Age of Innocence

The Symbolic Child and Political Conflict
on American Holy Land Pilgrimage

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ABSTRACT: The link between US evangelicalism, Zionism, and Middle East policy is well documented, as is its refraction through Christian tourism/pilgrimage in Israel-Palestine. However, the scholarly focus on political Zionism oversimplifies how American Christian pilgrims, mostly older women, actually construe the experience: they see contemporary politics as unrelated, and even antithetical, to the trip's spiritual goals. Building on Liisa Malkki's notion of 'tranquilizing' symbols, this article shows how pilgrims draw on broadly moral cultural tropes to quell political discussions, while still speaking in a moral register about Israelis and Palestinians. It explores how one especially powerful trope—the 'symbolic child'—is deployed during the trip. Tracing this image historically and ethnographically, I argue that pilgrims ground their reactions to Israeli-Palestinian conflict in symbolism with deep resonance for American women, which also speaks to how they engage in politics at home.

KEYWORDS: Holy Land, innocence, Israel, Palestine, pilgrimage, politics, symbolic child

> For children are at our core—not only as vulnerable beings in need of love and care but as a moral touchstone amidst the complexity and contentiousness of modern life. Just as it takes a village to raise a child, it takes children to raise up a village to become all it should be.
>
> — Hillary Clinton, *It Takes a Village: And Other Lessons Children Teach Us*

> If you could just get all the little children, the ones young enough that they haven't learned to hate one another, and you put them in a room, then they would all play together. That's what needs to happen to solve this mess. We just need to get out and let the children solve it.
>
> — Elaine, age 66, Catholic pilgrim, 2009

Since the 1820s, millions of American Christians have traveled to the Holy Land to visit the sites where Jesus lived and died. Following World War II, group trips became broadly affordable and a more accepted form of religious leisure (Kaell 2014: 5–10). While tourist traffic increased, forms of globalized technology—television and then the Internet—also introduced Americans to a spate of new Holy Land images. Especially since the late 1960s, the US media has reflected

and amplified the impact of events such as Israel's wars with its Arab neighbors, the post-1967 rise of a Palestinian movement, and the failed Oslo Accords. As a result, to varying degrees all contemporary American pilgrims hold cherished biblical images in tension with the knowledge that Holy Land people—Israelis and Palestinians—are in dispute over the land and its resources. This article explores how pilgrims encounter Israeli-Palestinian politics and interpret violence (or the threat of violence) in the place they associate with Jesus, the Prince of Peace. How do these realities correspond to, and impinge upon, their spiritual goals? I approach this question by foregrounding the 'symbolic child', a discursive tool that is popular on contemporary American trips. Doing so sheds light on this particular trope while also addressing a number of gaps in the scholarly literature.

American Christian engagement with Israeli-Palestinian politics is well-trodden ground. Shelves of books are devoted to the topic, often including some discussion of religious tourism (Chafets 2008; Clark 2007; Cohn-Sherbok 2006; Falk 2006; Merkley 2001; Sizer 2005; Spector 2009; Weber 2004). Scholars have ably demonstrated the political impact of tourism in the region, documenting how Israeli guides and American pastors/tour leaders articulate shared ideologies (Bajc 2007; Belhassen et al. 2008; Feldman 2007, 2011; Shapiro 2008; Stein 2007) and sometimes lambasting both for misrepresenting political realities (Bowman 1992). To a lesser extent, scholars have also examined 'Living Stones' tours, which are intended to inculcate pro-Palestinian sentiment (Belhassen and Ebel 2009; Clarke 2000; Feldman 2011; Sizer 2005). Overwhelmingly, these studies—indeed, nearly all studies of American Christians and Israel—focus on examples of and responses to evangelical Christian Zionism, a pro-Israel theological and political ideology (Belhassen 2009; Bowman 1991; for a European example, see Coleman 2004).

Although most scholars emphasize the shared Zionism of pastor-leaders and Israeli guides, at least one study has noted the latter's frustration: pilgrims are seen as "not interested" and too "uneducated" to understand the intricacies of Holy Land politics (Collins-Kreiner et al. 2006: 74–75). In other words, although the satisfactory co-creation of Zionist or anti-Zionist ideology may occur at the tour leadership level, this often differs significantly from the pilgrims' own responses and level of interest. Importantly, participants differ demographically from the clergy who lead them: most pilgrims are older, lay, and female. Very few can be easily classed as either Christian Zionists or Living Stones (Feldman 2011).

A major result of the current focus on pastors, guides, and exceptional lay individuals (Shapiro 2008: 309) is the faulty impression that pilgrims parrot what their Zionist leaders tell them (Bowman 1992) and/or that they espouse a coherent theology. For Christian Zionists, this theology is apocalyptic 'end times' prophecy and philo-Semitic interpretations of biblical passages promising that God will "bless those that bless Israel" (Genesis 12:3). Living Stones proponents espouse a 'liberation theology' focused on social justice, Palestinian suffering, and a muted supersessionism. While the importance of these ideas is not to be downplayed, they are only one narrative among many that color a pilgrim's outlook, which is a bricolage of religious and cultural-moral tropes. In this case, childhood innocence, associated with being 'good' and making 'progress', is a construct so pervasive in the West as to constitute an effectively unassailable truth. It is, as anthropologist Liisa Malkki (2010: 72) argues, a "tranquilizing dynamic" in global politics as well, a tool to depoliticize fraught political contexts.

