

**A Christian Look at the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.
Bruno Hussar and the Foundation of ‘Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam’**

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Abstract

In 1970, after a long genesis, the joint Israeli and Palestinian experience of the village of ‘Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam’ (‘oasis of peace’) began. Among the decisive figures for the start of this project, Father Bruno Hussar (1911-1996) was the most important, although his life has not yet been explored by historiography. Born in Egypt to assimilated Jewish parents, during his studies in France he converted to Christianity. In 1953 he was sent to Israel in order to open a Dominican centre for Jewish and Christian studies. During those years the idea of a place where to experiment a direct form of coexistence between Jews, Christians and Muslims in Israel took shape in Hussar’s mind. My paper aims to investigate his complex figure, combining Judaism, Christianity, adherence to Zionism and commitment to peace. The analysis will be carried out mainly using three types of sources: the documents gathered in different archives, the association bulletin and the texts published by him.

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Preface: Hussar and ‘Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam.’ A double reading

A man with four identities: Jewish, Christian, Israeli, born in Egypt and bound up with the Arab world. Through this multiplicity of different identities, sometimes conflicting with each other, the Dominican Father Bruno Hussar outlined his own life as a priest and, in particular, the period – from 1953 until his death, in 1996 – spent by him in Israel.

The fact of belonging to four different cultures also characterized the best-

known experience initiated by Hussar at the end of the 1960s: the village of ‘Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam’ (NSWAS),¹ created with the aim of gathering Israeli citizens belonging to three different monotheisms in an experience of living peacefully together.

The history of NSWAS has drawn the attention of the current affairs press, particularly within the European area: the media focused, on several occasions, on the personality of NSWAS’s founder – particularly after his death – and on the most famous experience that generally identifies the village: the School for Peace. However, an in-depth historical study of the facts that marked out the case of NSWAS has not been carried out yet. In order to better understand the story of this village, it is necessary to analyze Hussar’s figure, without reducing him to an “icon” of inter-religious dialogue and pacifism in Israel.

The aim of this essay, accordingly, is to identify some approaches to the interpretation of the history of Father Bruno and the village of NSWAS, using unpublished archival sources. In order to do this, it will be necessary also to examine the previous stages of Hussar’s life: his discovery of Christianity and the parallel development of his awareness of his Jewish origins during the *Shoah*, his move to Israel and his pastoral engagement with Jews converted to Christianity, the establishment of the St. Isaiah House and the participation in the Council. These themes were to give birth to the project leading to NSWAS, whose establishment and subsequent history were to experience transformations and (sometimes dramatic) changes with respect to Hussar’s original idea.

The conversion

André Hussar was born in Egypt on 5 May 1911: his father was Hungarian, his mother French, and both were non-practicing, assimilated Jews. After completing his studies at the Italian School of Cairo – adding Italian to English and French as his mother tongues – at the age of 18 he moved with his family to Paris, where he graduated in engineering. It was during his university period, as he claimed several decades afterwards, that his conversion² – as he called it describing his identity formation process³ – to Christianity took place. Hussar

¹ Unless spelled differently in the sources used, the editor has opted for the spelling ‘Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam,’ as it appears in <http://nswas.org>, accessed 28 June 2013.

² In the wide historiography on Jewish conversions to Christianity, see for our topics John Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother. The Revolution in Catholic Teaching on the Jews, 1933-1965*, (Cambridge Mass: Harvard University Press, 2012).

³ In the large historiography tracing the historical development of Jewish identity/ies, particularly related to the Jewish Israeli case, see *Jewish Identity in Modern Israel: Proceedings on Secular Judaism and Democracy*, eds. Naftali Rothenberg, Eliezer Schweid, (Jerusalem: The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Urim, 2002); *Contemporary Jewries. Convergence and Divergence*, eds. Eliezer Ben-Rafael, Yosef Gorny and Yacov Ro’i, (Leyden and Boston: Brill Academic Press 2012); Yosef Gorny, *The State of Israel in Jewish Public Thought. The Quest for Collective Identity*, (New York: New York University Press, 1994); Alain Dieckhoff, “Israel: la pluralisation de l’identité

described his approach to faith as prompted by an “agonized anxiety” to receive answers to his questions regarding both the “problem of evil” and the figure of Jesus.⁴

During the dramatic period of the World war two, Hussar went through a stage in which he deepened his choice of faith, in order to overcome his “enthusiastic temper” and “immature Christianity.” Those were the years in which André began a reflection – which was to attain fullness after he moved to Israel – on his Jewish origin, starting the development of a religious awareness that was able to combine his belonging to Judaism and his adherence to the Church.

At the same time, and with some difficulties, Hussar also became aware of the anti-Judaic and anti-Semitic prejudice present in the Catholic Church and of the fact that this background was to be held responsible for the Christians’ behavior towards the current persecutions. He felt an increasingly strong desire to contribute to the dismantling of the Christian ammunition against Judaism. Hussar himself wrote that, during that period, he met Jacques Maritain and his wife Raïssa, revealing that he was deeply influenced by the philo-Semitic approach of the French philosopher. All these different tensions resulted in a naive desire not to hide his own Jewish origins: he risked being arrested and had to leave France in 1940 because of the Nazi occupation.

When the war ended Hussar began to attend the philosophy courses at the seminary of Grenoble and prepared to join the Dominican order. He was ordained priest on 16 July 1950 and took the name of Brother Bruno to mark an everlasting monastic reference to the founder of the Carthusian Monastery. This reflected a contemplative dimension that Hussar never gave up in the subsequent decades: it resurfaced particularly in NSWAS, when he devised and created Doumia, the House of Silence, to which he devoted the last years of his life.

nationale,” in *Nationalismes en mutation en Méditerranée orientale*, eds. Id., Riva Kastoryano, (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2002), 153-171; Robert S. Wistrich, *Between Redemption and Perdition: Modern Antisemitism and Jewish Identity*, (London: Routledge, 1990).

⁴ Bruno Hussar, *When the cloud lifted*, 1st ed. fr. 1983 (Dublin: Veritas, 1989), 12. I am currently working on this phase of the life of Bruno Hussar in France, which needs further clarification and historical reconstruction.

The arrival in Israel and the 'St. James Association' (1953-1959)



Figure 1: Bruno Hussar in the fifties in Israel. ASJA

The second, decisive moment in Hussar's biography, in which the current historical events posed new questions to him in relation to his Jewish origin, was the foundation of the state of Israel. The events that shook the Middle East in 1947-49 caused different and conflicting reactions among Catholics. The attitude of the Holy See,⁵ the most significant one, was based both on a firm refusal to recognize the state of Israel and on an intense diplomatic activity that aimed to induce the UN General Assembly to ratify an internationalization system for Jerusalem and the protection of the Holy Places. There were, however, different attitudes, although they were a minority within the hierarchy and the Catholic clergy. Hussar was an example of this: he rejoiced at the birth of the state of Israel, which he recognized as legitimate and necessary to grant the Jews a homeland after the *Sboah*. His concern was not limited to the political and historical aspects, but also included a theological perspective. In his opinion, it was necessary for the Church and the Christians

⁵ On the reactions of the Holy See (and the ones from the Vatican in particular) to the establishment of the State of Israel, see Silvio Ferrari, *Vaticano e Israele dal secondo conflitto mondiale alla guerra del Golfo*, (Firenze: Sansoni, 1991) and Uri Bialer, *Cross on the Star of David. The Christian World in Israel's Foreign Policy, 1948-1967*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005). On the previous period, see Sergio I. Minerbi, *The Vatican and Zionism. Conflict in the Holy Land, 1895-1925*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

to make an effort to understand how this epoch-making event could be regarded as a part of the Christian salvific plan and could affect the “mystery of Israel” as well as the relationship between Judaism and Christianity.⁶

Hussar was appointed by the Dominican Provincial Father, Albert-Marie Avril, to open a ‘Centre for the study of Judaism’ on the Israeli side of Jerusalem, strengthening the already considerable presence of the Dominicans with the *École biblique et archéologique*⁷ in the Jordanian sector of the Holy City.

