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Kaplan, Danny (2014). Jewish-Arab relations in Israeli Freemasonry: Between civil society and nationalism. *Middle East Journal* 68(3), 385-401.

**Jewish-Arab Relations in Israeli Freemasonry:
Between Civil Society and Nationalism**

By Danny Kaplan

Abstract

This article applies ethnographic methods and historic analysis to explore Jewish-Arab relations within Israeli Freemasonry. The article tracks local Masonic history as the fraternity transformed from individual lodges under colonial-like obediences in late Ottoman and Mandate-era Palestine into a national-level organization, under the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel. In light of an official position of political noninvolvement, Jewish and Arab-Palestinian members conveyed shared values of universal fraternity, but variable interpretations of citizenship and nationalism.

In 1995 the Masonic Grand Lodge of Argentine inaugurated the International Masonic Peace Prize to be awarded to individuals and institutions engaged in promoting peaceful coexistence and fraternity among groups and nations. Among its recipients were Juan Goldwaser and Rami Farran, credited for strengthening fraternal links and personal contacts between Jewish and Arab Freemasons in Israel and for establishing a model of cooperation and intervisitation between their respective Masonic lodges in Tel Aviv and Nazareth.¹ In the face of the continuing Israeli-Arab military conflict, alienation between Jewish and Palestinian citizens has remained a central cleavage in Israeli society with limited social ties across the two communities. Against this backdrop, local Freemasons take pride in organizational and personal ties between Jewish and Arab members. This study provides a first window into the complexities of these interactions, examining the tension between civic and national attachments in the eyes of local masons.

Notes

¹ Leon Zeldis, "International Masonic Peace Prize". About Freemasonry, <http://www.mastermason.com/fmisrael/israeli.html>.

Freemasonry, the world's largest and oldest fraternal order spread worldwide since the eighteenth-century carried on the wings of British and French imperialism. Structured as a quasi-secret society it formed perhaps the first social network of global scope in modern times. Historians noted how its professed principles of universal fraternity and enlightened civility translated in various instances into particularist national or Eurocentric identifications among local members.² On the one hand, within the secluded spaces of Masonic lodges, men of diverse occupational, social, religious, and ethnic backgrounds were able to discuss questions of constitution, self-governance, and social order and to negotiate disagreements employing a civic-democratic political vocabulary.³ On the other hand, individual members of Masonic lodges often participated in struggles for national independence, as noted in the United States and Latin America,⁴ the Iranian constitutional revolution of 1905-7,⁵ the 1908 Young Turk revolution,⁶ and the first democratic revolution in Egypt in 1924.⁷

When facing antidemocratic regimes it is easy to understand why Freemasons might join national revolutions in the name of liberal universal values. But even as nation-states became

² Jessica Harland-Jacobs, "All in the Family: Freemasonry and the British Empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," *Journal of British Studies*, Vol. 42 (2003), pp. 448-82; Michelle Campos, "Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine," *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Vol. 22-23 (2005), pp. 37-62; Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann, *The Politics of Sociability: Freemasonry and German Civil Society, 1840-1918* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Stephan Schmid, "a review of 'Freemasonry and Fraternalism in the Middle East' edited by Andreas Önnerrfors and Dorothe Sommer," *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism*, Vol. 2 (2011), pp. 333-4; Michelle Campos, *Ottoman Brothers: Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Early Twentieth-Century* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

³ Margaret C. Jacob, "The enlightenment redefined: The formation of modern civil society," *Social Research*, Vol. 58 (1991), pp. 475-95.

⁴ York, Neil L. "Freemasons and the American Revolution," *Historian*, Vol. 55 (1993), pp. 315-60; Victor M. Uribe-Uran, "The birth of a public sphere in Latin America during the age of revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42(2000), pp. 425-57.

⁵ Thierry Zarcone, *Mystiques, Philosophes et Francs-Maçons en Islam: Riza Tevfik, Penseur Ottoman (1868-1949), du Soufisme a la Confrérie*. (Paris: Librairie d'Amérique et d'Orient Jean Maisonneuve, 1993); Mangol Bayat "Freemasonry and the Constitutional Revolution in Iran: 1905-1911," in *Freemasonry and Fraternalism in the Middle East*, eds. Andreas Önnerrfors and Dorothe Sommer, (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 2009), pp. 109-50.

⁶ İnkılapçı M. Hanio lu, "Notes on the Young Turks and the Freemasons, 1875-1908," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 25 (1989), pp. 186-97.

⁷ Karim Wissa, "Freemasonry in Egypt 1798-1921: A study in cultural and political encounters," *British Society for Middle Eastern Studies [Bulletin]*, Vol. 16 (1989), pp. 143-61.

established, local lodge members often favored patriotism over universalism.⁸ The question of national attachment is particularly pertinent to the Israeli case where Masonic lodges organized in 1953 as a nationwide organization termed the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel (hereafter GLSI) incorporating all lodges that befell under Israeli sovereignty .

I explore how universalist values and particularist preferences are negotiated by local masons, drawing on personal interviews and participant observations during lodge activities.⁹ GLSI is one of the only recognized local Grand Lodges operating to-date in the Middle East.¹⁰ It adheres to the orthodox principles of mainstream English Freemasonry, among them a stated belief in God (or a Supreme Being) and an exclusion of women from becoming members, though members' wives often assume active roles in lodge social life. The majority of its members are Jewish. However, four lodges have largely Christian-Arab memberships and a small-to-negligible Druze and Muslim participation. In addition, two mixed Arab-Jewish lodges operate in Haifa and in Jerusalem (the Na'aman and Holy City lodges, respectively). I begin with a historical background of Freemasonry as it restructured from individual lodges under exogenous Masonic bodies in late Ottoman and Mandate-era Palestine to the national organization of GLSI. Following a brief account of the social make-up of past and contemporary members I turn to discuss the inner relations between Jewish and Arab-Palestinian members and their conceptions of citizenship and nationalism.