This article parses three overlapping representations of the child on Holy Land trips: the child as the embodiment of innocence, as the harbinger of political hope and progress, and as the brutalized victim. It then examines more closely why these images appeal to pilgrims at particular moments. In so doing, it aims, first, to move away from the focus on Christian Zionism and pastor-guide relationships that has thus far dominated the scholarship about American Christian tours. Second, while acknowledging the importance of theology, it expands the

discussion of pilgrims' 'religious' worldviews to include broadly moral cultural tropes. And last, it utilizes an interdisciplinary framework, drawn especially from American studies, to interpret ethnographic data, thereby clarifying how pilgrims' discursive strategies parallel those they use at home.

Methodology and Background

Writing about politics in Israel-Palestine can be fraught with difficulty, whether or not one intends to be polemical. It should be clarified from the outset that this article is not about Israeli-Palestinian politics per se; it is about how American pilgrims understand such politics. I examine this particular perspective without "denying the existing power asymmetries between different subject positions or the political interests that are at stake" (Schramm 2011: 5). However, given my focus, I have tried to use pilgrims' own terminology. Thus, I use 'Holy Land' to refer to the Christian sites in the State of Israel and under the Palestinian Authority in the Occupied Territories.[1] I should also note that pilgrims' interaction with politics resembles what anthropologist Glenn Bowman (1991: 121) concludes regarding religious beliefs: visitors reaffirm what they know, rather than acquiring entirely new perspectives.

My conclusions below draw on research conducted between 2007 and 2012, including pre- and post-trip conversational interviews with 131 pilgrims in seven primary groups (four evangelical and three Catholic), as well as participant observation with two groups in the Holy Land in 2009. I focus on Catholics and evangelical Protestants since they form the bulk of the industry's American clientele: Catholics comprise about 30 percent of the US market and evangelicals 60 percent (Israel Ministry of Tourism 2011: 32). Although there are notable political and theological differences between Catholics and evangelicals—there is a larger, more vocal pro-Palestinian minority among Catholics, for example (Lux 2010; O'Mahony 2005)—they share comparable views on childhood, which is the primary focus here.[2]

A standard American Holy Land pilgrimage lasts 10 to 12 days, costs $2,500 to $5,000, and is undertaken by bus, usually led by an Israeli guide and a US pastor or priest. Pilgrims range widely in terms of race, class, denomination, and geographic region but are more homogeneous in gender and age. Like Elaine quoted in the epigraph, more than 70 percent of American pilgrims are women between the ages of 55 and 75 (Collins-Kreiner et al. 2006: 47; Kaell 2014: 7). The rest of the group usually consists of slightly older or younger women, husbands, and grown-up children accompanying their mothers.[3] As is typical in a packaged tour, encounters with locals are tightly controlled and mostly limited to professionals: guides, drivers, site hosts, souvenir sellers, hotel receptionists, and waiters. Local children are 'not in the picture', that is, not part of the performances arranged for visitors, and thus pilgrims rarely train their cameras on them or speak to them directly (Bruner 2005: 62–65; Urry 2002: 145).

Despite a sustained interest in 'guest-host' encounters, tourism studies literature has rarely examined the role of children (V. Smith 1977: 11). More recently, however, academic and media interest in the 'child at risk' (Stephens 1995) has produced some discussion about tourism's negative impact on young people forced into prostitution or begging (e.g., Smith and Brent 2001: 187–200). In pilgrimage studies, children are no better represented since local shrine custodians are assumed to be adults (Eade and Sallnow 1991). An exception is the work on Catholic Marian apparition sites, where children are often the primary visionaries. This literature offers some groundwork for thinking about how the child plays a key symbolic role at prominent pilgrimage sites (see, e.g., Christian 1996; Zimdars-Swartz 1991). While it is a useful starting point, I base the discussion here on the scholarship in childhood studies, a loose interdisciplinary field

that tracks, among other things, cultural representations of the child. Two bodies of work are especially pertinent: the subset of anthropology that examines how the symbolic child factors into international development work (Bornstein 2001, 2005; Malkki 1996; Stephens 1995) and the American studies literature that develops this discussion in terms of US history and politics.

The Child as Innocence

In the epigraph, Elaine responds to the Holy Land's political "mess" with a utopian vision of Israeli and Palestinian children playing together. Her image relies on two interrelated assumptions at the core of Western Christian representations of the child since the nineteenth century: first, that children are naturally innocent, moral creatures and, second, that if sheltered from adult corruption—Elaine pictures them sequestered in a room—they will stay that way (Cunningham 2006: 130; Jenkins 1998: 18–19; Sánchez-Eppler 2005: xviv). This assumes a rigid boundary between worldly pursuits, which can result in sin, and a cordoned-off moral sphere. Although scholars of religion have sought to complicate these distinctions (see, e.g., Hall 1997), pilgrims continue to assert their relevance. These ideas, and how they pertain to children, have deep roots in Euro-American history.