Hussar arrived in Israel on 23 June 1953. He was deeply impressed and fascinated by the characteristics of the new state and also by Zionism, which he regarded as a movement that was able to give the Jews a new life, by granting them a state.

However, Hussar’s opinions were not shared by most of the Church – the Latin Catholic one in the Holy Land – since its vast majority was made up of Palestinian Arabs who were hostile to the new-born Jewish state, and it was led by a patriarchal⁸ and regular clergy that had an Arab or Western origin and was generally far from supporting the Jewish cause.

The attempt to oppose the Hierosolymitan Church’s dislike for the Jews, and the need for pastoral care for the minority of Christian believers of Jewish origin within the state of Israel were the origin of the creation of the ‘St. James Association.’⁹ The association, which was placed under the jurisdiction of the Latin Patriarchate, was established on 14 December 1954 by a group of priests who were members of several congregations, including Hussar himself. The goals of the Association included providing religious, social and economic care to the converts and the Christians of Jewish origin who arrived in Israel; promoting a “Jewish-Christian spirituality” and an “understanding of the mystery of Israel”; opposing “all forms of anti-Semitism,”¹⁰ and removing the isolation and separation that existed between the converted Jews and the Latin Church, and also between Jewish Christians and Israeli society.

⁶ Saint Paul referred to the mystery of Israel’s role in the history of salvation which is recognized both in God’s electing Israel among other peoples and in Israel’s rejection of Jesus as a Messiah, the event that, according to the apostle, opened the path to the salvation to the pagans (Letter to the Romans, chapters 9-11).

⁷ See Dominique Trimbur, *Une école française à Jérusalem. De l’École Pratique d’Études Bibliques des Dominicains à l’École Biblique et Archéologique Française de Jérusalem*, (Paris: Cerf, 2002).

⁸ On the contemporary history of the diocese of Jerusalem see Paolo Pieraccini: *Il ristabilimento del patriarcato latino di Gerusalemme e la custodia di Terra Santa. La dialettica istituzionale al tempo del primo patriarca mons. Giuseppe Valerga (1847-1872)*, (Cairo; Jerusalem: The Franciscan Centre of Christian Oriental Studies, 2006), and Andrea Giovannelli, *La Santa Sede e la Palestina. La Custodia di Terra Santa tra la fine dell’impero ottomano e la guerra dei sei giorni*, (Roma: Studium, 2000). On the Palestinian Christians, see Daphne Tsimhoni, *Christian Communities in Jerusalem and the West Bank Since 1948. An Historical, Social and Political Study*, (Westport: Praeger, 1993).

⁹ The history of the ‘St. James Association’ is still largely unwritten, though it deserves a rigorous historical analysis. Danielle Delmaire has explored some elements of this group (see “La communauté catholique d’expression hébraïque en Israël. *Shoah*, judaïsme et christianisme” *Revue d’histoire de la Shoah* 192 (janvier-juin 2010): 237-287).

¹⁰ Association of St. James, “Statutes,” 11 February 1956, Archive of the St. James Association (henceforth ASJA), Jerusalem. My deep thank to Yohanan Elihai for his help and availability.

For the St. James Association, Father Bruno was responsible for a flat – *foyer* – in which the Christian Jews from Jaffa and Tel-Aviv could gather. He was deeply engaged during the first years of life of the association, as he recognized in it the concrete realization of his desire to create a bond between Christianity and Judaism, and to achieve the ideal of a Jewish Christian Church and a liturgy in Hebrew prospering in Israel. Hussar defined it a ‘dream,’ using a word that later became customary in descriptions of NSWAS. However, the idea of opening a Dominican center in West Jerusalem was still alive in Hussar’s mind and in those of his superiors: that would have been the St. Isaiah House.

The 1960s: between Jerusalem and Rome. The St. Isaiah House and the Council



Figure 2: The St. Isaiah House. ASJA

In 1959, after deciding to resume the original project promoted by the Dominican Province in Paris, Hussar, together with Brother Jacques Fontaine and later with Marcel-Jacques Dubois, opened in Jerusalem the St. Isaiah House, a place of prayer and study, which was designed to provide a concrete space where a dialogue between Christians and Jews could be fostered.¹¹ The

¹¹ See Bruno Hussar and Jacques Fontaine to Eugène Tisserant, July 1959, Report *Maison Saint Isaïe*, Archives Tisserant, Montferrer. My deep thank to the association ‘Les Amis du Cardinal

aspiration to overcome the separation existing between, on the one hand, the Arab Christians and the European Catholic clergy living in the state of Israel and, on the other hand, Israeli Jews, in a political and social framework where Arab and Jews considered themselves as enemies, lead Hussar, Fontaine and Dubois to the opening of the St. Isaiah House.

In those years, the experience of Vatican Council II represented an important step in Hussar's biography: he was appointed, by Cardinal Bea to take part, as an expert, in the conciliar commission of the Secretariat for Christian unity, with the task of drawing up a document called *De Iudaeis*, to be submitted to the conciliar assembly.¹² Father Bruno's first ten years of stay in Israel and the establishment of the 'St. James Association' seemed to be driven by the attempt of meeting and gathering the Christians of Jewish origin who lived in Israel. They had been marginalized by Jewish Israeli society, but, at the same time converts were eyed suspiciously by the Palestinian population belonging to the Latin Church and by a part of the Western clergy, which associated them in any case to the Jewish state and considered them as potential enemies.

During the fifties the Israeli-Arab conflict had not been absent from Hussar's mind and pastoral care: Jaffa, mostly populated by Arabs, had shown him the complex situation of the Arab population in Israel. The religious separation between Christians and Jews (including the converts to Christianity), and the social and political division between Arabs and Jews, had directly influenced the experience of the *foyer*. Hussar asserted the need for an ecclesial action focused on the meeting of Arabs and Christian Jews; but his leading interest, during his first years in Israel, was fighting the anti-Judaism tinged with anti-Semitism that filled a great part of the Catholic Church in the Holy Land.¹³ The experience of the Council was the climax of this effort. For Hussar this was also a personal path: his life in Israel constituted for him a process of discovery of his own Jewish origin and elaboration of a new identity, that of a *Christian Jew*.

The second part of the 1960s marked the emergence and deepening of a new political awareness in Hussar. The work of the Council had forced him to deal with the difficult Islamic reception of the new season of openings between the Church and Judaism, including in the already complex Arab-Israeli conflict also the question of the relationship with Christians.

The Six day war was an epoch-making event in Hussar's interpretation of the political and religious situation in Israel and the entire Middle East. The community that gravitated around the St. Isaiah House joyfully welcomed the

Tisserant' (and particularly to Paule Hennequin) for their help and availability.

¹² On the complex history of the preparation of *Nostra Aetate*, see Giovanni Miccoli, "Due nodi: la libertà religiosa e le relazioni con gli ebrei," *Storia del Concilio Vaticano II. La Chiesa come comunione, settembre 1964 - settembre 1965*, ed. Giuseppe Alberigo, vol. IV, (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1999), 119-219, and *Nostra Aetate. Origins, Promulgation, Impact on Jewish-Catholic Relations*, eds. Neville Lamdan and Alberto Melloni, (Münster: Verlag, 2007).

¹³ On the Catholic anti-Semitism see at least *Les racines chrétiennes de l'antisémitisme politique (fin XIXe-XXe siècle)*, eds. Catherine Brice and Giovanni Miccoli, (Roma: École française de Rome, 2003).

reunification of the Holy City under Jewish control after the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem. As Rina Geftman, one of Hussar's closest friends since the earliest times of the St. James Association, remembered, the reunified Jerusalem resounded with biblical and eschatological echoes: after the foundation of the state of Israel in 1948, the reunification of Jerusalem was now interpreted as a new stage in the unveiling of the 'mystery of Israel.' The feeling of terror for a possible destruction of Israel by the Arab armies and the subsequent euphoria of victory that were experienced in June 1967 also affected Father Bruno's thought, increasing its consonance with the policies adopted by the Israeli government. His self-definition as a Christian, Jew and loyal citizen of the state of Israel, as well as his adherence to Zionism, became more closely intertwined. While on the one hand Hussar was developing an increasingly pro-Zionist attitude, on the other hand the Six Day War gave him the opportunity to travel in the West Bank, where access during the Jordanian rule had been strictly controlled and possible only through special permits. The annexation of East Jerusalem and the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza (WBGS) made Hussar feel the urgency to find a way for a resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. To use Hussar's lexicon, after the "dream" of "reconciliation" between Christians and Jews, it was now time for another "dream:" that of a community that joined Jews, Christians and this time Muslims as well.

