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Historic Walls and the Disconnection of Humanity From Itself: a Case Study of Israel and Palestine

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**HISTORIC WALLS AND THE DISCONNECTION OF HUMANITY FROM
ITSELF: A CASE STUDY OF ISRAEL AND PALESTINE**

**A thesis submitted to
Regis College
The Honors Program
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for Graduation with Honors**

by

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Preface and Acknowledgements

I would like to personally thank all of the creative minds that have worked so diligently with me to help finish this thesis; to Dr. Damien Thomson as my thesis advisor and to Dr. Linda Land-Closson as my reader, without their input and feedback this thesis would not be as cohesive and holistic as it is.

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Foreword

This poem is a way for us, as readers and thinkers about tough issues, to position ourselves in various perspectives and paradigms. Written by Theo Horesh ¹while opposing the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, this poem portrays the interpersonal connection of the writer, myself, and all readers in each position involved in this “sprawling drama of guilt and redemption” (Horesh 2015). Perhaps by sitting in each of these seats, we can understand the complexities that make up these global issues and, therefore, take caution in dishing out solutions or answers.

I am Israel, I am Hamas

I am the man who has jumped from a burning building only to land on the head of another, and cannot admit that I chose him to break my fall.

I am the suicide bomber whose heart implodes, and in its implosion diminishes the hearts of those he would need to make good his cause.

I am the pilot whose heart contracts as the bombs set sail, and in contracting allows me to fly another mission, but in flying destroys the finer feelings that make my mission matter.

I am the child who is buried in the rubble of his home—it is a mystery how my world has just broken on my head, and in later years I will blame myself.

I am Hamas, who having had enough, lashes out with no clear purpose, and in lashing out only rains down fire on the things that matter most.

I am the beach dweller who sees only waves—and flees from boundaries by losing herself in an infinite present that makes for a hollow future.

I am the Zionist who seeks security and builds a tough shell, only to find that shell breaking and slashing him up as he builds a tougher armor.

I am the stone thrower who in protecting my turf helps the world close in but a few inches more on my own life prospects.

¹ Theo Horesh is the author of Convergence: The Globalization of the Mind and co-founder of *The One Step Peace Solution*, which would establish fair and equal courts in areas under Israeli Occupation.

I am the smooth Israeli freeways, so easy in the lies I sustain.

I am the cop who brings to the protest his own sense of order and in enforcing that order disrupts the flow of life, thereby making a death of his own.

I am the non-violent protester, who ends up chanting verses of hate, and in failing to love, loses the day.

I am the politician who wants justice but must speak of peace, and in speaking too long of peace has forgotten the meaning of justice.

I am the writer who makes believe he is a part of the battle so he can write with an authority he fails to carry into his heart and in his failure comes to break the hearts of those who are dear.

I am the reader holding destruction at a distance and revealing in my own equanimity as the bombs fall but in maintaining this peace fails to grow her heart and mind.

I am the Nakba, destroyer of homelands: having failed to find my home, I plowed over husbanded fields and started to build where I should not go.

I am the conflict ever sustained because I can't find the love to transcend justice and in transcending justice put an end to injustice.

To see myself in all of these roles is to recognize my limits and in recognizing my limits try to overcome them through love.

To see myself in all these roles is to recognize my limitlessness and in recognizing my limitlessness try to see the destruction to which we all are heirs.

To see myself in all these roles is to recognize my interconnectedness and in recognizing my interconnectedness try to see a path beyond mutually assured destruction.

To see myself in all these roles is to recognize my separateness and in seeing my separateness try to find a way to come together.

I am all of these roles because I am human and in being human cannot help but be all things.

But to see myself in all of these roles is no justification for those who would carry them out.

To be all and yet recognize some things still should not be

Is to love your enemies within yourself even in the heart of the battle.