Medieval Western Europeans believed that children, tainted by original sin, were half-wild humans-in-the-making. This notion began to change in the late seventeenth century, driven by John Locke's popular child-rearing philosophy. Eschewing the notion of original sin, Locke instead conceived of the child as a *tabula rasa* needing early discipline to prevent corruption. Over the next century, this idea gained prominence in America. Mid-eighteenth-century minister Jonathan Edwards's famous comparison of children to corrupt 'young vipers' had fallen so out of vogue a generation after his death that his followers quietly expunged it from his published works (Brekus 2003). In the same early-nineteenth-century period, Americans encountered Romantic philosophy. This intellectual current not only rejected original sin, but described children as 'naturally' good if allowed to develop freely (Higonnet 1998: 8–10; Holland 2004: 8–9). The link between childhood, innocence, and nature was superimposed upon the young nation itself, in contradistinction to the corrupt Old World (Rawlins 2002).

As rapid industrialization and urbanization progressed, however, the nineteenth-century child also began to symbolize the potential breakdown of the white Anglo-American ideal, evident in the increasing numbers of poor, immigrant children who populated city centers. Called 'street Arabs' in the US and the UK—a name not incidental here—these 'idle' and 'disorderly' children were feared, both as criminals and as future threats to the democratic experiment (Marshall 2008: 369; Mintz 2004; Rawlins 2002: 99; L. Smith 1996). Urban poverty mobilized an army of middle-class Protestant reformers, whom historians call 'child savers'. These men and women envisioned the ideal child as the protected center of a nuclear family, as well as the key to national progress. In order to save innocents from exposure to sin, at times they took part in 'philanthropic abduction': removing children from what was thought to be sinful environments and sending them to Anglo-Protestant foster homes, orphanages, or farms (Cunningham 2006: 167; Mintz 2004: 155–156). By the early twentieth century, American child savers had successfully laid the groundwork for universal schooling (largely in order to encourage rapid assimilation) and a ban on child labor, which they now looked on as exploitation (Fass 2008: 35; Zelizer 1994).

Based on these campaigns, the US government created charity food programs during World War I for European children behind enemy lines. The US media portrayed the children as 'adopted' by American charity, unconnected to their parents and thus to the politics of war (Marshall 2008: 358). By the 1950s, missionary and development organizations ran highly organized

child sponsorship programs along the same lines: Westerners sent monthly donations to aid a child in the poor world. As anthropologist Erica Bornstein (2001) argues, these programs have perpetuated the concept of Westerners as the adoptive parents of foreign children, who are pictured as separated from their kin. Sponsorship remains popular today, and many Holy Land pilgrims have participated through Christian organizations such as World Vision (evangelical) or the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging (Catholic).[4] These trends bear directly on how pilgrims frame ideal childhood—as the embodiment of innocence and also as unconnected to the corrupting influence of economic function, political position, and even kinship ties. In Elaine's vision, idealized children are shorn of cultural, linguistic, and religious differences. They are part of a generic human family—"the world's children" (Stephens 1995: 8)—and as such break the cycle of conflict.

To give a sense of how these ideas operate at particular moments on the pilgrimage, let us turn to Cynthia, a 65-year-old Catholic from Boston. Since hearing a 2001 talk by Drew Christiansen, then the editor of the Jesuit magazine *America*, she has had a deep desire to help the Holy Land Arab-Christian population, adversely affected by emigration due to economic and political hardship (e.g., Christiansen 2000).[5] Cynthia felt moved to start a parish prayer group in order to pray for Holy Land Christians and for Catholic-Muslim understanding. In 2009, looking for ways to "make a difference" and "jumpstart" a new phase in the prayer group, as she put it, she contacted the US-based (Catholic) Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) and set up a 'sister parish' partnership with Palestinians. She and six members of her prayer group then came on a Holy Land trip that I followed in 2009.

Toward the beginning of our pilgrimage, Cynthia convinced the group to detour in order to visit the Arab-Christian village of Taybeh, a community of 1,300 inhabitants that promotes itself as a tour stop for (mainly) Catholic groups. One of its attractions is its children's peace choir; indeed, Cynthia had heard of the village because of its inclusion on *D'une seule voix*, an Ad Vitam Records compilation of Israeli and Palestinian children's choirs released in 2004 and advertised as the "CD of peace."[6] She played the Taybeh choir's tracks a number of times over the bus loudspeakers as she introduced its Arabic songs and Latin hymns with an emotional plea: "I just want you to really listen to this. You won't understand the words, but the first time I heard it, really, I started crying. The [children's] voices are so pure and the message is beautiful." After listening, we voted on whether to visit the village. Moved by the Taybeh children framed as symbols of peace, our group decided that it was indeed worth a detour.

When we arrived, we were welcomed by the parish priest, who also organizes tour activities. We saw a model of a historical home, had a snack, and visited the souvenir shops. The priest told us about village peace initiatives, most often highlighting those focused on children's education or health. When he described the new school project, stating, "We have [Christian and Muslim children] in school together so they will learn to live together," the pilgrims burst into applause. On our visit we did not meet any actual Taybeh children, despite their crucial role in drawing us there and framing our encounter. This absence did not elicit comment from the pilgrims, for whom the symbolic child was both familiar and sufficient.