NSWAS: the early years (1969-1976). The pioneering phase and the disagreements with the Patriarchate



Figure 3: Hussar and the first hut. ASJA

At the end of the 1960s Hussar was defining his project. He gathered around him some of the protagonists of the ‘St. James Association’ and St. Isaiah House. In particular, Rina Geftman and Anne Le Meignen supported Hussar’s idea and actively co-operated with him.

One of the most important and complex questions during this first phase was the choice of the place. Initially the preference went to the convent of the Muslim village of Abu Gosh, which the Dominicans had already considered in the late 1950s in view of a possible foundation in Israel. According to Hussar, Abu Gosh was a place full of symbolic value because of its geographical position and biblical history:

This centre will be established on the slopes of Kiriath Yearim, close to the Muslim village of Abu Gosh, 14 kilometres from Jerusalem (road to Tel Aviv), in an area of about 5 hectares made available by the nuns of the Congregation of St. Joseph. It is on this hill that the Ark of the Covenant was placed in the house of Avinadav, until, around the year 1000 BC, King David brought it into the new capital, Jerusalem. So Nevé Shalom will suddenly be inserted into a Christian, Jewish and Muslim context: on the top of the hill of Kiriath there is the Church of Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant, belonging to the Sisters of St. Joseph, (...), at a short distance, the magnificent basilica built by the Crusaders (one of the possible locations of Emmaus); next to it, two Jewish kibbutzim: Kiryat Anavim and Ma’ale ha-Hamisha, and the Muslim village of Abu Gosh. This location will facilitate friendly and spiritual exchanges.¹⁴

However, the availability, offered by the head of the Trappists of the nearby Latrun Abbey, of a wider ground of some tens of hectares, led Hussar to abandon the option of Abu Gosh in favor of the latter. The area around the Trappist monastery was a key point in the armistice line between Israel and Jordan after 1948: it was located at an equal distance to Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Ramallah – the three most important cities for Jews, Christians and Muslims because of their religious, political, economic and demographic significance. In Hussar’s view, the location of this area – as well as that of Abu Gosh – was a symbol of the equal proximity to the three religions in the Holy Land that the future village would have to secure and maintain, placing itself at the crossroads of three different but intertwined worlds.¹⁵ The valley of Ayalon had seen several battles in the past centuries, as well as in more recent conflicts, and in Hussar’s opinion this added a greater value to the choice of this hill for hosting the ‘oasis of peace.’

¹⁴ See Bruno Hussar, Report *Nevé Shalom*, n.d. [1969?], Dossier Nevé Shalom 1969-2000, AG-MS, Archive of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem (henceforth ALPJ), Jerusalem.

¹⁵ Bruno Hussar, Report *Nevé Shalom/Wahat as-Salam*, novembre 1987, Dossier Nevé Shalom 1969-2000, AG-MS, ALPJ, Jerusalem.

The biblical tradition of this area was for Hussar a further confirmation of a meta-meaning embodied by his project: a sign of reconciliation that could overcome the political and religious conflicts and was linked to a biblical history interpreted as a prophecy of peace and reconciliation. The name of the nascent village was taken from Chapter 32 of the book of Isaiah (verse 18): “My people will live in an oasis of peace.” So the continuity with Hussar’s previous experience – the St. Isaiah House – was evident, also in its underlying biblical references. This time, however, the purpose of the new foundation was different from both the foyer of Jaffa/Tel-Aviv and the experience of the study center on Judaism in Jerusalem:

PURPOSE: This centre aims to be a place where Jews, Christians and Muslims living in the country, as well as pilgrims, occasional visitors and foreign students, can meet or live together. Those who will come there will be led by a sincere desire for mutual understanding and dialogue, in view of a real and just peace between people, communities and nations.¹⁶

In the opinion of Hussar and his first companions, the only prerequisite for those who wished to go to NSWAS or live there was a desire to meet other communities and religions, and an open-minded attitude towards their arguments.

While some parts of Hussar’s description of the village seemed to outline a sort of monastic rule (focused on prayer, work and silence) and were probably influenced by the Dominican example and Hussar’s personal experience (thereby running the risk of the imposition of a Christian model), its religious dimension was essential, although no exceptions to atheists were raised. In any case, the founding principles of the village often referred to the Bible, overshadowing the Muslim and atheist component. While the ideal that underpinned the village was a religious one (mostly Jewish-Christian), the organisation designed for the village closely resembled that of a *kibbutz*:

The social structure will be based on the form of the collective villages existing in Israel. The family will be its basic cell. Since the early stage of its realisation, Nevé Shalom will be widely open to guests; material conditions will be, at the beginning, forcibly poor (dormitories, camping), but the welcome the guests will receive will be as friendly as possible.¹⁷

The image of the *kibbutz* was full of different meanings. First, it was not a new idea. Already in the fifties some of the members of the ‘St. James Association’ used to visit several kibbutzim regularly in order to study Hebrew and in some

¹⁶ Bruno Hussar, Report “Nevé Shalom,” n.d [1969?], Dossier Nevé Shalom 1969-2000, AG-MS, ALPJ, Jerusalem.

¹⁷ Ibid.

cases to celebrate mass. Coming from France, where they were close to the movement of the *prêtres-ouvriers*,¹⁸ they found in the *kibbutz* an environment where to work, maintain themselves economically and learn Hebrew. It meant as well to make the first contacts with Israelis and eventually to meet some Jewish people secretly converted to Christianity. The *kibbutz* was regarded by the members of the ‘St. James Association’ as a community characterised by some traits that were close to the Gospel ideal and to the rule of religious congregations: a simple, egalitarian communal life, often in adverse natural conditions that made farming and economic subsistence difficult and forced the residents to rationalize their resources and share their goods. This position, nuanced by a sort of idealization of the *kibbutz* model, was interesting especially because it contrasted with the traditional Catholic vision about the *kibbutz* as a secular collectivistic experience.

In the 1950s two families among the first members of the ‘St. James Association’ had tried to build a Christian *kibbutz* in the land provided by the Sisters of Our Lady of Sion in Ein Karem. The creation of NSWAS, therefore, was related specifically to the attempts undertaken a decade earlier.

Secondly, as founders of a new *kibbutz*, though one characterized by such particular features, the protagonists of the foundation of NSWAS (Hussar, a group of less than ten companions, and four families previously connected to the St. Isaiah House) projected on themselves an image of pioneers. The start of NSWAS – between 1970 and 1976, until the arrival of the first families – was specifically identified as the ‘pioneering phase.’ Before the mid-seventies Hussar and his first companions lived in harsh material conditions, sleeping in caravans and unsuccessfully trying to cultivate the dry land.

The bitter, hard life of the early years was thus compared by Hussar and his companions to that of the first Jewish pioneers who had arrived in Israel at the end of the 19th century, and had had to struggle with the harshness of nature in order to establish the *yishuv*. As Rina Geftman wrote several years after this difficult period,

You can really say that Father Bruno Hussar and a small team of pioneers, including Anne [Le Meignen], with their patience and courage, have made the desert bloom.¹⁹

The image of the ascent of the Ayalon hills was reminiscent of another climb, the one towards Israel: the choice of starting the experience of NSWAS was then considered a sort of second *ahyah*.

Another level of reading could also be proposed to decipher the symbolism of the founders-pioneers. In Hussar’s mind, while the first members of the *yishuv* had been able to make the desert bloom, as the expression goes, and to build an egalitarian social model in Israel (though without resolving the thorny issue

¹⁸ For an historical account of this movement, see Émile Poulat, *Les prêtres-ouvriers. Naissance et fin*, (Paris: Cerf, 1999).