⁸ Jessica Harland-Jacobs, "Worlds of Brothers," *Journal for Research into Freemasonry and Fraternalism*, Vol. 2 (2011), p. 26.

⁹ Fieldwork was conducted between 2006 and 2008 mainly in Urim lodge (pseudonym) located in central Israel and catering to Jewish members. I was admitted as a member and participated in formal and informal lodge activities. In addition, 40 in-depth interviews were held with mostly Jewish, and a few Arab, Masons from lodges across the country, and with selected family members. Some of the interviews were conducted by my students participating in research seminars on fraternal societies. The questions probed for members' interpersonal and organizational experiences and only indirectly tackled their political-ideological views, given the Masonic commitment to political non-involvement. Interviews were held in Hebrew. Names were replaced with pseudonyms and identifying details were omitted from quotes. For further discussion of ethnographic methodology and findings see Danny Kaplan, "The Architecture of Collective Intimacy: Masonic Friendships as a Model for Collective Attachments," *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 116 (2014), pp. 81-93.

¹⁰ Several Grand Lodges were established in Morocco in recent decades but suffer from instability. Over a dozen of active lodges operate in Lebanon under foreign obediences. See Kent Henderson, "The Craft in Islamic Countries: An Analytical Review," Lecture delivered in the Victorian Lodge of Research, 24 November 2000, http://kenthenderson.com.au/m_papers02.html.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Non-operative (or “Speculative”) Freemasonry emerged in the mid-17th century in Scotland and England when a growing number of middle-class professionals and aristocrats joined traditional vocational guilds of operative stonemasons and gradually transformed them into an elitist social club. Historians mark the year 1717 as the official birth of modern Freemasonry, when members of four Masonic lodges in London founded the first Grand Lodge, giving Freemasonry a new institutional structure as a loosely connected network of social clubs that spread worldwide over the next three centuries.¹¹ Different strands of Freemasonry, termed ‘obediences,’ formed around new, autonomous Grand Lodges, uniting lodges in a particular region or country. Many Grand Lodges developed various criteria for recognizing one another to enable formal interaction and mutual visitation.

Commonly described as “a peculiar system of morality veiled in allegory and illustrated by symbols,”¹² Masonic mythology goes back to the biblical King Solomon and the construction of the First Temple. Scenes from this mythology accompanied by symbols of stonemason craftsmanship are staged during the ritual activity, termed lodge work.

Unlike its counterparts in Europe, the Americas, and Turkey, where the historical impact of Freemasonry is not only well-documented but also publicly acknowledged, Freemasonry has little public presence in Israel and the Arab Middle East, aside perhaps from the popular belief in a Jewish-Zionist-Freemasonic conspiracy to seize control of the world.¹³ Actual Masonic activity, however, is rarely covered in local media and there is to-date only one historical study of Freemasonry in late Ottoman Palestine.¹⁴

¹¹ Harland-Jacobs “All in the Family”; Wissa, “Freemasonry in Egypt.”

¹² Jan Snoek , 1995, ‘similarity and demarcation’ , In *Pluralism and Identity: Studies in Ritual Behaviour*, eds. Jan Platvoet and Karel van der Toorn (Leiden: Brill ,1995), p.56.

¹³ Originating in the 1903 anti-Semitic Protocols of the Elders of Zion, these allegations grew in popularity in the Arab Middle East and were adopted by political leaders and radical Islamic movements which proclaimed a hidden relationship between Freemasonry, Judaism, and International Zionism. See Richard S. Levy, “Introduction: The Political Career of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion”, In *A Lie and a Libel: The History of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, ed. Binjamin W. Segel (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), pp. 1-48; Jacob M. Landau, “Muslim Turkish Attitudes toward Jews, Zionism and Israel,” in *Jews, Arabs, Turks* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), pp. 83-5.

¹⁴ Campos, “Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine.”

Freemasonry arrived in the Middle East in the mid-18th century, with several Masonic lodges reported to have been established in major Turkish cities, though little is known about their fate.¹⁵ More significant Masonic activity was documented from the mid-19th century onward, stimulated by the growing influence of British and French colonial and commercial interests in the region. New lodges were established in Greater Syria, particularly in Lebanon, and in North Africa, particularly in Egypt.¹⁶ In the turn of the 19th century, well-connected men of free professions and “self-made” intellectuals, among them some Masons, served as imperial bureaucrats across the Ottoman Empire. Participating in Masonic lodges offered them inadvertent possibilities for professional networking and career opportunities.¹⁷ Some also engaged in political activism, encouraged by the French Masonic obedience *Grand Orient de France* (hereafter GODF), which assumed a more active approach in the pursuit of collective liberal rights than did its British Masonic counterparts.¹⁸

In 1868 Robert Morris, a past Grand Master of the State of Kentucky, directed a Masonic ceremony in the Cave of Zedekiah, site of the alleged King Solomon’s Quarries, located under the walls of the old city of Jerusalem. By 1873, Palestine’s first Masonic lodge had been

¹⁵ Jacob M. Landau, “Muslim Opposition to Freemasonry”, *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 36 (1996), pp. 186-203.

¹⁶ Dorothe Sommer, “Early Freemasonry in Late Ottoman Syria from the Nineteenth Century onwards – the First Lodges in the Beirut Area” in *Freemasonry and Fraternalism in the Middle East*, ed. Andreas Önnarfors and Dorothe Sommer, (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 2009), pp. 53-84; Byron D. Cannon, “Nineteenth-Century Arabic Writings On Women And Society: The Interim Role Of The Masonic Press In Cairo — (Al-Lata’if, 1885–1895)”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 17 (1985), pp. 463-484; Schmid, “a review of ‘Freemasonry and Fraternalism in the Middle East’.”

¹⁷ Jens Hanssen, “‘Malhame–Malfame’: Levantine Elites and Transimperial Networks on the Eve of the Young Turk Revolution,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 43 (2011), p. 36.