Not all Holy Land hosts are as adept at mobilizing idealized children as the Taybeh priest. Later during that trip, Cynthia and her group visited their new sister parish in Nablus. They explained to the priest that they wanted to donate money in order to help the children. They also hoped to exchange letters and possibly bring the children, at some future date, to be educated in the US. Essentially, the Americans pictured the partnership as a child sponsorship program, similar to those with which they were already familiar. The priest accepted their money but would not guarantee that it would go toward the children. Nor would he agree to have the children write letters or, presumably, travel to the US. Disappointed and offended by his aggressive

manner, Cynthia and her group asked the HCEF to find a new partner parish. A second visit took place a week later in Bethlehem, and this time it was a huge success. They got along well with the young parish priest, who understood exactly how the pilgrims wanted the partnership to run. He was, Cynthia told me, an affable young American.

The Child as Hope and Progress

For Cynthia and her group, donations that benefit children plant the seeds for future change, and thus they balked when the Nablus priest suggested that the money would be equally well-spent on programs for others, perhaps middle-aged men or workers. Americans typically laud 'progress', meaning that they are optimistic that old ways can be improved and replaced by newer ideas and innovations. Since the nineteenth century, this notion has been bound up in the idea of youth—both young people and the young nation (Levander 2006: 2). In Christian theology, of course, the Christ Child is the ultimate sign of hope for the world in its progress toward the ideal of universal salvation.

It is no surprise, then, that the child as a metonym for progress and hope is a staple in American politics (Levander and Singley 2003: 4–5; Montgomery 2009: 208; Sánchez-Eppler 2005: xviii). Today, this symbolism is so deeply entrenched as to span otherwise acrimonious political splits between conservatives and liberals. Although their child-saving platforms differ—with Democrats focusing on social programs and Republicans on traditional gender roles—both parties regularly harness the image of the child as the key to future progress (Jenkins 1998; Mintz 2004). In the epigraph at the beginning of this article from her bestseller, *It Takes a Village*, Hillary Clinton (1996: 336) employs this moral rhetoric: the child will "raise up" the nation "to become all it should be."

The fact that children are the focus of Clinton's book also speaks to how the child is a political tool mobilized especially by female politicians and aimed at female voters, a pattern that dates back to American women's first forays into politics. Mid-nineteenth-century domesticity enshrined the mother as the moral caretaker of children, the future citizens of the nation. On these grounds, suffragettes fought for their right to vote and abolitionists induced women to support their cause. Scholars argue that whereas in Britain and Germany social welfare focused on the worker and his needs, in the US it centered on the mother and the child whom she protected (Fass 2008: 37; Rodgers 1998; Skocpol 1992). Later, during the civil rights movement and the Cold War, children were routinely described as the vulnerable, moral center of America (Marshall 2008: 359).

Thus, American pilgrims, women especially, reflexively draw on the symbolic child as an accepted way to frame hope for political progress. Loretta, a 63-year-old African-American Methodist, provides an example. We sat together toward the back of the bus as our group drove through the Golan Heights. The guide had unfurled a map and was pointing out where military skirmishes had occurred. He described water shortages and dam construction. He pointed out the Israeli bunkers and rusting Syrian tanks on a bluff above the road. Clearly, this part of the tour was not a highlight for most members of our group, who later described it as "just political," unrelated to the spiritual uplift they expect in the Holy Land. As we sat together, Loretta followed the guide's gestures but admitted that she could not hear him well, nor did she understand most of the details. When I asked her what she thought, she responded: "I just feel for the children. They're lambs of God … I don't mean to sound naive, but I really do believe that once we [black and white American] kids played together and went to school together, we changed things. [The South] is really unrecognizable. Like a miracle."

Loretta's multi-layered and deeply personal response to the guide's speech was probably not what he intended to elicit. She begins with the Christian image of *Agnus Dei*, "the Lamb of God" (John 1:29). In its biblical context, the 'lamb' refers to Jesus as redemptive sacrifice, but here Loretta draws on a usage common in Western Christianity, which focuses on the innocence and purity of Jesus echoed in children today. At her home in South Carolina, which I visited after the trip, Loretta's walls are decorated with a number of religious images, including mass-produced artwork depicting Jesus tenderly holding a lamb or being surrounded by children, illustrating Christ blessing the children (Matthew 19:13–15). These modern reproductions harken back to enormously popular Victorian images in Bibles, greeting cards, and parlor prints, which show children grouped around Jesus while dressed in romanticized biblical robes or exotic 'native' garb representing the nations of the world (McDannell 1995: 40, 240; Prothero 2003: 61). Although comparable twentieth-century images have received less scholarly attention, they continue to be bought, displayed, mailed, and e-mailed, especially by women. One picture on Loretta's wall is typical and also distinctly post-1970s. Jesus is portrayed smiling down at a group of carefully groomed, American, and multi-racial children—the US ideal personified.

For Loretta, this imagery speaks to the transformative power of children in the segregated South. Most American pilgrims lived through the civil rights era and are familiar with commonly reproduced photographs of school desegregation battles and of children marching in the South (Jenkins 1998). Widely circulated was the iconic image of six-year-old Ruby Bridges, an African-American girl escorted to school by white officers, as well as photographs of black and white children learning or playing together, symbols of a post-segregation future (Goldin 1998). Adults are often absent in these images; Norman Rockwell's famous rendering of Bridges shows the girl without her parents, surrounded only by police officers' legs (see also Liptak 2006).