¹⁹ Rina Geftman, *Guetteurs d'aurore*, (Paris: Cerf, 1985), 179.

of the relationship with the Arabs), at NSWAS a group of pioneers of dialogue among conflicting religions would have created an 'oasis of peace' with, as its own core, not only egalitarianism but especially reconciliation between peoples, religions and cultures.

In the following decades of village life, the strong link with this kind of imagery was to show various aspects of ambiguity: in the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict, to take the Jewish pioneers and *kibbutzim* as a social, economic and cultural reference included the risk to appear as potential antagonists to the Palestinians who perceived pioneers as occupiers and usurpers. The difficulties for NSWAS to penetrate the Israeli Arab world, acting as a viable option in the quest for a just peace, were to deepen during the subsequent decades.

At the time of the foundation of NSWAS, however, the first inhabitants and Hussar himself did not seem aware of these implications. What prevailed was the enthusiastic effort to start an experience that was regarded as necessary and unprecedented in Israel. Even concerning the means of sustenance for the young community, Father Bruno did not concentrate on developing feasibility studies, but appeared to be certain that aid would not be lacking, especially through his extensive network of contacts in Europe and the United States.

The project of NSWAS was taking shape in Hussar's mind, and in the late 1960s he sent its description to the former Secretary of the Congregation for the Oriental Churches Cardinal Eugène Tisserant, a supporter of Hussar's work since the foundation of the St. James Association.²⁰

The relationship between Hussar and the hierarchy of the diocese of Jerusalem was much more difficult. One of the fundamental obstacles to the beginning of NSWAS was represented by the authorization of the Latin Patriarch. Hussar was thoroughly acquainted with Msgr. Gori and was aware of his resistance to Catholic projects implying a presence in Israel:²¹ in this case his resistance was even stronger, because the project that was being proposed, though of Christian origin, was based on an inter-religious spirit and also had obvious political implications regarding both Jews and Muslims. Fifteen years before, the consent of the Latin Patriarchate to the foundation of the 'St. James Association' had come after some years of informal meetings between different religious congregations, laypeople of Jewish origin and converts.

However, while St. James in any case was an association of Christians placed under the Latin Patriarchate in Israel and led by the vicar of the Latin Catholic Church, the project of NSWAS could not have a similar paternity and an equal control by the hierarchy of the Diocese of Jerusalem. It was an experiment of coexistence and dialogue between members of different faiths and origins:

²⁰ On Cardinal Tisserant and his attitude towards the Catholic Church in Israel, see Étienne Fouilloux, *Eugène, cardinal Tisserant (1884-1972)*, (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 2011), 443-454.

²¹ The main attitude by the Latin Patriarchal hierarchy toward the Zionist movement and the Jewish immigration before, during and after the *Shoah* and the establishment of the State of Israel, was characterized by hostility, particularly evident during the pastoral charge of the Patriarchs Luigi Barlassina (1920-1947) and Alberto Gori (1950-1970).

placing it under the control of the Church would have meant undermining its neutrality and credibility in the eyes of the conflicting parties.

At the same time, however, Hussar also sought the approval of the local church. NSWAS aimed to be presented as one of the “fruits” of the Council, and to achieve this it was necessary to receive the ecclesiastical approval both of Rome and of Jerusalem. In the autumn of 1969 Hussar sent his plan to Patriarch Gori, asking for “the aid of your prayers for this work and for the small team of laypeople with whom I work.”²² In the same days, Rina Geftman wrote a letter to Paul VI in order to present the project of NSWAS. Rina Geftman had already sent the Pope a letter dated January 12 of the same year: in the wake of the events of Beirut,²³ she had asked the Pope for “a glance of solicitude for your children of Israel.” A few months later, Geftman saw this request fulfilled by the meeting of Paul VI with Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban, “a glance of solicitude” that was accepted by the Christians in Israel as “an entrance into a new era, a page full of hope in the history of the relations between the Church and the Jewish people.”²⁴ Rina Geftman now felt that it was time for a new “sign of reconciliation,” and NSWAS could be this. The Secretariat of State sent the letter to the Apostolic Delegate Pio Laghi, who in turn sent it to Patriarch Gori, in order to request an opinion before giving his answer to Rome. The Patriarch decided to wait a few months before formulating a response, assigning a feasibility study to Msgr. Kaldany.

Among the major supporters of the idea of NSWAS there was the abbot of Latrun, Elie Corbisier. His enthusiasm for Hussar’s proposal, however, was not shared by some of the monks of the abbey, for economic and administrative reasons connected to the lease contract and, even more significantly, also for reasons of “political prudence” regarding the opinion that the Israeli government and the Muslim population in the nearby villages would have drawn from it.

Despite the impasse in which the relations between Hussar and the Patriarchate seemed destined to remain, and the tensions within the abbey, on 3 June 1970 ‘Yishuv Neve Shalom’ was officially established through an act of incorporation signed by Hussar and Corbisier.

The confirmation of this hostile attitude of the Patriarchate to the idea of the village came in the autumn of the same year: Msgr. Kaldany, formulating a legal opinion requested by Gori on the contract between Latrun and Hussar, advised Corbisier and the Apostolic Delegate Laghi to refuse the lease of the

²² Bruno Hussar to Alberto Gori, 13 November 1969, Dossier Nevé Shalom 1969-2000, AG-MS, ALPJ, Jerusalem.

²³ On December 28 1968, after a terrorist attack in Athens by some members of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine against a plane of the Israeli airline El Al, the Israeli army attacked the airport of Beirut, destroying 14 aircrafts. Two days later, Paul VI sent a telegram to Lebanese President in which he expressed his “sorrow at the grave event which took place in Beirut,” generating strong reactions in Israel.

²⁴ Rina Geftman to Paul VI, 26 October 1969, Dossier Nevé Shalom 1969-2000, AG-MS, ALPJ, Jerusalem.

land “because of *vague, ambiguous and dubious* features contained in the Act of Constitution and in the Companies’ Ordinance as regards *the purposes and methods of future implementation*. Nothing concrete or definite on this subject can be found in the two official documents in question.”²⁵

Despite the Patriarchate’s unfavorable opinion, Hussar and Corbisier decided to proceed with the deal, which was signed on 6 November 1970. The death of Patriarch Gori on 25 November of the same year, and the appointment of Msgr. Beltritti as his successor, further delayed a clear response of the Diocese of Jerusalem about Hussar’s project, inducing the latter to proceed without a formal authorization from the bishop.

In the 1970s the project of NSWAS was gradually carried out. Hussar and the group of students moved into small camper vans in the 400 *dunam* of land made available by the abbot of Latrun. “The first six years were very hard; they led to the birth of the present community and to its activities,”²⁶ Hussar wrote years later. From 1970 to 1976 the search for a livelihood, the harshness of the land to be tilled, and a feeling of isolation from the local Church exacerbated the difficulties: during this stage, the disagreements and conflicts among the founders were set aside because of the greater urgency of the problem of finding practical resources for building the first houses for the village members. In these years, the image of the pioneers, of the founding fathers of the village, emerged and crystallized: they were Bruno Hussar, Anne Le Meignen, Rina Getfman and a few other members of the community.

In the second half of 1970s the village began to change: Hussar’s journeys abroad and his many contacts in Europe resulted in the establishment of the first group of ‘Friends of NSWAS,’ particularly in France, Italy, Switzerland and Belgium. In the 1980s the relationship with some cardinals and representatives of the Roman Curia were probably becoming stronger.²⁷

The arrival of a new group of Israeli families of Jewish and Palestinian Arab origin was what chiefly marked the beginning of a new phase in the life of the village. Water came, a generator was installed. The first houses were built. A social and decision-making structure began to appear.

²⁵ Hanna Kaldany to Elie Corbisier (and in copy to Pio Laghi), 18 September 1970, Dossier Nevé Shalom 1969-2000, AG-MS, ALPJ, Jerusalem. Emphasis in original.

²⁶ Bruno Hussar, “Appel à nos amis,” November 1987, Dossier Nevé Shalom 1969-2000, AG-MS, ALPJ, Jerusalem.

