data-gathering tool mainly to understand the hidden meaning that rests behind human actions. For example, in this article, the authors used DT to revisit the respondents' worldview. More specifically, to reexamine the trips' coordinator's worldview, the authors sought to base their interpretation on data derived from a setting different than 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 authors 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 article 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 the following: Why did the informant choose to present the facts in a certain way? (e.g., Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont 2003; Dean and Whyte 1958). Accordingly, DT should not simply be seen as a tool that aims to increase the credibility just by answering the question "Is the informant telling the truth?" (Atkinson, Coffey, and Delamont 2003, p. 120), since informants never do because of 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's speaking about sensitive topics, such as politics. Second, the interview results in an interaction that is usually influenced by the interviewer's response—which directs the conversation—whereas a sermon is usually a prepprepared 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 required careful planning to fit the pictures to the content. Lastly, an 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 that can be interpreted as political were found. The first reference to politics was in 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 because 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 who 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, though verbal, also was 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 Palestinian 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 because both 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's life (based on Mark 4: 35-8) that 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 was 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 article.

Data Triangulation 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 show 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 minister 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 and 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 article indicate that tourists can also use tourism to promote their political vision. The data also illustrate the complexity of the hosts' side regarding the link between tourism and politics. The political use of tourism by the latter is discussed here in the setting of the Israeli parliamentary democracy. The interview with Binyamin Elon, the former minister, was broadcasted on February 21, 2004, in the central program of the Israeli Broadcasting Authority on a Saturday-night program that focuses on international news. In this particular week, the show was dedicated to broadcasting an episode from the American television program *60 Minutes*, produced by CBS. The title of the *60 Minutes* episode was the "Rise of the Righteous Army" by Morley Safer. Originally, this episode was broadcasted in the United States on February 8, 3 weeks before the Israeli broadcasting. Following the *60 Minutes* program, the interviewer introduced the minister of tourism, Binyamin Elon. The fact that he was the only interviewee invited to comment on the *60 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 2 months. Aren't you worried with what you have just seen [from the *60 Minutes* program]?

Much more concrete criticism has recently been written by the leftist Knesset member Avashlom Vilan in a newspaper commentary ("Dangerous and Destructive Alliance," *Haaretz,* February 22, 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 a 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 the United States also participated. In all of these meetings, it was made crystal clear that the conflict between the pragmatic-political interests of the United States 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 uses 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 plays 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 Israeli politics is coupled with the political use of tourism by the Israeli minister of tourism and by the tourists themselves.

CONCLUSIONS

The Political Use of Tourism in Pilgrimage

This article aims to explore the political dimensions of a case study in contemporary pilgrimage, namely, evangelical

pilgrimages from the midwestern United States to Israel. In this regard, the findings illuminate two important themes. First, tourism is used by evangelical pilgrims to promote their ideology in Israel. Second, marginal political groups from Israel use tourism as a political tool to promote their ideology. Although the literature shows that the collaboration between Israeli right-wing and American evangelicalism groups was initiated before the Ministry of Tourism was assigned to Moledet (e.g., Merkley 1998), it is suggested here that the political circumstances that led to the combination of the extreme Israeli right wing and the Ministry of Tourism facilitated 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 chose to focus on this segment of tourism to promote its ideology.

In a related matter, it is suggested that tourism has become an important tool to promote Moledet's ideology for the past decade based on two basic grounds that 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 have influence within a relatively limited ministry in 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 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 who 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 use 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 United States, the pilgrims want to promote their premillennial ideology that 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 article 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 past few decades because of a renewed interest in religion within the emergent global culture and economy (Murray and Graham 1997; Poria, Butler, and 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 a variety of disciplines (Cohen 1992; Digance 2003; Nolan and 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 and Kliot 2000; Jackowski and Smith 1992; Uriely, Israeli, and 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 article, 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 article can be used to expand the philosophical premises on which DT is based. Accordingly, it is argued here that the way the findings are presented and analyzed illuminates the relevance 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, the authors also seek to reconcile the problem pointed out by Blaikie (1991) that the use of DT by qualitative researchers, who reject the realist ontology, may involve some internal logical mistakes.

As shown, DT is a fruitful tool that 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 article 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 respondents' worldview 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 that considers it merely 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 on the process of interpreting the respondents' actions. To be more specific, by acknowledging the multiple resources on 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 of 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 German 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 postpositivist ontology, this article shows the relevance 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 versus tactic uses of DT. In a strategic use, the researcher uses DT as a tool to contextualize the researched phenomenon and to enter an unfamiliar fieldwork by basing his or 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.

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