¹⁸ Wissa, “Freemasonry in Egypt.” A historic schism occurred between mainstream British Freemasonry and GODF after the latter excluded the requirement of belief in God from its Masonic principles. Also known as “liberal Freemasonry,” GODF spread in continental Europe and recognizes women’s Masonic organizations as well as mixed membership organizations. As of 2010 GODF decided that its own lodges would be allowed to initiate women as members; “Le Grand Orient de France autorise l’initiation des femmes,” *L’Express*, September 3 2010. http://www.lexpress.fr/actualites/2/le-grand-orient-de-france-autorise-l-initiation-des-femmes_916972.html

officially established in Jaffa under a charter from the Grand Lodge of Canada.¹⁹ Most of its founding members were Evangelical missionaries of the Church of the Messiah, members of the small American colony in Jaffa. Among the founders was also Charles Netter, a member of the French-Jewish solidarity movement *Kol Yisrael Haverim* (Alliance Israélite Universelle), who established around the same time the first Zionist enterprise in Palestine, the agricultural school Mikveh Israel.²⁰ The Jaffa lodge gradually dissolved within a few years, apparently following the disintegration of the local American colony.²¹

A new lodge formed in Jaffa in 1891 under Egyptian obedience and then reestablished in 1906 under the obedience of the French GODF and named *Barkai/Shafaq* (“light of dawn” in Hebrew and Arabic, respectively). Among its founders were French engineers involved in the construction of the Jaffa-Jerusalem railroad, as well as local Christian-Arab and Jewish residents. Lodge work was held in French. A growing number of Muslim men joined the lodge in the wake of the 1908 Young Turk Revolution which encouraged participation in the civic sphere.²² Barkai became the local hub for Masonic activity. Its members were prominent in attempts to revitalize Masonic activity in the region in the face of opposition by certain local Ottoman officials. In 1909 a delegate from Barkai participated in the assembling council of the renewed Grand Lodge of Turkey in Istanbul.²³ In 1910 Barkai members helped revive Masonic activity in Jerusalem, establishing the Temple of Solomon lodge under the new regional Turkish obedience. However a first breach between Arab and Jewish members was documented in 1913 when personal and ideological disputes led a faction consisting mainly of Jews and Frenchmen to break off from the newly formed Jerusalem lodge and form a separate lodge under the name Moriah.²⁴

¹⁹ Albert G. Mackey, “Freemasonry in Jerusalem” In *Mackey’s National Freemason October 1872 to September 1873* (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2003[1873]), pp. 585-93.

²⁰ Mackey, “Freemasonry in Jerusalem,” p. 588; Lisa Moses Leff, *Sacred bonds of solidarity: The rise of Jewish internationalism in nineteenth-century France* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

²¹ Seth Frantzman, “Terra Incognita: The first economic peace in the Holy Land”, *Jerusalem Post*, January 6 2010, <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Terra-Incognita-The-first-economic-peace-in-the-Holy-Land>.

²² Campos, “Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine.”

²³ Barkai members complained in Letters to GODF of the Jaffa deputy who plotted against Masonic members in the local police force. See Celil Lyiktez, “Unknown Founding Lodge of the Grand Lodge of Turkey: Lodge Barkai, Jaffa”, Oct 3 2008, http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/layiktez_barkai.html#_ftn1.

²⁴ Campos, “Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine”, p. 46.

Between 1908 and 1911 two new lodges were established in Jerusalem and Jaffa, chartered by the Egyptian Grand Lodge, and two more were established in the northern cities of Acre and Haifa, chartered by the Grand Lodge of Scotland. Lodge work was held mostly in Arabic yet also accommodated Jewish members from the local Sephardi community (Jews of Middle Eastern or Mediterranean background).²⁵

Masonic activity stopped during the First World War after the Ottoman authorities expelled foreign citizens—among them Masons, particularly Jewish—and did not resume until 1924 under the British Mandate government.²⁶ During this period political relations between the local Arab and the growing Jewish-Zionist communities deteriorated, impinging on Masonic inner relations. Gradually, most Arab members of Barkai left to join all-Arab lodges.²⁷ Meanwhile, new lodges formed across the country, attaining recognition by several foreign obediences beyond those of the Grand Lodges of Egypt and GODF. Several English-speaking lodges were established by the Grand Lodge of England, catering primarily to British employees and military personnel. Most of these lodges ceased activity with the British withdrawal from Palestine in 1948. The Grand Lodge of Scotland also chartered numerous Palestinian lodges joined by Arab and Jewish members. Finally, four lodges were established in Palestine by the Symbolic Grand Lodge of Germany before it was shut down by the Nazi regime. These lodges continued to operate under the Israeli state, catering to German-Jewish immigrants.²⁸ As the only German-speaking lodges to survive the Second World War, they played a crucial role in restoring freemasonry in postwar Germany.²⁹

A first attempt to unite local lodges under a Grand Lodge in Palestine rather than under diverse foreign obediences was made in 1933, when seven recently established lodges in Jerusalem and Jaffa operating under Egyptian obedience joined to form the first National Grand Lodge in

²⁵ Benzion H. Ayalon, “Concise History of Freemasonry in Israel,” in *Jubilee book of the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons*, ed. Ephraim Fuchs (Tel Aviv: Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, 2003), pp. 130-42. (Hebrew)

²⁶ Avraham Rosen, “An Historical Overview of Freemasonry in Eretz Yisrael,” <http://www.oocities.org/slodge57/Resources/rozen.html> (Hebrew)

²⁷ Campos, “Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine”, p. 57

²⁸ Ayalon, “Concise History of Freemasonry in Israel.”

²⁹ Christopher Campbell Thomas, *Compass, square and swastika: Freemasonry in the Third Reich*. Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation (College Station, Texas: Texas A&M University, 2011).