²⁷ On 13 April 1986, Bruno Hussar and Anne Le Meignen had gone to Rome to greet the Pope John Paul II on his first visit to a synagogue. There, the two protagonists of NSWAS gave an interview to the Vatican Radio, telling the story of the village whose origins laid – according to them – on the same spirit of dialogue that had prompted the meeting between John Paul II and the Chief Rabbi of Rome Elio Toaff. It is difficult reconstruct the opinion held by the Holy See concerning NSWAS and Hussar’s personality due to the current unavailability of the sources held in the Vatican Secret Archives. Certainly, Hussar positively welcomed the process leading to the Fundamental Agreement between the Holy See and the State of Israel, signed on 30 December 1993 (see his preface to Carlo Maria Martini, *Israele, radice santa*, (Milano: Centro Ambrosiano - Vita e Pensiero, 1993), 11).

While in the 1950s the *foyer* of Tel-Aviv/Jaffa had adopted, as its ideal reference, the Judeo-Christian communities of the Church of the origins (communal life, sharing of property and goods, gathering around the celebration of the Eucharist), twenty years later the first group of founders of NSWAS, though still connected to some of these elements, blended them with the pioneering imagery and the *kibbutz* structure. During the second phase of its history, which opened in the second half of the 1970s, NSWAS began to distance itself from both these models, in an attempt to unite different cultures and ways of life, and to achieve an original and unprecedented experience.

The first conflicts and differences of opinion regarding the next steps to be taken by the community began to emerge. Some of the members left the community, while other families moved into the village. The emphasis on reconciliation between different faiths that characterized the intentions of the early days now gave way to a progressive focus on “identity conflicts” – as Hussar called them – paving the way not only for religious divergences but also, and even more, for conflicting forms of nationalism and ideologies.

This evolution, and the changes that marked the Arab and Israeli societies in the 1970s, contributed to a shift in the agenda of the paths and methods to be chosen in order to achieve NSWAS’s goal of becoming a laboratory for peaceful coexistence. The first signs of a rift between Hussar’s initial project and the outlook of the new members arriving in the village began to appear. As Rina Geftman explained:

When Father Bruno and I laid the foundation of this community, we thought that prayer for peace was one of the pillars of life. What happened was very different, because those who came to join us were in love with justice and fraternity, but not interested in the religious aspect.²⁸

The change of the village’s focus from prayer for peace to social action – choosing education – changed the nature of Hussar’s project, and the first signs of such a change became visible from the 1980s onwards and then fully apparent in the successive decade. Rina Geftman, who had spent five years there and had experienced the most difficult period of NSWAS, left the village for these reasons. A decade after its establishment, the only two remaining members of the original group were Father Bruno and Anne Le Meignan.

The need to provide education to the children of the village, whether Jews, Muslims or Christians, Israelis or Palestinians, helped develop a new awareness of the responsibility of education for peace in the schooling of the children of the village. The idea of a School for Peace was born: in NSWAS it was experimented hoping that it might become an educational model for the whole country. From religion, the focus of NSWAS shifted to education.

²⁸ Geftman, *Guetteurs*, 180.

The School for Peace

In 1984, the village consisted of about 70 members, half of them Jews, and half Palestinian Arabs, Muslims and Christians. All the inhabitants were Israeli citizens. Together with some unmarried laypeople, 17 families with 30 children were living in NSWAS. A nursery, a kindergarten and a primary school were established for the children.

In the educational system that was being created in NSWAS, the first problem was linguistic: in which language should the children be educated? They all learned either Hebrew or Arabic, depending on their family of origin, but the educational program of NSWAS was designed since the beginning as a bilingual system. The teachers, who were members of the village belonging to different communities, spoke and taught in two languages. Thus the linguistic vehicle was the first channel of knowledge of others and respect for them. The school curriculum was focused on the knowledge of the cultures of the different populations living in Israel. Particular attention was devoted to the preparation and celebration of festivals of all three communities.

In the documents that explained the work and philosophy behind this educational system, and in Hussar's speeches, it was often specified that the goal was not that of a generic 'syncretism' or fusion of cultures and religions, but the children's awareness of their origins, which led to the desire to know and meet different identities and histories. This approach was particularly original in a context, that of Israel, in which even education was designed on the basis of strict national, linguistic and religious divisions.²⁹

In 1979 another experience started: that of the School for Peace, which fully developed during the 1980s. Through a contact with the educational system in Northern Ireland and in other theatres of conflict, a team specialized in education for peace was established in NSWAS. Other educational trainers from all over Israel joined the first group. The School for Peace was added to the traditional education of NSWAS, enriching it with other experiences: the reference model considered was that of an open school in which, starting from an essentially pluralistic situation such as that of the village, education and knowledge were not divided on the basis of the children's origins and backgrounds, but were shared, promoting the development of new generations that were able to overcome the friend-versus-enemy outlook and were open to otherness and difference since childhood. The School for Peace aimed to complete the educational path of the children of the village by offering time and space for individual and group teaching, providing creative and artistic tools and skills, developing respect for nature, encouraging forms of personal

²⁹ See Majid al-Haj, *Education, Empowerment, and Control. The Case of the Arabs in Israel*, (New York: SUNY Press, 1995); Aurelia Smotriez, "Emancipation, sionisme et education: aux origines du système scolaire israélien" *Revue Labyrinthe* 28/3 (2007): 91-103; Aurelia Smotriez, "Frontières externes et fractures internes entre Juifs et Arabes: aux sources de la ségrégation scolaire en Israël, 1947-1953" *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'histoire* 103/3 (2009): 133-147.

expression of mutual respect and generosity, and also promoting the active involvement of the parents within the school.

One of the most important aspects of the School for Peace was the direct contact with situations outside the village that was provided in order to offer a real opportunity of exchange to the children who had been born and raised in NSWAS. In addition to this, at the end of primary school, the children of NSWAS had to return into the state educational system. Therefore, the School for Peace was a means for continuing to ensure them a personal development based on the founding values of this tiny village. For this purpose, visits to NSWAS were promoted and organized: after its foundation, in less than ten years, the School for Peace was visited by about 8,000 young Jews and Arabs, and more than 1,000 adults visited NSWAS.

The style and method of education of NSWAS deserves further systematic analyses, not only limited to the methods of historical research. However, it is interesting to understand how, in Hussar's mind and choices, the development of peace building strategies and tools was changing during the 1970s and 1980s. On the one hand, the importance of the school within NSWAS was directly linked to the figure of Hussar: his network of contacts in Israel and throughout Europe allowed this village in the Ayalon valley to receive funds to be re-invested in education. At the same time, however, the central role progressively acquired by the school moved NSWAS away from the ideal of inter-religious coexistence for which it had been created. The voice and "dream" of Hussar and of the small group around him at the end of the 1960s became, twenty years later, one of the many voices of the village. An authoritative voice, undoubtedly, but not the only one. While Hussar's reputation and fame were growing abroad, in the internal decisions inside NSWAS the weight and importance of the founders began to decrease. A new generation born or grown up in the village claimed other priorities and choices.

The watershed of the 1980s and the development of the School for Peace cannot be separated from an investigation of the analysis that Hussar and the community provided on the on-going political and social changes, especially when the first Intifada broke out. In parallel, the image and interpretation of NSWAS and of its founder that public opinion in Israel developed (and we shall see, though only through few examples, in the Palestinian territories, oPt) also came under discussion.

The 'oasis of peace' in the Israeli society. The first Intifada

The experience of the School for Peace and the thousands of visitors from all over the world drew the attention of the Israeli media on NSWAS. In the 1980s, newspapers, radio and television investigations devoted space and reports to the history and initiatives of Hussar and of the group of people around him. In those years Hussar received numerous awards for his

commitment to dialogue in the Israeli-Palestinian context: in Israel he was awarded the peace prize by an important magazine, *New Outlook*.³⁰ In 1988 and in the following year, Hussar was nominated twice for the Nobel Peace Prize. Meanwhile he was trying to obtain the official recognition for NSWAS as a village in Israel; this authorization was granted by the Ministry of the Interior – after several years of hesitation – in September 1989.