When Loretta recalls the civil rights era, desegregation seems driven by her generation, the idealized children who played together. In fact, it is unlikely that Loretta spent much (or any) time playing with white children. She grew up in a poor black neighborhood and dropped out of high school in order to support her mother and younger siblings. At other moments, she spoke in great detail about her life in this period. However, in this case she was intent on framing hope, not describing her personal experience, and thus she focused on the idealized images of black and white children that so shocked and inspired a nation mired in racial hatred. In her framing, Loretta drew on a classic American notion—that the morally corrupt society gives way, through the actions of the young, to a progressively better one (Smith and Denton 2005). Yet Loretta did not minimize the extent of the transition. Indeed, she described breaking down segregation as a "miracle," implying the need for God's help. Children were not only the lambs of God, but his instruments on earth.

When pilgrims like Loretta respond to Israeli-Palestinian politics by describing how "we Americans" progressed, there is an implied (although often unintended) critique of Holy Land adults.[7] Jean, a 71-year-old Methodist from Colorado, described how, as her group drove through Jerusalem, the guide asked them to promote peace in the Holy Land because the children "deserve it." Ruminating on this seemingly innocuous comment, Jean responded: "There's a problem there. They segregate themselves in Jerusalem. The Armenians, Muslims, Jews—they don't live in the same neighborhoods. They want *us* to promote peace, and *they* aren't even trying." Americans, like other Westerners, favor metaphors of breaking new ground over 'going in circles', which can be interpreted as a sign of a fundamental character flaw (Frey 2004: 96). Jean implies as much, critiquing Holy Land parents for being seemingly unwilling or unable to assume responsibility for their children's futures—despite the fact that it is a parent's moral imperative to do so (Higonnet 1998: 118–120; Holland 2004: 148–152; Ross 2003: 62). Instead, Holy Land adults, stuck in repeated cycles of violence, prefer to foist their burden onto American shoulders.

In this vein, female pilgrims are particularly apt to problematize guides' statements about politics that incorporate references to their own children and grandchildren. On the evangelical trip that I followed, our Jewish guide described how his grandsons had fled bombings multiple times and will be proud to serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) when they come of age. He meant to underline Israelis' strength in adversity, but Dorothy, a 70-year-old North Carolina Baptist, was troubled. She was one of the rare pilgrims who self-identified as a Christian Zionist. She was staunchly pro-Israel and pro-America. However, her own 17-year-old grandson, Jim, was thinking about joining the US Army. Dorothy's Holy Land prayers were focused on this decision, asking God to direct him on a different path. "He's my first grandbaby," she said. "The army really messes you up. He's too young to understand that." With this in mind, Dorothy reflected on the guide's comments: "I can understand how he loves [Israel] and is really proud of it. But then you have to ask, 'OK, so you want your family to suffer? Even the babies?' You have to ask that." She left the question hanging. When pilgrims like Loretta, Jean, and Dorothy draw implicit (and sometimes explicit) comparisons between 'us' and 'them', Israeli and Palestinian parents can seem bewilderingly desensitized to their own children's suffering, unwilling to end the cycles of violence that inhibit progress and jeopardize the innocent.

The Child at Risk, the Child as a Risk

The brutalized child victim became a staple image in US media in the 1970s, a decade characterized by political pessimism, economic recession, and mounting conservatism. The foreign child victim was used to build support for war or to rally against it, while starving or abused children were depicted as a shock tactic by charities to elicit donations (James and Prout 1990: 2; Jenkins 1998: 31). Closer to our particular concern here, Americans were introduced to images of Arab/Palestinian violence, including child and teenage rock throwers targeting civilians and even tourists (McAlister 2001: 178–192; Shaheen 1989). During the First Intifada (1987–1993), these same boys were often recontextualized as victims. US media showed young Palestinians beaten by Israeli soldiers, images that Palestinian leaders hoped would shift the political tide in their favor (e.g., D'Amato 1991; Daniel 1995). Whereas before the Intifada Americans cast Israel as biblical David against the Arab world's Goliath, in the late 1980s this characterization found its "ironic double" (Daniel 1995: 68) in the pro-Palestinian movement, which cast Palestinians as children with stones against the powerful IDF.

Contemporary pilgrims know these images well and refer to them, especially if they seek to identify clear victims and perpetrators. Guides and American pilgrims who sympathize with Israel most often describe its children as healthy and strong, going to school, or involved in organized activities. These children embody the well-functioning, democratic state that looks after its own, an image with strong appeal for Americans. Pro-Palestinian pilgrims and their guides also use children as a metonym for the state. In this case, the children are portrayed as broken, victimized, and deserving of protection and sympathy. Thus, on the tours I followed, it was most often Palestinian children who were described as moral victims.[8]

Father Mike, the leader on the Catholic trip I accompanied, used this framing device to tell a story on our last night in the Holy Land. He described how, years before, he met a Palestinian woman who had lost her "beautiful child" when he was shot by Israelis. He paused before the punch line: the Israelis were using *American* bullets. He followed with a call to empathize with Palestinians who still face violence, notably when crossing Israeli checkpoints: "Now you've been here, you've seen it. When you went through the checkpoints [at Bethlehem], you saw someone come on there with a machine gun and look at you like a criminal and … they're treating you like

there's something wrong with you" (see also Feldman 2011). As he described the Arab child shot to death, Father Mike mentioned his age: 22. Scholars note that although legally a child refers to an individual under 18, in reality 'child' is a flexible descriptor. When someone is described as 'the child of', it implies support and care, regardless of calendar age (Montgomery 2009: 53, 55; Sánchez-Eppler 2005: xxi). In this case, Mike not only identified the Palestinian as the child of the woman to whom he spoke but also used the young man's age to emphasize his status as pure victim. The mother in the story remains child-like as well since she too is a victim—unable to change her circumstances, other than to bear witness to the American in the story, Father Mike himself.