Palestine (NGLP).³⁰ Barkai also joined in 1942.³¹ The “regular” Masonic lodges under English, Scottish, and German obediences continued to work separately however. Whereas in some lodges operating under the NGLP Jews and Arabs worked separately, other lodges sustained a mixed membership. One of these was the short-lived Pax, an English-speaking lodge whose membership included Jews, Christians and Muslim Arabs and apparently stimulated rich social activities between the communities.³² *Haykal Sulayman* (Solomon’s Temple), an Arabic-speaking lodge in Jaffa began by contrast as a mixed lodge but by 1933 splintered as its Jewish members left to establish a separate lodge, Kochav (active to this day in Tel Aviv).³³ Campos infers that by the 1930s mixed Arab-Jewish lodges were no longer active in Palestine, although further historic study of Freemasonry in Mandatory Palestine is needed in order to examine this issue.³⁴

In 1948, following the establishment of the State of Israel and the partial flight and expulsion of Arab Palestinians, many Arab-speaking lodges apparently became inactive. In 1951 four Hebrew-speaking lodges and the English-speaking Holy City lodge, backed by representatives of two inactive Arab-speaking lodges—all operating under Scottish obedience—petitioned to the Grand Lodge of Scotland and were granted recognition as the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel. This recognition also won support from the English and Irish Grand Lodges.³⁵ GLSI was officially founded and consecrated in Jerusalem in 1953. In addition to the five founding lodges,

³⁰ The seven founding lodges of NGLP include: the French-speaking Jerusalem and the English-speaking Pax, founded in Jerusalem in 1925 and 1928, respectively, later to merge; Moriah (Jaffa, 1928; unrelated to the earlier Moriah in Jerusalem), a French-speaking lodge with a mixed Arab and Jewish membership; Har Zion (Jerusalem, 1927), Hiram (Jaffa, 1929), and Har Sinai (Jerusalem, 1929), all Hebrew-speaking; and the Arabic-speaking *Haykal Sulayman* (Jaffa, 1929); See Ayalon, “Concise History of Freemasonry in Israel,” pp. 138-9.

³¹ Yossef Bar-Ner, “History of Freemasonry in the Land of Israel,” in *Jubilee book of the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons*, ed. Ephraim Fuchs (Tel Aviv: Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, 2003), p. 143. (Hebrew).

³² Ayalon, “Concise History of Freemasonry in Israel,” 138; Ruth Kark and Joseph B. Glass, “The Valero Family. Sephardi-Arab Relations in Ottoman and Mandatory Jerusalem”, *Jerusalem Quarterly*, Vol. 6 (2004), pp. 27-40.

³³ Ayalon, “Concise History of Freemasonry in Israel,” p. 139.

³⁴ Campos, “Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine,” p. 57.

³⁵ Rogeh S. Nikola “The Grand Lodge of the State of Israel”, in *Jubilee book of the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons*, ed. Ephraim Fuchs (Tel Aviv: Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, 2003), pp. 96-97. (Hebrew)

thirty lodges across Israel received a charter from GLSI.³⁶ One lodge operating under Scottish obedience, the Golden Throne, remained active in East Jerusalem under Jordanian and subsequently Israeli rule.³⁷ Another lodge, Jordan, moved from Jaffa to Amman in the Kingdom of Jordan in 1952, possibly the only Palestinian lodge to have resumed operation in exile after 1948.³⁸

SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS

Comparing the social characteristics of Freemasonry during its formative years in late-Ottoman Palestine and in contemporary Israel suggests significant correspondences as well as several differences. Campos provides a detailed archival study of Barkai lodge during the early 20th century. Against the impression of a significantly foreign, European membership, participants were overwhelmingly indigenous, most of them Arab Palestinians from the urban economic and political elite. Family ties and potential prospects for career opportunities emerge as significant motivational factors for admission. Campos distinguishes between members who came from the new commercial and bureaucratic elites of the late Ottoman era, mostly Christians, and those belonging to traditional notable families with influence in the local Muslim Palestinian society. Among these were the Arafat, al-Nashashibi, Nusseibi, and al-Khalidi families which went on to play an important role in Palestinian municipal and national politics. Barkai's Jewish members were both Sephardi and Ashkenazi (of European descent). The former were typically younger in age and similar to their Arab counterparts came from economically or socially established families. The latter were mostly immigrants who arrived with the first waves of Zionist immigration after 1882 and settled in the early Jewish agricultural settlements (the so-called New Yishuv).³⁹

³⁶ Ephraim Fuchs, ed., *Jubilee book of the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons* (Tel Aviv: Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, 2003), pp. 29-30.

³⁷ Ayalon, "Concise History of Freemasonry in Israel," p. 136.

³⁸ Interviewees reported that King Hussein participated in Jordanian Freemasonry, yet in recent decades Jordanian lodges faced political pressures to close down. Jordan lodge is the only lodge reported to have remained in operation in low profile. See Henderson, "The Craft in Islamic Countries"; Menashe Silverstone "One Hundred Years of Freemasonry in Eretz Yisrael," in *Jubilee book of the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons*, ed. Ephraim Fuchs (Tel Aviv: Grand Lodge of the State of Israel of Ancient Free and Accepted Masons, 2003), p. 146 n.3 (Hebrew).

³⁹ Campos, "Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine," 45-8.

Over the years, Jewish members of various lodges assumed prominent roles as Zionist activists, among them Yosef Feinberg, founder of the first Zionist settlement Rishon LeZion,⁴⁰ David Yellin, Zionist educator and Hebrew revivalist, Shabtai Levy, first Jewish Mayor of Haifa,⁴¹ and Daniel Auster, first Jewish Mayor of Jerusalem.⁴²

Official figures on the demographics of current GLSI membership are unavailable. Estimates range between 1200 to 2000 active members in some 55 active lodges across Israel. Following decades of gradual growth in membership, recent years have seen a small but steady drop, echoing a similar decline in the appeal of Freemasonry worldwide.⁴³ Whereas the average age of admission in the early Barkai lodge was 32,⁴⁴ my observations in contemporary GLSI suggest that the majority of members are over sixty. Admission typically occurs around the age of retirement rather than during earlier phases of one's career. A similar trend was found in a demographic study of contemporary American Freemasonry.⁴⁵

GLSI refrains from publicly advertising and promoting its activities. Similar to earlier periods, new members are recruited mostly through family ties and social networks. Typically, these include immediate or secondary male relatives (fathers, grandfathers, brothers, cousins, uncles), business colleagues, and casual acquaintances. In their personal interviews, members provided various personal and social reasons for joining Freemasonry. They often expressed a desire to connect with a family "tradition" and to socialize with men of high standing. While recruits in earlier stages of their careers hoped to expand their professional and business opportunities, the older men were seeking out new areas of interest and a new social circle in which to spend their growing leisure time.