In addition, the attention of many politicians has been drawn to NSWAS. On 5 September 1985, the Israeli President Chaim Herzog visited the village in the region of Latrun where he had fought in the first Arab-Israeli war of 1948-1949. After visiting the School for Peace and participating in a work group of young Jews and Arabs, the head of state held a speech in which he stressed the exceptional nature of NSWAS.

The most significant political presence in the village, however, was that of Wellesley (Pinhas) Aron: secretary of the first President of the State of Israel Chaim Weizmann, Pinhas – as they called him in the village – was the founder of the Jewish socialist youth movement *Habonim*. Then, in 1980, with his wife, he joined the first families who moved to NSWAS. For Hussar, the friendship with Pinhas represented a key step in the development of the project of NSWAS, steering it towards the question of peace education. To this topic Pinhas, a high school teacher in Tel Aviv, had dedicated a curriculum in agreement with the Ministry of Education since 1967. Pinhas had also done much to raise the fame of NSWAS in Israel. In 1988, the passing away of one of the main points of reference for NSWAS, a man who had belonged to the Jewish world in Israel and had been close to the Zionist leadership of the country, affected the village in the difficult months of the first Intifada

Since the very beginning of the pioneering phase, Bruno Hussar and his companions had claimed for the nascent village a choice of political neutrality. However, after 1967 Hussar made no secret of his commitment to the ideals of certain currents of Zionism. The 1970s had strengthened these beliefs in Hussar, particularly in light of the resolution adopted by the UN in 1975 that condemned Zionism as a form of racism: this document had been strongly criticised by Hussar and his circle of friends and companions. The next decade had given notoriety to the experience of NSWAS, but had not changed its founding spirit. Peace was still identified not with the fact of joining conflicting ideologies, but with the peaceful coexistence for which the village aimed to be a laboratory and example.

In the 1980s, the political and social radicalization in Israel and the Palestinian territories, the consequences of the civil war in Lebanon and of so-called operation Peace in Galilee, and even more significantly the events connected to

³⁰ Founded in 1957 by Martin Buber and Simha Flapan, *New Outlook* has been one of Israel's most important magazines in the pacifist context for several decades (its publication stopped in 1992). See Marcella Simoni, "L'Utopie concrète' de New Outlook. Construire le dialogue entre jeunes Israéliens et Palestiniens dans les années 1960," in *Israël Palestine. Les enjeux d'un conflit*, ed. Esther Benbassa (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2010): 179-193.

the first Intifada (1987-1990), broke this image of neutrality, and dramatically revealed, for the first time, the inner conflicts between the different components of the village.

During the war in Lebanon (1982-1985) the village community had organized a series of talks to discuss the political situation in the region. A few months later, in the summer of 1986, NSWAS responded to President Herzog's call for tolerance and for the rejection of social polarization, included in his speech for the anniversary of the declaration of independence, on 13 May 1986. This appeal was repeated after the incidents in late June in which factions of ultra-Orthodox Jews had clashed with groups of secular Jews. As requested by President Herzog, throughout Israel and also in NSWAS the last two weeks of school were devoted exclusively to the "study of Tolerance." A year later, on 11 April 1987, 20,000 Israelis (both Jews and Palestinians) had gathered in NSWAS. The meeting was particularly significant, because some groups from the oPt participated hoping to renew the effort to build a bridge towards the Palestinians in the oPt. A few months later, the Palestinian question broke out dramatically with the beginning of the first Intifada.³¹

Hussar and the group of founders of NSWAS had never claimed a splendid isolation for the inhabitants of the village, but the events related to the first Intifada really shocked the community. The frequent passages of the army near the village and the news of repression and on-going violence in the oPt distressed the village residents, particularly the children, who were in the habit of reading the newspapers at school and of being up to date about current political events. The choice between military service and conscientious objection also divided the young people of NSWAS³².

The adults could see in the children and young people the rift that was beginning to divide the entire community in those months. The coordinator of the School for Peace, Ariela, a Jewish Israeli, wrote:

The Intifada exerts a strong influence on all of us, as well as on the young people who come to the School for Peace. The Arabs feel strengthened, 'At last! We are doing something to change the situation.' And the Jews are terrified by the change in the balance of forces.³³

In this period Hussar seemed increasingly to step aside, and did not take a public stand on the Palestinian Intifada. Meanwhile the leadership of Abdessalam Najjar (1952-2012), an Israeli Palestinian, Muslim, from Nazareth, secretary of the village – a sort of mayor – and friend of Bruno since the 1970s,

³¹ On the history of the first Intifada, see Mary Elizabeth King, *A Quiet Revolution. The First Palestinian Intifada and Nonviolent Resistance*, (New York: Nation Books, 2007). On the first Intifada see the essay by Julie Norman in this issue, pp. 140-161.

³² On conscientious objections among Israeli Jews, even though in an earlier period, see the essay by Marcella Simoni in this issue, pp. 73-100.

³³ Ariela (surname not reported), "L'école pour la paix. Un bilan (1988-1989)," *Lettre de la Colline* 14, September 1989, 12.

was growing. For the first time the Palestinian voice was becoming the loudest one inside the village.

After the outbreak of the Intifada, members of the village met and discussed the situation: a majority of people voted for a public protest in front of the prime minister's office, against the Israeli repression in the oPt. The choice of location was significant, because in this way the protest of NSWAS intended to turn directly to the Israeli government, and also because it created a link with marches and sit-ins led by other well-known Israeli peace movements, such as 'Peace Now.'³⁴ So for the first time NSWAS was close to other pacifist groups and movements, although it did not participate to other collectives. The protest in the name of the village was held on 14 February, 1988. A leaflet was distributed. It stated that:

We, the members of Nevé Shalom/Waahat as-Salaam, have decided, exceptionally, and on this single occasion, to organise a political initiative about the difficult situation in the occupied territories. We protest against the increasing military repression, and we identify with the Palestinians' struggle for freedom and independence. We want to show the Israeli government that our experience at Nevé Shalom/Waahat as-Salaam, based on community life in equality, exchange, and communication, demonstrates that this path is possible and leads to success in settling disputes. This path is not easy, and sometimes it is very difficult, but it is worthwhile and it is a human path.³⁵

A few months later, Najjar prepared an editorial for the community newsletter, and it was published in the same page that hosted the commemoration of Pinhas by Hussar. In his text, Najjar wrote that "the residents of N.Sh.-WS have a strong political consciousness, and the Intifada (...) was not a great surprise, because we have been aware for a long time of the discontent brewing in the occupied territories. Yet, the intensity of the uprising was a shock." With respect to the escalation of violence, he continued, "we have formulated some demands for the end of the occupation and for self-determination."³⁶ The events of the first Intifada did not lead Hussar to disown the Zionist cause:

I am a Zionist. This term has been distorted by the struggles and squabbles of party politics which have turned it into a stereotype far removed from its true meaning. Didn't the United Nations go out of its way to identify Zionism with racism? A Zionist is someone who recognises the right of the Jewish people to exist as a nation in the land of their fathers, so that every Jew who wishes may find his homeland

³⁴ On 'Peace Now' see the essay by Jon Simons in this essay, pp. 124-159.

³⁵ Various Autors, "«Des gens et des choses...» ou chronique de la Colline," *Lettre de la Colline*, 12, April 1988, 2.

³⁶ Abed El Salam Najjar, "Editorial," *Lettre de la Colline*, 13, December 1988, 2.

there. In itself Zionism is not in any way against the right of the Palestinian Arabs to a national existence in the same region; the land is spacious enough for that. (...) No Jew who truly lives in the spirit of the Torah can be indifferent to the fate of the Palestinian Arabs and their hopes. This land is their home too.”³⁷

Despite Hussar’s adherence to Zionism as it is presented in these lines, he never analytically specified which notion and kind of Zionism (political, practical, synthetic, cultural, religious, or other)³⁸ he referred to. He did not precisely quote his political references in the historical evolution of Zionism before and after the establishment of the state of Israel. Therefore, it appears to be difficult to deconstruct the Zionist vision endorsed by Hussar. He often considered Zionism simply as the movement supporting the right of the Jewish people to a land and a state, especially after the *Shoah*, but without adding any further explanation.

