Panicked by lines of reasoning that dispute the claim of the opposing party: in this case, for example, the argument that the Jewish temple had never stood in Jerusalem, or that Jerusalem is not mentioned in the Qur’an. (It is hardly surprising that these feigned counterarguments are not based on a religious framework, but rather on dubious archaeological evidence or historical-critical text research.) What is more, the holy sites often also function as factors of distinction between rival groups within the same religious community, who use them to distinguish themselves as being, for example, more strongly religious or more strongly secular, or strive to make a stand against a religious establishment, such as the Jewish Women of the Wall, who oppose orthodox claims and promote a more egalitarian prayer practice at—at least parts of—the Wailing Wall.

1929, Wailing Wall Riots

In most of its manifestations, Zionism was not a religious movement. Although it is based on the religious tradition of a longing for Zion (Jerusalem), its leading tendencies were secular and arielligious—in some cases even antireligious—Jerusalem was not the focus of early Zionism, since, with its religious denizens, the city strongly represented the negative image of the Jew in diaspora. This changed with the Balfour Declaration and the beginning of British rule in 1917, when Jerusalem became increasingly important as the seat of the British administration in Palestine. Muslims and Jews became conscious of the claims to the holy sites and strove to consolidate their respective ambitions. A remnant of the Ottoman era was the so-called status quo rule, which, for example, allowed Jews to pray at the Wailing Wall, but not to bring or leave objects there (not even temporarily), since this could be interpreted as a claim to the wall, which, at the time, was property of a Muslim trust. The collision of incompatible claims to the wall led to the situation that the ostensibly banal positioning of a partition wall between men and women on Yom Kippur in 1928 became a catalyst for provocations. Muslims reasserted their claim of ownership by opening the narrow lane in front of the wall for traffic and erecting a Muslim house of prayer immediately next door. The secular leftist Zionist workers’ movement, which was dominant at the time, had already warned of a religious conflict: «[…] we must not forget: Other values play a key role in the revitalization of the Hebrew people—immigration, work, land, […] We are prohibited from lending [the conflicts] a religious character, which would unite the Arab people, who are divided and disrupted today.» For his part, the Muslim mufti Amin al-Husseini attempted to establish contacts to Muslim movements in order to draw the attention of Muslims throughout the world to the alleged danger for the Temple Mount. Many Muslims feared, namely, that the Jewish claim to the Wailing Wall would be followed by a claim to the Temple Mount and thus lead to the destruction of the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In 1929, members of Jewish—actually secular rightist Zionist—movements held a loud demonstration at the wall by singing the Zionist hymn »Hatikvah« and blowing shofar horns: a deliberate appropriation of religious symbolism by nationalist forces. This demonstration is considered the trigger for the hitherto most violent riots and pogroms throughout the land, with 269 deaths and nearly 500 casualties, particularly among the traditional, non-Zionist Jewish communities of Hebron and Safed. Hillevi Cohen interprets the incidents of 1929 as the effective start of the

Prologue: 1990, The First Intifada

On October 18, 1990, during the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles and in the third year of the First Intifada, the Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation, rumors circulated that the national religious Jewish group »Temple Mount Faithful« wanted to lay the foundation for the Third Jewish Temple on the plateau of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Palestinian Muslims took this announcement very seriously. And although the Israeli police assured that they would deny the »Temple Mount Faithful« entry to the plateau, there were violent confrontations between Palestinian demonstrators and Israeli security forces; at least seventeen Palestinians were killed. Among the dozens of injured were members of the Arab rescue forces that had been called in for help, as well as Jewish worshippers on the square in front of the Wailing Wall, located directly beneath the plateau, where the demonstrators had pelted with stones. It was one of the bloodiest incidents of the First Intifada, and it shook Palestinian society to its core. The confrontations resulted in a further radicalization of the conflict: Three days later, the Islamist Hamas movement announced that they would conduct the already violent battle against the Israeli occupation not only against Israeli soldiers and settlers but expressly see Israeli civilians outside the occupied territories as legitimate targets.

In conflicts, holy sites often serve as crystallization points for religious and/or national identity, and contribute significantly to giving the conflict a religious and/or national frame of reference. Especially in the »Holy Land,« there are numerous sites which are considered sacred by several sides and are thus associated with divergent interests—be it freedom of religion, physical presence, sovereignty, control, or possession. Outstanding in this regard is the area around the Temple Mount and the Wailing Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem. The Temple Mount is venerated by Jews as the site of the First and Second Jewish Temple. For Muslims, the plateau, with the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque, is the »Noble Sanctuary,« the starting point of the Night Journey and Heavenly Ascension of Muhammad. The Wailing Wall, or »Western Wall« according to the Jewish interpretation, is the western wall of the foundation of the Second Temple. At the latest with the beginning of the modern era, it became the central place of prayer for the Jews. For Muslims, it is the site on which Muhammad tied his miraculous riding animal Buraq before he ascended to Heaven.

Within a larger national or religious conflict, multiple claims to holy sites are often understood as being mutually exclusive, which is, in some cases, accom-
Israel-Palestinian conflict. The confrontations also attracted great international attention. The conflict was interpreted at the time as being basically a conflict between religions, but the echo was even greater on a nationalistic level; from this point on, solidarity with the Palestinians became a key crystallization point of the expanding Arab national movement in the Arab countries.