Prospective candidates may also apply to a lodge of their choosing with no prior contacts in the lodge. To be admitted, however, all candidates must undergo a candidacy period of six to twelve months, garner official recommendations by two lodge members, and secure the unanimous support of lodge members in an anonymous election ceremony.

⁴⁰ Ibid, n.59.

⁴¹ Rosen, "An Historical Overview of Freemasonry in Eretz Yisrael."

⁴² Kark and Joseph, "The Valero Family."

⁴³ A. Dean Monroe, Jr. and Jonathan C. Comer, "Spatial and Socioeconomic Patterns of Freemason Membership in Oklahoma," *Proceedings-Oklahoma Academy of Science*, Vol. 82 (2002), p. 107.

⁴⁴ Campos, "Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine," p. 48.

⁴⁵ Monroe and Comer, "Spatial and Socioeconomic Patterns of Freemason Membership."

Lodge work in GLSI is held in eight languages: Hebrew, Arabic, English, Turkish, Russian, Spanish, French, and Rumanian, reflecting the variety of Jewish immigrants that participate in Freemasonry.⁴⁶ In this sense, contemporary lodges play a unique role as a social enclave where immigrants, both recent and longstanding can retain and cultivate the language and cultural customs of their former country within the confines of their lodge. Some lodges have even retained certain Masonic customs practiced in the country of origin.

The spread and diversity of contemporary GLSI suggests a segregated structure, with specific, specialized lodges not only for Jews and Arabs but in part also for immigrant subgroups within the Jewish society. In contrast, the few active Masonic lodges in early 20th century Palestine offered more integration between distinct ethnic and religious groups, Arabs and Jews within a single lodge, such as Barkai. At the same time, whereas in its formative years the order attracted members from the upper echelons of society, in recent decades membership has become more heterogeneous and increasingly includes men of middle- and lower-middle-class background.

This brief account of the social make-up in past and contemporary Freemasonry in Palestine/Israel suggests that despite major organizational changes and demographic shifts in age groups and ethnic-religious composition, motivations for participating in Masonic social clubs have remained relatively constant over the years and center on the pursuit of a family tradition, social networking and professional ties. Against this backdrop, I turn to discuss inner relations between Jewish and Arab-Palestinian members and their conceptions of citizenship and nationalism.

ARAB-JEWISH RELATIONS

The most conspicuous aspect of Arab participation in GLSI is the prevalence of Arab members in leadership positions. In 2010 GLSI elected Nadim Mansour as its new Grand Master (President). Mansour is a Greek-Orthodox Arab from the Acco lodge (of which his father was the founder) in the Northern town of Acre.⁴⁷ Two other Palestinian Arabs had served as Grand

⁴⁶ Leon Zeldis, "An Israeli Freemasonry," About Freemasonry, <http://www.mastermason.com/fmisrael/israeli.html>; Ayalon, "Concise History of Freemasonry in Israel."

⁴⁷ H. Salomone Conte di Montebianco, "Mr. Nadim Mansour elected as new Grand Master of Ancient Free & Accepted Masons in the Holy Land," <http://hermetismoymasoneria.com/holylandfm2011.htm>.

Masters in 1933 (Yakob Nazee) and 1981 (Jamil Shalhoub).⁴⁸ Very few nationwide organizations and civic associations in Israel have Arab citizens at the very top of the hierarchy. It seems that despite its relatively segregated structure, a strong kernel of Jewish and Arab members maintain social ties across their respective lodges and moreover engage jointly in democratic decision-making processes at the wider organizational level of GLSI general assembly.⁴⁹

Participation in Masonic lodges provides opportunities for social networking that can potentially further one's occupational mobility in real life and not only in Masonic administration. For Arab citizens who suffer from systematic discrimination in the Israeli job market in both the public and the private sectors,⁵⁰ such social networking may be all the more significant. During my fieldwork in the Jewish lodge of Urim I met Rafiq, a young Christian Arab. He was a member in an Arab-speaking lodge in northern Israel that had ongoing ties to Urim. Rafiq befriended some of the young members of Urim and began to attend lodge activities regularly. Eventually he joined the lodge as a full member. I learned that he was planning to move to the metropolitan Tel Aviv area. By joining a local lodge he was able to form personal ties almost instantly and garner social support that could help cushion his imminent arrival in a new and mostly Jewish social environment.

Regardless of whether Masonic involvement actually provides career advantages the association between the two seems to be appreciated by members, especially when connected with the issue of Arab-Jewish relations. Thus, a Jewish member recalled the excitement he felt during a special reception held by his lodge for a fellow Arab Mason who was appointed to Israel's Supreme Court:

I knew him well. The reception was held with all the (members') wives and we invited the Arab-speaking lodges from up north. So the lobby was filled with people from the north [of Israel], and with our own folks and our wives. When he arrived he almost burst into tears from the excitement, it was very moving.

⁴⁸ Rosen, "An Historical Overview of Freemasonry in Eretz Yisrael."

⁴⁹ Lodge presidents from around the country serve as official representatives of GLSI general assembly and elect its Grand Master. Members can also advance to positions in the higher administration and educational arms of GLSI.

⁵⁰ Rouhana and Ghanem, "The Crisis of Minorities in Ethnic States," p. 329.