The person intimidating us with a machine gun at the Bethlehem checkpoint, whom Mike asked us to recall, was an Israeli soldier. Clearly, he was not construed as a child by Father Mike, yet he was likely younger than the Palestinian victim in calendar years, as Israel's compulsory military service runs from age 18 to 21. At the checkpoint I had jotted in my notes that the soldier was "a red-headed kid—looks about 14." For Father Mike and the members of Cynthia's group, however, the Israeli qua soldier offered proof of what they already believed: Palestinians are victims, and Israelis are aggressors. Although most other members of our group did not feel as strongly, the soldier's employment as the perpetrator of organized violence—or, at the very least, of governmental bureaucracy—made him seem like an adult, regardless of age. Moreover, implicit in Mike's checkpoint story was our own role as naive innocents and victims of intimidation. In this context, the other player, the soldier, could not easily be construed as a child.

Of course, neither the Palestinian victim nor the Israeli soldier was legally a child. During tours, the few interactions between pilgrims and actual Holy Land children take place most often with Palestinian souvenir vendors in Bethlehem or Nazareth. Boys, usually aged 10 to 18, sell wares on the streets, sometimes approaching tourists quite aggressively and certainly in a manner that is foreign to Americans. Claire, an evangelical participant on a 2007 Crystal Cathedral trip, described how, when they were in Bethlehem, a group of young vendors banged on the bus windows, selling trinkets: "Most people on the bus were American church ladies in their 80s … [who] said, 'Young boys came up to the windows of the bus! I felt so threatened!' One even said to me, '[A boy] almost touched me!' even though a window was separating them. I expected a lot of prayer for world peace—but there was little to none of that … It was just: 'I'm an American.' She didn't think about her faith in relation to that little boy." Claire, who accompanied her parents on the trip, was atypical in a number of ways: she is half Arab-American, in her late 20s, and holds a college degree. She was critical of the older women on her bus and recounted this story because the supposed aggressors were in fact children whom she, like Father Mike, construes as victims.

The "church ladies" she describes clearly associate the trinket sellers with another, very different image: the unnatural, violent child. The vendors bring to mind the menace of loitering, uncontrollable street Arabs and, more pointedly in this context, the specter of rock-throwing Palestinian boys. Further, as with the young Israeli soldier, Americans find it difficult to classify the vendors because of their manner and type of employment, which seems betwixt and between childhood and adulthood. The pilgrims are used to American teenagers working part-time jobs, of course, but the street vendors are fast-talking, multi-lingual professionals who seem to work outside the sanctioned bounds of a visible adult-run establishment (Orellana 2009; Zelizer 1994). Yet at the same time, the loud calls and gestures bespeak an unnatural and potentially dangerous child. The result is that pilgrims are often overwhelmed and unable to distinguish between children *at* risk and children *as* risks (Stephens 1995).

Encounters like the one Claire describes are heightened because they disrupt the usual quality of experience during tour bus travel. As per sociologist John Urry (2000: 62–63, 191), modern tour buses create a form of 'mobile privatization', the sensation of being in a sealed, safe place—a

'home away from home'—as the vehicle moves through strange environments. Normally, local people are visible but largely separate, mediated through panes of glass. Thus, Michel de Certeau ([1984] 2011: 112) characterized vehicle travel as the "dispossession of the hand" in favor of the eye, that is, "the more you see, the less you hold." This separation is shattered, for a moment at least, when Palestinian vendors thrust their necklace- and scarf-laden arms through the windows or put their hands up to the panes of glass.

Tour guides often fuel pilgrims' sense of unease and fear. Palestinian guides in Bethlehem and most Israeli guides (who wait for the group's return on the other side of the 'security' wall) receive commissions from store owners, so it is in their best interests to minimize street purchases. Thus, guides exacerbate group members' fear by warning them to avoid child vendors, implying that the street is an unnatural place for children, who should be at home or in school. Although it is much less frequent, some guides employ a counter-narrative in order to inculcate pro-Palestinian sentiment. Yusuf, an Arab-Israeli guide, conflated the young trinket sellers with deserving child beggars. "You see," he told us, gesturing at the vendors' outstretched arms laden with necklaces for sale, "these children must beg to make two shekels to feed their family. Israeli children do not even accept two shekels from their parents—to do what? Buy one Coke?" Here the Israeli child becomes unnatural, so spoiled as to invert the laws of adult-child protection: he needs nothing and accepts nothing from his parents, a rhetorical stand-in for the American charity giver.

Tranquilizing Anxiety on Contemporary Pilgrimage

The period since the 1970s has been characterized by increased mobility of people, capital, and ideas—'global flows', as Arjun Appadurai (1996) puts it (see also David Harvey in Stephens 1995: 3–9, 20). Scholars of American religion and politics have shown how globalization and the Internet have led to dramatic changes in the ways that religious individuals and groups access information, make linkages, and learn about the world (e.g., Griffith and McAlister 2008: 14–16). As mentioned above, of particular import here is the seemingly interminable supply of conflict images and information about Israeli-Palestinian politics aimed at the US audience (Collins-Kreiner et al. 2006: 20, 32). In addition, overseas travel has become more common for all classes of people (e.g., Urry 2002). Many pilgrims who would not have taken such a trip a generation earlier—single women or working-class or lower-middle-class people—can now do so, enabled by low airfares and emboldened by the idea that anyone can go abroad.