The conclusion coming from the above quotation of Hussar’s vision as a Catholic Zionist thinker needs to be approached in a nuanced manner. Hussar dealt with the Israeli state as a historical fact with a religious impact on Christians – as contained in his notion of the correlation between the “mystery of Israel” and the Jewish state. Contrary to the most convinced Christian Zionist thinkers, such as John Hagee, and to other American evangelical fundamentalist circles, Hussar did not interpret the establishment of the state of Israel as an apocalyptic prophecy of the second coming of Jesus, although he undoubtedly considered it under a supernatural light.³⁹ As we have seen, Hussar’s approach considered the Israeli state and its history as a part of the biblical “mystery of Israel,” but he never defined in which way the establishment of the Jewish state affected this mystery. According to Hussar, the foundation of Israel was inside this mystery and, although Christians could not fully discover it, they had to consider it while standing pro or against Israel’s right to existence. They could not deny the relevancy and legitimacy of Israel as a state, although this did not imply agreeing to every single government decision and measure, as Hussar’s attitude to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the 1980s made clear. Therefore, his position can be

³⁷ Hussar, *When the cloud*, 97.

³⁸ For classic histories of the Zionist movement, see Arthur Hertzberg, *The Zionist Idea. A Historical Analysis and Reader*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1959); David J. Goldberg, *To the Promised Land: A History of Zionist Thought*, (London: Penguin, 1996); Walter Laqueur, *The History of Zionism*, new edition updated (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Georges Bensoussan, *Une histoire intellectuelle et politique du sionisme (1860-1940)*, (Paris: Fayard, 2002).

³⁹ On Christian Zionism – although rigorous historiography has still to emerge – see Regina Sharif, *Non-Jewish Zionism. Its Roots in Western History* (London, Zed, 1983); Paul Charles Merkley, *The Politics of Christian Zionism, 1891-1948*, (London: Frank Cass 1998); Paul Charles Merkley, *Christian Attitudes Towards the State of Israel*, (Montréal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001). Christian Zionism was rejected by the representatives of different Christian confessions in the so-called *Jerusalem Declaration on Christian Zionism*, signed on 22 August 2006; see “We Stand For Justice: We Can Do No Other” *Holy Land Studies* 5/2 (2006): 211-213.

better defined as pro-Zionist and/or philo-Zionist, rather than as Catholic Zionist. At the same time, Hussar's adherence to the Zionist project remains problematic, as the following history of NSWAS showed.

Coming back to Hussar's words on his vision on Zionism, significantly, the 1988 French edition of the book *When the cloud lifted* included an addition to this paragraph that clarified Hussar's interpretation of the events related to the first Intifada: the Palestinian uprising was, in his opinion, "a natural consequence of growing pressure on the 'territories', due to the Occupation and Jewish settlements – and it has given rise to inevitable and harsh military repression."⁴⁰ Hussar's words were no longer those of 1967, because his alignment to the positions of the Israeli government was changing.

According to him, the Palestinian Intifada had brought two outcomes: it had raised the Israeli public's awareness of the situation of the occupation in the oPt, and had led to a rapprochement between the Palestinians of Israel and those of the WBGS, in a common attempt to break the regime's oppression. From a religious point of view, Hussar did not join the nascent Palestinian liberation theology.⁴¹ The Intifada led Hussar, who was about to turn 80, to dissociate himself firmly from the government's policies, though without changing his support to the Zionist ideology and the Israeli stance. In NSWAS, however, the balance of power between the two national components was beginning to shift towards a gradual strengthening of the Palestinians. This determined a progressive severance between Hussar's thought and the feelings of most of the inhabitants of the village. In the 'oasis of peace,' the time of Herzog's visit and Pinhas's presidency seemed hopelessly distant.

The silence is broken. The assassination of Rabin

With the beginning of the 1990s, the conclusion of the Intifada and the opening of peace negotiations seemed to start a season of hope for a resolution of the conflict. Bruno Hussar and the residents of NSWAS shared the expectation of an imminent signature of a peace treaty.

One of the most significant novelties for NSWAS at this stage was the presence in the village school of children coming from 'outside,' in particular from the nearby Muslim village of Abu Gosh. During this period, Hussar was gradually withdrawing from active participation in the village's activities. The

⁴⁰ Hussar, *When the cloud*, 124.

⁴¹ On the Latin American liberation theology see Silvia Scatena, *La teologia della liberazione in America Latina*, (Roma: Carocci, 2008). The liberation theology was spread also in other Christian contexts, such as South Africa and the oPt. In the Palestinian case, the first promoter of a local way of the liberation theology was the Anglican Rev. Naim Stifan Ateek. During the first Intifada, the Palestinian Liberation theology rejected Christian Zionism and adopted the popular reading of the Bible, a contextual approach to the Scriptures and read the sacred text in the light of the concrete condition of the Palestinian people, raising strong opposition in Israel.

last years of his life were devoted to the project of Doumia, the “space of silence.”⁴²

The history of Doumia is also the story of Hussar’s last “dream.” In 1983 a small house was opened in NSWAS: its purpose was to provide a place where silence (*doumia* in Biblical Hebrew) was kept, in order to promote meditation and personal prayer.

During the ensuing decade the project was fulfilled by the construction of a building: a white dome, inside which only rugs and cushions were placed, situated in a garden within an area that was slightly separated from the village, in order to encourage silence and meditation. With Doumia, Hussar, now in his eighties, seemed to return to the original project of NSWAS as a meeting place for different faiths: in the presence of opposing nationalisms, the shared prayer of the three religions could be a vehicle for reconciliation and peace.⁴³

However, an event abruptly interrupted Hussar’s silence and his work in Doumia: the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin. The murder of the prime minister on 4 November 1995 was the single most important event that broke the hopes of peace of the 1990s. Hussar did not witness the outbreak of the second Intifada but he foresaw the failure of a season of illusions that peace would be near. Rabin’s death deeply upset the Israeli public, like a “shock treatment” as Hussar defined it. His last article, published in early 1996, in the St. Isaiah House bulletin, dealt with this event, interpreting in the light of the development of the “mystery of Israel.”⁴⁴

In this article, Hussar described Rabin as a great statesman with an exceptional personality, who had shown his value by shaking hands with Yasser Arafat and “accepting the Oslo II agreement with all its implications.” His death had shaken Israel, because “a Jew killing another Jew for political reasons is a fact that has never been seen before.”⁴⁵ The text is particularly interesting also because of the eschatological reading of these events presented by Hussar:

In terms of what is sometimes referred to as God’s plan, this event, so shocking in its historical dimension, is undoubtedly a further step on the road leading to ‘aharit ha-yamim’, the last times. (...) We stand in the presence of a mystery: that of the final fulfillment of God’s work that began with the creation of the world – and at the heart of the mystery of Israel.⁴⁶

⁴² See Psalm 65: “For you silence is praise, o God” (verse 2).

⁴³ On joint praying as a vehicle for reconciliation see some events analyzed in the essay by Cristiana Calabrese in this issue, pp. 101-123.

⁴⁴ Bruno Hussar, “L’assassinat d’Itzhak Rabin dans la perspective du ‘Mystère d’Israël,’” *Les Oliviers de Saint Isaïe. Lettre aux Amis*, 5, first semester 1996, *Shalom*, Bruno, ed. Bruno Segre, (Doar-Na Shimshon: NSWAS, 1997), 13-16.

⁴⁵ This idea formulated by Hussar and largely shared by the Israeli public opinion before and after Rabin’s murder, was in reality not true; see Nachman Ben-Yehuda, “One More Political Murder by Jews,” in *The Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin*, ed. Yoram Peri, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), 63-95.

⁴⁶ Bruno Hussar, “L’assassinat d’Itzhak Rabin,” 14-15.