Overall, Jewish interviewees presented a rather idealized picture of Masonic Arab-Jewish relations. Noam recounted interactions between his Jewish lodge in central Israel and the Arab lodge in Nazareth:

When you meet a Brother from elsewhere it's a special feeling, a feeling of fraternity. For instance, the Nazareth lodge organized [an activity] where each time a different family would host [other members' families] over at their place. We would come over with our spouses, and then we would all meet at one of the Brothers' homes and do some social activity, nothing particularly Masonic. I wish everyone in Israel and around the world thought like [the Masonic] Brothers... There would have been world peace a long time ago.

It is interesting to note how this promise of peaceful coexistence draws on several distinct Masonic principles associated with fraternity. First, it echoes a notion of “strangers-turned-friends” reiterated by many members to describe how Masonic random encounters on the street with non-familiar members as well as visitation rituals during visits to lodges in other countries can instantly and miraculously overcome barriers between strangers.⁵¹ Noam chose to invoke this “special feeling of fraternity” when meeting a Mason “from elsewhere” to describe social interactions with fellow Israeli citizens. This is indicative of the usual level of estrangement between Jews and Arabs in Israeli society. Against this backdrop the ‘magic’ of Masonic fraternity seems all the more powerful.

Second, fostering impartial ties of fraternity is considered a high virtue and a special achievement of which not every person is capable. Several members stressed that this virtue is all the more valued in the Israeli and Middle Eastern context, given the surrounding military and political conflict, as concisely described by Pinhas, a Jewish senior functionary in GLSI:

There are good ties between all of us, Christians, Muslims, and Jews... We visit them, they come to visit us. Just a moment ago I was talking to this guy who lives in the fire-zone up north,⁵² a Muslim Arab, and I called him up to see how he was doing. That's the basic idea, because we're all in this together. You can't separate the political circumstances from Freemasonry; you have to attain a very high level of morality to distinguish between

⁵¹ Kaplan, “The Architecture of Collective Intimacy,” pp. 85-6

⁵² During the July 2006 War (Second Lebanon War) residents of Northern Israel, both Jewish and Arab, were bombed by Hezbollah missiles.

Freemasonry [on the one hand] and political relations between states or peoples [on the other].

Third, Masonic fraternal ties are considered not only morally superior but also highly emotional and can develop into more personal and inclusive relationships. Along these lines, in order to underscore the quality of Arab-Jewish social interactions between members some interviewees described how these bonds have extended to their families. Itzik from Tel Aviv recollected the development of his childhood bond with Nadim Mansur, the would-be Grand Master. Notice again how the example is set against the backdrop of the surrounding military conflict:

The conception was one of peaceful coexistence between Arabs and Jews... My father and this Christian guy from a village [up north] developed a very special connection... And me and his son Nadim Mansur became soul mates... We're still in touch today, we meet 4-5 times a year... But there's a connection not just between Nadim and I but also between his children and my children. I recall how we had sent them greeting cards for the New Year just a few days before the [Iraqi] scud missiles fell in 1991 [in Tel Aviv during the first Gulf War]. So when the missiles started falling, Nadim's children called up my children and said, 'pack your suitcases and come over to the village!'

Although similar themes were sometimes brought up by Arab interviewees, their accounts were more ambivalent. George, a Christian member of a Northern lodge, described the close personal bonds he had developed with a Jewish Mason, stressing they would have remained strangers were it not for Freemasonry:

I have a good friend who's around my father's age...and you know what, there are no barriers: not age, not language or nationality, nothing. He is much older than me, he's Jewish, he has no connection to my culture, and I can suddenly decide to give him a call, tell him a joke, or tell him I'm coming over for coffee. In ordinary life this would never have happened, I mean, what connection are a 75-year-old and a 40-year-old likely to have?

George's version of strangers-turned-friends underscores that at stake is the suspension of social and cultural divides of any kind. Yet it is interesting to note that while his wording did not ignore the ethno-national barrier when describing his close friendship, he chose to illustrate and expand on the perceived distance from his friend by emphasizing the age barrier, a universal form of difference that is less sensitive politically. Moreover, when asked explicitly about Arab-Jewish

interactions in the organization, George made a point of rejecting the very concept of “mixed” interactions:

Interviewer: are there mixed lodges of Jews and Arabs operating together?

This is a tricky question, not a very good question. From our inner standpoint, the order accepts honest, proper, free and moral people, irrespective of their background.... [At earlier times] there was no total separation [between Jews and Palestinians/Arabs], and really, there should be no such total separation because that’s contrary to the abstract principle of freemasonry, we don’t bother with religion, race, or nationality... and when you say mixed lodges, you mean lodges with members of different nationalities, but we treat freemasons as freemasons, period.

To conclude, some GLSI lodges and individual Jewish and Arab members maintained relatively strong ties of sociability at the organizational and personal levels. Their (often idealized) accounts of these interactions should be read, however, in light of the Jewish-Palestinian cleavage in Israeli society and the unequal positions of Jewish and Arab citizens. Whereas Jewish members explicitly addressed the cleavage in national and political terms only to stress how it is overcome by Masonic practices of fraternity, Arab members appeared less eager to address Arab-Jewish relations in terms of national and political disparities.