1967, Israel Capturing the Old City of Jerusalem

In the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, the Old City of Jerusalem, with the Temple Mount and the Wailing Wall, fell to Jordan; the Jewish residents of the Old City were expelled to the newly founded state of Israel. Nineteen years later, during the «Six-Day War» in June 1967, Israel was able to gain a surprising military victory. During this war, Israel conquered a territory that was larger than its national territory at the time, including the Old City of Jerusalem. After the victorious war, the radio message by the Israeli commander Mordechai Gur—a «The Temple Mount is in our hands!»—and a photo depicting three Israeli soldiers standing reverently in front of the just captured Wailing Wall became iconic expressions of euphoria. The unexpected victory was interpreted by a large share of the Israeli public as divine-messianic, which was not least of all reflected in the name of the war, which recalls God’s creation of the world in six days. This messianic interpretation laid the roots for a new ideological and political direction in Israel, which would evolve since the 1970s and would often be called «Neo-Zionism.» It is characterized by a linking of nationalism and religion; in contrast to «classical,» secular Zionism, a secular national state is no longer the goal, but rather merely an intermediate form on the path to a religious renaissance. The national-religious movement—which includes the religious settler movement—would become the most recognizable protagonist of this ideology.

At the Wailing Wall, swift action was taken to reinforce Israeli claims to the sacred site. Immediately after the Old City had been conquered, the buildings in front of the wall were torn down to make way for the large square still found there today. More difficult, however, was the question as to how the Temple Mount and the Muslim sanctums located there should be dealt with. The Israeli Minister of Defense, Moshe Dayan, decided to make the Wailing Wall a Jewish site and to place the Temple Mount under Israeli sovereignty, but to leave the supervision of the area to the Jordanian authorities. Consequently, the Dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque remained in the hands of the (Jordanian) Muslim trust authorities. Jews were to be given the right to enter the area—but not, however, to pray there.1 This ostensible «surrender» of the Temple Mount was made easier by the traditional Jewish-religious prohibition of setting foot on the temple plateau due to its extreme sanctity—a prohibition which ultra-orthodox Judaism (with few exceptions) continues to emphatically defend to this day.2 Within the national-religious camp, however, there were opposite standpoints: Shlomo Goren, then chief rabbi of the Israeli army, regretted that the dome of the Rock and the Al-Aqsa Mosque had not been immediately demolished and called for the site to be made available for Jewish worshipers.3 In the decades that followed, various temple movements formed, the different demands of which ranged from the right to pray on the Temple Mount to the erection of a Third Jewish Temple.4 In 1984, Israeli intelligence uncovered the so-called «Jewish Underground,» which was comprised of radical representatives of the settler movement.

of Israel as it existed before 1967 is at least not excluded as a possibility), it states in Article 10: «Jerusalem is the capital of Palestine ... Its Islamic and Christian holy places belong exclusively to the Palestinian people and to the Arab and Islamic Ummah [community]. Not one stone of Jerusalem can be surrendered or relinquished.» (Not only the integration of «Christian holy places» is worth noting, but also the lack of any mention of Jewish sites.) The Fatah politician Jibril Rajoub recently announced his intention, within the frameworks of a peace settlement, to accept the status quo of Israeli sovereignty over the Wailing Wall, if the Palestinians are granted full sovereignty over the Temple Mount. Although, with this, he did not go beyond Arafat’s offer during the peace negotiations in 2000, inner-party criticism forced him to withdraw his proposal.25

Conclusion

The Wailing Wall and the Temple Mount stand at the center of national and religious claims of Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Muslims. Time and again, they were the sources of disputes and the places where existing conflicts culminated. Whereas the conflicts at the Wailing Wall in 1929 were interpreted primarily from a religious perspective, from then on it was a matter of two national claims that stood in opposition to each other. An important turning point for the Near East is represented by the war of 1967. The unexpected victory of Israel was interpreted messianically by sectors of Israeli society—a form of sacralized nationalism. Large contingencies of the National Religious Party, as well as some members of the Likud party, adhered to this interpretation. In sectors of Arab society, in turn, the defeat of 1967 was interpreted as a failure of the predominant ideologies of socialism and nationalism. This was countered, as an alternative, with the ostensibly inherent, that is Islam, which was now transformed into a political ideology in the form of Islamism. In Palestine, the hitherto apolitical movement of the Muslim Brotherhood became politicized with the First Intifada and entered the political stage as the Islamist Hamas. The Second Intifada ultimately also provided a religious boost for the nationalist Palestinian forces.

National claims are always negotiable; with religious claims, however, this is far more difficult. When Yasser Arafat said during his discussions with Ehud Barak that he could not negotiate the status of the Temple Mount, since he did not have a mandate from the Muslims of the world, he argued within a religious frame of reference.26 Barak was also not prepared to completely relinquish Israeli sovereignty over the Temple Mount, presumably in light of the significance of the area for Jews. The solution to a conflict defined as religious can only be found within this frame of reference, which means that religiously founded concepts must be developed and implemented. This should now be the task of the actors in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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25 Cf.: Golan, Peacemaking, p. 146.