Referring to the letters of Paul and in particular to Chapter 11 of the Letter to the Romans, Hussar wrote:

The reaction of the people of Israel after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin is a major step forward in the march of the Jewish people towards messianic fullness (...) There is a conversion of heart: everyone, Jews and Christians of today, each for their own part, will march towards the era of fullness. Yitzhak Rabin, war chief, became a peacemaker, until he paid for this decision with his life – and the whole country, in its living forces, through its examination of conscience, assures us that this hope is not in vain. There will come a time when the Jews and the Gentiles, trees that complement God's single olive tree, will be united in the same praise. (...) We know that the fulfillment of the mystery of Israel is a part of the march of humanity towards fullness.⁴⁷

It is legitimate to wonder whether the inhabitants of NSWAS shared this kind of reading. But the fact that this was its founder's final stance was significant.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

On the hill



Figure 4: NSWAS, aerial view (2002). ASJA

During the last stage of Hussar’s life, the hill of NSWAS became for him an image of the peace that could be reached on the “everlasting hills” (Genesis 49, 26).⁴⁸ Hussar died on 8 February 1996. His funeral gathered on the hill of NSWAS thousands of people from all over Israel and from different areas of the world. He was buried at Doumia, “in the dry land of our country,”⁴⁹ as he had requested in a recording in Hebrew, found after his death and regarded as his testament. Hussar’s heritage was (and still is) complex and sometimes disquieting. After the death of its founder, NSWAS survived but it was hit by rifts like all the peace movements and Israeli-Palestinian joint associations during the tragic years of the second Intifada. The uprising showed another time the incapability of Palestinian, Israeli and joint organizations to coordinate among themselves.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ These hills had been mentioned in the last years of his life also by another protagonist of Christianity in the Middle East and the Arab world, Louis Massignon (1883-1962). Although politically divided in their opinion of the Israeli policy, both Hussar and Massignon considered the Holy Land a place to be transformed into a laboratory of coexistence between people, a “jardin d’enfants de l’humanité” now reconciled.

⁴⁹ Bruno Hussar, “Testament,” *Shalom*, 19.

⁵⁰ See Marcella Simoni, “Sul confine. L’attivismo congiunto israelo-palestinese,” in *Quaranta*

After Hussar's death, even among those who had most supported NSWAS in the world, there were people who no longer recognized NSWAS as Bruno's "dream."⁵¹ The village did not establish a significant link with Palestinian associations in the West Bank during the second Intifada; this led to a growing isolation of this experience, which became separate both from the Israeli and the Palestinian societies. Some members left NSWAS. Among them, Amin Khalaf, Arab Israeli co-founder – with the American Jewish activist Lee Gordon – of the 'Center for Jewish-Arab Education' in Israel in 1997. The Center opened four 'Yad b'Yad' (Hand in Hand) schools in Israel, with the goal to promote education to Arab and Jewish children together.⁵² Although it does not represent the only experience in this field in Israel, the 'Yad b'Yad' example of bilingual education reproduces the pioneering model of NSWAS. In the dramatic events that followed the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000, not only the school for peace knew a deep crisis: even Father Bruno's ideals were dramatically challenged, particularly by his friend Marcel Dubois. In a long interview, Dubois declared that he and Bruno had "completely denied the Palestinian tragedy": "We were naïvely Zionist, confusing the Jewish adventure with the Israeli one."⁵³ Such a criticism from one of Hussar's closest

anni dopo. Confini, barriere e limiti in Israele e Palestina (1967-2007), eds. Arturo Marzano and Marcella Simoni, (Bologna: Il Ponte, 2007): 72-88.

⁵¹ This is the case, for example, of Bruno Segre, who resigned from the presidency of the Italian Friends of NSWAS in 2007. For his resignation letter, in Italian, see <http://www.ildialogo.org/noguerra/mediooriente/commiato18062007.htm>, accessed 10 June 2013.

⁵² This experience can be compared to NSWAS school for peace for the common vision of granting a joint education, teaching in Hebrew and Arabic. The accent on peace education and conflict management and resolution in the school curricula represents an element shared by both experiences. However, they show significant differences: the religious dimensions that had been intimately connected to the establishment and evolution of NSWAS is less evident in the 'Yad b'Yad' schools. Also in this case the awareness of the religious dimension in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influences the school organization and teaching, but it's less constitutive of the birth of NSWAS. Another diversity is due to the link to the surrounding community: in NSWAS, the school for peace is included in the village and it's part and parcel of it; the children attending the school come from this community who already made a choice of co-existence. On the contrary, 'Yad b'Yad' institutes are established in a normal urban context: the challenge to involve parents and other organizations of the external reality is permanent. On the 'Yad b'Yad' school, see Zvi Bekerman, Gabriel Horenczyk, "Arab-Jewish bilingual coeducation in Israel: A long term approach to intergroup conflict resolution" *Journal of Social Issues* 60/2 (2004): 389-404.

⁵³ Dubois denounced the excessive adherence to the Israeli policy, the identification between Judaism and the state of Israel, and the blindness to political and military responsibilities in the oPt. He finally inverted his position towards Zionism, identifying it with "possession and conquest." As he wrote : "We have completely denied, yes, completely denied, the Palestinian tragedy. (...) And if I changed my opinion (...) it is not at all out of religious love for Israel, but out of the secular, engaged and selfish reasons of a people trying to reconstitute itself. Nevertheless, I also remain a lover of Sion and of Israel. (...) I am no longer a Zionist stating the right to conquest or to land possession... Finally, I would avoid the word Zionism, because I believe that it means possession and conquest." See Marcel-Jacques Dubois, *Nostalgie d'Israël. Entretiens avec Olivier-Thomas Venard*, (Paris: Cerf, 2006), 28-30, (my translation from French).

friends still raises increasingly pressing questions on the experience of NSWAS, its development, and even its founding ideals.

Eschatological tension, historical reading and political urgency are merged in Hussar's biography. Even in his most famous achievement – the village of NSWAS – these three dimensions are linked in a complex interplay, not devoid of contradictions. During the last stage of Hussar's life, the response offered by him to the Arab-Israeli conflict transcended history and attained mysticism. According to him, if Rabin's assassination was the failure of the possibility of a political solution, then praying for peace was all that remained. It was a choice that had an almost monastic tinge,⁵⁴ as shown by Doumia, though in an inter-religious context like NSWAS.

To sum up, Hussar's never-ending effort seemed to be that of creating a space, a place, a land for utopia, a non-place. The *foyer* of Jaffa/Tel-Aviv, the St. Isaiah House, and especially NSWAS, seem to represent the answers to this endeavor to actualize a utopia of dialogue, mutual understanding and peace between religions and cultures. The same space was being sought also by those who had converted from the religion of their family to another religion – as Hussar himself had done – and were always precariously poised and divided between their community of origin and the one of choice.⁵⁵ The same position of border-crosser between Jews and Christians that Hussar held during the first part of his stay in Israel, that he searched inside NSWAS between Jews and Arabs (Christian and Muslims) with and after the establishment of the 'oasis of peace.'

At the crest of this paradox lies the immense significance of Hussar's venture (and perhaps failure) of NSWAS. This element will also provide a measure of the importance of future historical works addressing this experience. In the Israeli-Palestinian context, more than in any other, an in-depth historiographical investigation is needed, not only for understanding the course of past events, but also for outlining the future paths of peaceful coexistence in the region between the Mediterranean and the Jordan river.

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⁵⁴ The monastic experience interpreted also as a prayer for peace shared by the three monotheistic faiths also inspired Giuseppe Dossetti (1913-1996), although with different starting points and horizons from those of Hussar's. For a history of the origins of the presence of this community in the Holy Land, see the address by Dossetti in 1973 to Cardinal Antonio Poma in the volume *La Piccola famiglia dell'Annunziata: le origini e i testi fondativi, 1953-1986*, (Milano: Paoline, 2004), 214-241.

⁵⁵ John Connelly considers Hussar and a generation of converts from Judaism to Christianity who deeply affected the preparation of *Nostra Aetate* as *frontaliers*, *border-crossers* between two communities, never leaving completely one in favor of the other. See Connelly, *From Enemy to Brother*, 63-64).

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