This transnational intercourse, both informational and physical, has led to heightened anxiety about the role of Israeli-Palestinian politics during Christian pilgrimage—a concern that is more intractable than fears about terrorism or security during the trip. What I refer to is pilgrims' growing awareness of the widening gap between the information they could know and have access to and their actual level of knowledge and interest. This observation dovetails with a notion that is foundational to the anthropological study of global childhood. With increased access to information, affluent Westerners have become aware of a chasm between idealized childhood and the reality that exists for most children in the world, precipitating a crisis of meaning in society and in scholarship (James and Prout 1990: 1; Stephens 1995: 7). In the interviews I conducted, some respondents, particularly if they were older, female, and lower-middle or working class, described the media related to Israel-Palestine as "overwhelming" or "too depressing to follow." Most pilgrims also agreed that they do not know much and that they "could" or "should" know more. Yet these feelings almost never motivate further research. Instead, they speak to an awareness of the chasm that leads to heightened anxiety when pilgrims feel pressured by experts

(often the guide, but sometimes a vocal group member) to take a particular stand or rationalize a political perspective.

Pilgrims go to the Holy Land to instantiate the presence of God, the truth of the biblical stories, and a personal relationship with Jesus. When guides and scholars criticize them for a "considerably less than accurate" understanding of reality (Bowman 1992: 121), it is of course premised on the assumption of a secularist reality. Pilgrims, on the other hand, insist that there is a visible secular reality *and* an unseen religious one. They are adept at balancing these two realities in their everyday life, but in the Holy Land it is primarily the latter that they seek to make distinct. Thus, it is not surprising that, according to Israeli survey data, "pilgrims themselves do not feel the need to expand more on that issue [of politics]. There is evidence that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict played a minor role in the pilgrimage. However, the Israeli-Palestinian hosts may have a different view" (Collins-Kreiner et al. 2006: 130). In my interviews, approximately 60 percent of respondents steered the conversation away from Israeli-Palestinian politics because it had "nothing to do" with the trip. Luke, an evangelical in his mid-50s, voiced a typical response: "It has no value to me. I just look at it as another part of this fallen world. I feel bad for the people living there, what they have to go through, but it's not related to what I'm looking for." Another 25 percent were open to learning more, assuming that it was not misconstrued as central to the trip. For example, Luke's wife, Terri, added: "It would be interesting to hear about it within reason but not essential. As I said, the reason I'm going is to know my Christian roots." Only 15 percent of my respondents were significantly interested in politics.[9] In other words, when guides bring politics to the fore, on average more than three-fourths of pilgrims feel that it is unrelated to the spiritual 'point' of the trip.

A related concern is that political discussion will result in intra-group conflict. As I have argued elsewhere (Kaell 2014: 13), pilgrims' attempts to avoid conflict are less a result of Turnerian communitas than an effort to safeguard their own experience. Simply put, no one wants to jeopardize his or her 'trip of a lifetime' by bickering with others: it distracts from the focus on personal prayer and a connection to Jesus. More broadly, however, pilgrims believe that 'good Christians' should not feel ill will toward others, especially if they are partaking in communal worship. The importance of the group in this context is crucial. For pilgrims, personal spiritual uplift depends upon sharing in the Body of Christ/People of God (Catholics) or Christian fellowship (Protestants) through collective rituals such as mass and communion.

When pilgrims feel pressured to take a particular political stance or digest the details of events, treaties, and alliances, they often respond by shutting down the conversation and redirecting it to the moral realm. At these moments, the imagined child, as Malkki puts it, 'tranquilizes' uncomfortable interactions. As the "embodiments of a basic goodness and as symbols of world harmony" (Bornstein 2005: 71), the child provides a sense of shared optimism and quiets dissent (Malkki 2010). Although it is most often guides who cause this anxiety and engender recourse to the imagined child, as a researcher I too unwittingly provoked such reactions. In my ongoing conversations with Dorothy, for example, she told me a great deal about her love for Israel, quoting both the Bible and the Christian Zionist televangelists to whom she tunes in nightly. In Bethlehem, however, she bought postcards from a young Palestinian vendor, confiding to me that she had not actually needed them but had done so "to help him out." I responded with surprise: economic support means that Palestinians will stay in Bethlehem. Had she not said earlier that they had "no right" to be there? She replied: "Sure I said it. But I still pray for peace in Jerusalem. The Bible says you got to." I questioned her again, asking if she could envision a peace process that would address both Israeli and Palestinian concerns. She looked annoyed: "Look, [that vendor] was just a boy, and he reminded me of [my grandson] Jim … We all got to look after the children. No matter if the Jews [are] right or the Arabs or if Clinton is. The children come first." She

pressed her lips together. Invoking the universal child, Dorothy effectively ended the discussion by moving it into an uncontestable moral realm and thereby avoided potential conflict with a self-proclaimed expert—in this case, an anthropologist.