LOCAL CIVIC AND NATIONAL IDENTIFICATIONS

Throughout modern history Freemasonry represented universal values of liberalism and humanitarianism. However, this universalism was subject to variable interpretations at different periods and by different members depending on their social and political affiliations. In a telling example provided by Campos, the group of Jews and Frenchmen who had split from the Jerusalem-based Temple of Solomon lodge in 1913 and sought independent recognition from GODF argued against the remaining members, mostly Muslim and Christian Arabs: “The indigenous Turkish and Arab element is still unable to understand and appreciate the superior principles of Masonry, and in consequence, of practicing them... because the indigenous know only despotism, from which they suffer for long centuries, and their instruction is very little developed, and is not prepared to work with a disinterested aim for humanity and justice”.⁵³ Similar exclusivist Eurocentric views of civility and humanitarianism with a hint of racism were

⁵³ Campos, “Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine,” pp. 52-3.

found in debates over indigenous participation in lodges throughout the British Empire.⁵⁴ At the same time, the remaining Arab members, backed by the president of the Barkai lodge accused the dissenters of fostering particularist attitudes, promoting Zionist initiates, and jeopardizing local Mason's public reputation.⁵⁵

Ethnographic findings from contemporary GLSI provide another opportunity to analyze the complex and often inconsistent ways that members interpreted Masonic universal values and particularly how these translated into their understanding of state loyalty, citizenship, and nationalism. First, lodge members repeatedly wrestled with the question how to differentiate Masonic activities from local politics. On the face of it, Israeli Masons adhere to the orthodox Masonic directive to avoid any discussion of politics or religious controversy. In my very first meeting with a member of Urim, Yoav, who coordinated the admittance of new candidates, he clarified that the suspension of politics was integral to formal lodge work and noted that these norms carried over to their social activities as well. If, he added, he were to learn that a fellow lodge member was either a follower of Kahana movement (outlawed radical-right movement, infamous for demanding the expulsion of Arab citizens) or an activist on the radical left, then, "without taking a political stand on the matter," he would feel this could ruin the whole social fabric of Urim lodge.

Some interpreted these considerations as prohibiting not only discussion of politics and religion but also any kind of talk against the State of Israel, as explained by the following interviewee:

One may not talk against religion or against the state, and one shouldn't stir up disputes or do anything that opposes the state. Above all comes the state! If you live in this country, you need to respect it and its rules, so you shouldn't do anything against the state.

In this account the prohibition on talking against the state, itself an indirect inference from the prohibition on political involvement, unfolded into a declared duty to be loyal to the state. The significance of state loyalty reappeared when I officially applied to become a member of Urim in 2007. Two lodge representatives paid me a house visit and interviewed me in order to prepare an official letter of recommendation for the lodge assembly. They handed me an admission form where I was to answer several philosophical questions about my understanding of morality and

⁵⁴ Harland-Jacobs, "All in the Family," p. 480.

⁵⁵ Campos, "Freemasonry in Ottoman Palestine," pp. 54-5.

justice, mutual relief and good citizenship. Interestingly, my visitors elaborated only on the latter concept, explaining that since they avoided engaging in political issues, obedience to the state is of prime importance. In other words, they reinterpreted the question of good citizenship as loyalty to the state and furthermore connected it with the Masonic principle of nonpolitical engagement, overlooking the fact that claiming allegiance to the state is inherently a political act.

Beyond the question of citizenship and state loyalty, nationalism posed another source of collective attachment although was rarely addressed by members directly. The few scattered references to nationalism and specifically Zionism among the Arab members present a complex, ambivalent picture. On the one hand, some Arab members identify with an Israeli nationality, as noted by an interviewee alluding to a statement by a former Grand Master: 'By birth I am an Arab, by religion, a Christian, by nationality, an Israeli, and by ideology, a Freemason.' Although I observed no direct identification of Arab members with Zionist ideology per se, affiliation with Zionism appears to be the main allegation raised against Arab Masons among non-Masons in their communities. For instance, when I mentioned during a university class that I studied local Freemasonry and had met with Arab members, one of my Arab students with strong self-professed national Palestinian convictions told me that in her community Arab Masons were viewed as Zionist collaborators, echoing the popular belief in a Masonic-Zionist conspiracy. I was also told by one of my informants of Masonic candidates from the Nazareth lodge who upon joining the order were excommunicated by their families until they were forced to leave.

Against this external branding of Arab Masons as pro-Zionists, it may not be surprising that in one of the rare occasions that an Arab interviewee conveyed an ideological stand he expressed an explicit non-Zionist, or rather anti-Zionist position:

If you're asking whether it's changed my view of Zionism, then it hasn't, because I'm anti-Zionist, what can I do. So it hasn't changed that. I don't reject Jews for being Jews: the fact is that I sit here and talk to people whom I call brothers, even though I have nothing in common with them; [all] we have in common is our humanity, period.

Whereas the position of Arab members to Zionism was for the most part evasive or ambivalent, Jewish members displayed strong identification with the Zionist ethos and ideology. However, unlike their explicit discussion of loyalty to the state their national attachment was never actually stated as such but rather taken for granted. It could be inferred not so much from

interview material as from attending to members' interactions in everyday life and during lodge work.

The following anecdote described to me in passing by Urim's president as we were on our way to a lodge meeting illustrates the passion that some members evidently felt for the Zionist project of nation-building. He described how he and his wife had watched all nineteen chapters of *The Pillar of Fire*, a celebrated documentary television series on the history of Zionism, and then remarked: "I think it's a masterpiece, a must-see at every home. And we made it a habit to watch the chapters in order, on the appropriate days of the year: the chapter [about the Holocaust] on Holocaust Memorial Day, the chapter about the declaration of independence on Independence Day. That chapter in particular reduces me to tears."

Interestingly, Zionist attachments may partly carry over to Masonic rituals. The lodge president regularly held a sermon during lodge work sessions. On one occasion he opened the sermon by paraphrasing American President John F. Kennedy's famous dictum, declaring that lodge members should ask "not what Freemasonry in Israel can do for us, but what we can do for Freemasonry in Israel." To shed light on this question, the president of Urim brought up a current issue, that of military service dodgers, which had just been at the center of public debate after celebrity singers in a reality TV show were discovered to have evaded military service.

An animated discussion began among the lodge members about the great importance of reserve military service. One member noted that there were other groups who disobeyed military orders, recalling an event from earlier that day in which religious Jewish soldiers refused to participate in the forced eviction of two Jewish families who had settled in a house under dispute in the West Bank city of Hebron. He hedged his remarks, though, by saying he would not want to comment on a political issue. A younger member standing next to me muttered that the matter was indeed political; the association of these soldiers with military dodgers apparently agitated him.