Conclusion

American pilgrims arriving in the Holy Land are familiar with long-cherished biblical images but also are highly aware of the contemporary conflict. Especially over the last decade, scholars and journalists have examined the links between evangelicalism, Zionism, and US Middle East policy, as well as the ways that Israeli tour guides and American trip leaders harness salient images and discourse to co-construct political ideologies. What is thus far lacking, however, is a more nuanced understanding of how pilgrims respond to—and ignore—the frameworks that guides and leaders employ. For participants, 'politics' and 'theology' encompass a much broader constructed reality (Bowman 1991) than Christian Zionism implies, including epistemologies with deep historical resonance for American women in particular. In this context, the symbolic child is a revealing lens. Although not religious or biblical per se, it is a trope with strong moral undertones that is so widespread for US pilgrims (and other Westerners) as to constitute an unquestioned reality.

Pilgrims draw on the imagined child in three overlapping modes: an embodiment of innocence, a sign of future progress, a brutalized victim. In so doing, they employ a symbol embedded in the American context. Nineteenth-century Americans viewed their nation as an innocent child, sheltered from European corruption and authoritarianism. American childhood, and the nation as a whole, seemed to embody infinite possibilities for future progress. It was upon the child that twentieth-century women staked their claim to political participation and enfranchisement. In opposition to this idealized norm was the 'unnatural' child, usually pictured as corrupted by sinful adults and manifested in the disorderly street Arab of the nineteenth century or the rock-throwing Arab boy of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Guides and other Holy Land hosts are adept at discursively mobilizing the child. Both they and the pilgrims use these tropes in order to confirm who they believe is 'right' (victims) and 'wrong' (perpetrators). Conversely, however, pilgrims also use the symbolic child as a "tranquilizing convention" (Malkki 2010: 71) when experts, most often the guide, engage in discussions that foreground the wrong (i.e., secular and political) reality during the trip. Aware of the gap between what they could know about the contemporary Israeli-Palestinian conflict and what they actually do know and care about, pilgrims worry that politics may cause intragroup conflict and will derail their spiritual goals. For female pilgrims especially, the innocent child—framed as both a victim and a solution—is an unassailable moral truth that can silence experts by redirecting the conversation into the broadly moral sphere away from political particularities. Although this tactic may provoke guides' frustration, the pilgrims are engaging politics, albeit not how guides and trip leaders might hope. The child tranquilizes what seems to be an endless cycle of violence that is overwhelming and often deemed morally suspect. Drawing on the symbolic child articulates the optimistic desire for future progress while reframing political discussions as part of a discursive realm familiar to American women in particular, in which small children, like the Christ Child himself, are the instruments of God's unfathomable goodness.

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▪ **NOTES**

1. Following anthropological convention, I use the term 'pilgrims' to describe people who take religious tours to the Holy Land. However, it should be noted that American evangelicals sometimes prefer terms such as 'participants' or 'travelers' (rather than 'pilgrims') and 'Bible Land' or Israel (rather than Holy Land), largely in order to emphasize that their journey differs from historic Catholic pilgrimage.
2. The percentage of US Catholics on Holy Land tours reflects their numbers in the overall American population. Evangelicals, who comprise about a third of the US population, are significantly over-represented. This number should be taken with caution, however, since 'evangelical' is a broad category. In my study, I focused on groups distinguishable from mainline or charismatic Christians based on their affirmation of historian David Bebbington's four core tenets: being born-again, taking part in missionary activity, believing in the centrality of biblical authority, and focusing on Jesus's redemption of humanity. See "What Is an Evangelical," National Association of Evangelicals, http://www.nae.net/church-and-faith-partners/what-is-an-evangelical (accessed 14 May 2012).
3. Evangelical groups tend to be more varied in age and gender, reflecting the make-up of their churches. I have not included Latino Catholic groups (which might well be younger), nor did I examine 'study tours' from Christian colleges.
4. In 2013, the Christian Foundation for Children and Aging was renamed Unbound.
5. Numbers are approximate (and contested for political reasons), but the 1922 British Mandate census estimated that Christians (Arab and non-Arab) made up about 9.5 percent of the total population. Today, the Arab-Christian population in Israel and the Palestinian territories is estimated at about 2 percent.
6. Children's peace choirs are a popular fund- and consciousness-raising tool in the West: US examples include the International Peace Choir and the World Children's Choir. In Israel-Palestine, scholar Edward Said co-founded, with Daniel Berenboim, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra in 1999. It brings together Israeli, Palestinian, and other Arab children for performances mainly in Western Europe.
7. Besides civil rights, pilgrims most often draw comparisons to the Irish 'Troubles' (Irish Americans consider themselves quasi-insiders although most have not been to Ireland), the history of aboriginal-white conflict, and Mexico-US relations.
8. My conclusion here should be taken as a call for further research, particularly since what I record conflicts with how some scholars have characterized US news coverage (see, e.g., Ross 2003: 61). Besides ethnographic data, I draw on e-mails from former pilgrims and Internet image searches. On Google images, for example, fully one-third of the first 30 independent sources under the search "Israeli+children" are actually of Palestinian child victims; 50 percent are of Israelis, most often pictured in school-related activities; and the rest are miscategorized (accessed 24 November 2011).
9. Men are more likely than women to talk about politics. Couples often describe a division of "responsibility": she is more emotional and spiritual, while he thinks about historical or political "facts."

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