A few days later Yoav called me on the phone to exchange views on the event. He was surprised that so many at the lodge rallied to speak against military dodgers. Current affairs had been discussed before in the lodge, he said, but never controversial political issues. He mentioned how on another occasion the lodge president incorporated into the "Chain of Brothers" ritual that closes each lodge work,⁵⁶ a special plea for the return of Israeli soldiers taken captive in 2006 in

⁵⁶ During the "Chain of Brothers" ritual, lodge participants gather in a circle, interlace their hands and the lodge president gives a brief address related to the worldwide Masonic chain of fraternity.

Lebanon and in the Gaza strip, a gesture that did not raise any reservations. In light of these incidents, we both wondered whether addressing captive soldiers during an official Masonic ceremony was not on a continuum with debating military service during lodge work. Weren't all of these issues eventually political? I tried to imagine how Rafiq, the new Arab member to join Urim who happened to be absent that day, would have felt during the military debate.

The discourse concerning military service in the Israeli-Zionist context is framed as a symbolic practice of contribution to the common good and is thereby civilianized, detached from its association with an organization that ultimately employs violence. The term "dodgers" runs the gamut from conscientious objectors to individuals discharged from service for personal difficulties and deliberate draft evaders who fake mental problems, to ultra-Orthodox Jews exempted from service through legal and administrative arrangements.⁵⁷ It does not, however, normally extend to Arab citizens, who like ultra-Orthodox Jews are officially exempted from the military. Thus, though formulated in civic terms, this discourse masks an underlying nationalist logic that excludes groups of citizens who are not part of the Jewish nation.

This example illustrates the subtleties of Zionist attachment among local Jewish Masons, an attachment which is framed in terms of citizenship but in fact rests upon a national ideology. Members' accounts alternated between mentions of the official Masonic prohibition on political debates, declared loyalty to the state, and unstated identification with the Israeli-Zionist nation. The mediating category between these positions was citizenship, associated with active contribution to the common good but addressed less in terms of universal values of humanity writ large and more in conjunction with the Zionist ethos, as in the controversy over (Jewish) military service and the noncontroversial identification with Israeli soldiers missing in action.⁵⁸ The national undercurrents of citizenship were often taken for granted, masked as unproblematic precisely by their alleged differentiation from the explicit political controversies of Israeli society.

CONCLUSION

⁵⁷ Oren Livio, "Avoidance of Military Service in Israel: Exploring the Role of Discourse," *Israel Studies Review*, Vol. 27 (2012), pp. 78-97.

⁵⁸ Public identification with captive and missing soldiers has become a central vehicle for mobilizing national solidarity in Israeli society. See Danny Kaplan, "Commemorating a 'suspended death': Missing soldiers and national solidarity in Israel," *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 35 (2008), pp. 413-27.

This study of Freemasonry from Late Ottoman and Mandate-era Palestine to contemporary Israel illustrates how the universal model of a worldwide fraternal order is adapted locally. I examined the standpoints of local Jewish and Arab members as they wrestled with questions of fraternity, citizenship, loyalty to the state and national attachments. Against the backdrop of significant organizational and demographic changes in local Freemasonry it seems that member's individual motivations for pursuing Masonic social networks remained stable over the years. In addition, both past and contemporary Jewish and Arabs members shared Masonic values of fraternity associated with (Western) liberalism, humanitarianism, and upper middle-class civility.

These universal values, however, were systematically reinterpreted by members and translated into various particularist preferences, which in turn can be mapped onto local divides and dichotomies: Jewish versus Arab ethnic-religious identities, European versus 'indigenous' mentalities, rivalries between British and French Masonic international systems, and, ultimately, identification with Israel as a Jewish-Zionist nation-state or, alternatively, a civil society.

First, already during the late Ottoman period, only a few years after the earliest lodges formed in Palestine, the different social backgrounds and agendas of Jewish-Zionist versus Arab-Palestinian members led to disagreements and divisions. Particularist preferences formed primarily around European descent or lack thereof, and to a lesser degree around Arab versus Jewish primordial ethnic-religious identities.

Second, during the British Mandate era, new lodges attracting both Jewish and Arab membership flourished under the charter of diverse foreign European obediences. The attempt to establish a national umbrella organization was only partly successful, given its rejection by lodges operating according to the British "regular" system of Freemasonry. Brief anecdotal evidence suggests that some lodges sustained strong social ties between Jewish and Arab Masons during the early Mandate period,⁵⁹ but further study is required in order to make sense of members' variable civic and national identifications at the time.

Finally, contemporary Masons operating within the Israeli state reveal complex associations between universalist and particularist preferences. Whereas Arab members stressed fraternal values, they only rarely and elusively mentioned national attachments. Accounts by Jewish members emphasized how Masonic practices of fraternity overcame the national cleavage. At the same time, they took for granted the Zionist-national undercurrents of their stated loyalty to the

⁵⁹ Kark and Joseph, "The Valero Family."

State of Israel, such as the consecration of military service. In part, depoliticized Zionist values carried over to Masonic rituals but went unnoticed precisely because members were preoccupied with the prevention of explicit political involvement

As local Freemasonry transformed from individual lodges under colonial-like obediences to the Grand Lodge of the State of Israel, one may be tempted to chart a linear historical transformation from a universalist-civic to a particularist-national mode of identification. This, however, may be misleading. Already in the first breach in a mixed Arab-Jewish lodge in the early 20th century both sides held to particularist preferences but rationalized them on moral grounds of enlightened universal civility. Members' collective attachments may have less to do with the organization's internal restructuring as with their preconceived (and often unacknowledged) political-ideological views.

At the same time, by cooperating jointly in an organization that practiced a civic-democratic political vocabulary and nurtured fraternal links between the two communities, local members were able, not to resolve their various particularist preferences and tensions, but nevertheless to contain them within Masonic ties of sociability. The resultant model of solidarity represents a pragmatic attempt to incorporate both civic and national preferences within Masonic practice.