Introduction

To be perfectly clear, or as clear as my words will allow, this thesis is formulated to approach a better understanding of walls in human history and their physical and mental impact on people. Explicitly, why are walls built? Why have they always been and continue to be? It is necessary to first examine the sacredness of landscape and humanity's relationship to place. This connection allows us to understand why walls are being built that divide people from their sacred land. Continuing along this path I will look at classic walls in human history, drawing from their individual stories threaded with political, just, and social need. From there, I will delve into the Israeli-Palestinian Separation Barrier that is a prominent example of contemporary walls. Instead of prescribing a solution for how this situation should play out, by my standards, I will be looking at the meaning, from a background of years of historical context and concepts, behind this wall and try to better understand why a community would build such a barrier.

Understanding differing perspectives from a variety of positions (in relation to these walls) is key to my thesis. Perhaps the purpose of these walls, contemporary and historic alike, are for national security...and yet, maybe some walls are symbolic of a predominant way of living, a majority culture, or stand as a talisman of ideology. We must ask ourselves the question, why do we accept division? Borders are drawn, walls are built, ideological separation occurs...and we all play a part by accepting the divide. Ultimately, this thesis questions whether walls relate to humans in these spaces where they are built. What does physical or psychological, metaphorical or symbolical

separation do to a people in their connection to other individuals and the land itself?

These are questions that I am attempting to answer throughout this project....

Chapter 1

Interconnectedness

It is helpful to define the concepts that occur throughout this thesis, as they are the roots of a larger theme of interconnectedness. Between people to people, people to sacred, and people to land, understanding the interconnectedness within these relationships is important in threading this thesis together. In this section, I demonstrate that interconnectedness exists at multiple levels of existence; therefore, I work from the premise that problems arise when we sever relationships with the establishment of walls. If an interconnection is desired therefore, it may be concluded that problems arise from severing relationships via walls. So, in order to fully understand these divisions and dividers of interconnection, we must first understand the relationships themselves.

Relationship, in the context of this thesis, is restorative. This sense of relationship, making each part more whole because of the connections, establishes an equal nature between both parties, requiring the same input and output from each organism. Nowadays, we define relationships not in their equality but by the dominant individual's power over the other. Think of abusive relationships, international relations between a hegemon and a small state, or the relationship between an elder and a person of youth...these relationships establish some type of hierarchy, and yet we still call them "relationships". In this sense, I challenge the reader to think of relationship referenced in this thesis as one of equal ground for both sides. This is the essential interconnectedness that I hope to establish through the research of this thesis.

Interconnectedness, therefore, is the acceptance and reciprocation of both parties in the traditional permeable relationship. The ability for a more give-and-take nature, equally beneficial for each side, creates fluidity within the relationship. Walls, however,

lack the flow of the relational interconnectedness that inherently binds us all. As they are physical barriers, walls block the fluidity that interconnection provides, literally standing as dividers between ideologies, nature, states, and people. By accepting these dividers, these walls, the ability for a true relationship to form is obliterated. When we accept division, the basis for interconnection is eliminated. By buying into the ideology that we are all separate we will not understand the interconnectedness that is innate. Going forward, it is important to remember this connection.

Firstly, this thesis will explore the interconnectedness of humanity with the natural environment, or land. Throughout history, the relationship of people to the natural environment has produced life. Therefore, human reliance on the land for survival and quality of life has fortified a strong connection. I am bringing up these questions now because of the overt severance between nations, peoples, and ideologies dominating our global community today. This severance is an explicit rejection of our innate relational connection in human society.

Human connection to the environment is timeless and life giving. Simply stated, humanity would cease to exist without the provisions of the natural environment. Historically, the relationship between indigenous populations and the natural environment show the progression of human existence. It provides for the production of food, adequate area for building shelter, educational and scientific advancement, and the space to interact with one another and nature; essentially, land provides a quality of life. Eric Hirsch and Michael O'Hanlon, in their compilation of various essays titled *The Anthropology of Landscape: Perspectives on Place and Space*, discuss the interconnectedness of humanity with land that I am focusing on in this thesis.

In Hirsch's Introduction of *Landscape: Between Place and Space*, landscape is a key concept often overlooked in the study of humanity, falling short of the power "history, exchange, and ritual" hold in anthropological debates (Hirsch 1). This is an unfortunate oversight, due to the fact that landscape provides a certain conceptual and contextual visualization of a certain peoples' daily life. For example, a group of people is directly affected by the natural environment, or landscape, in which they dwell. Their actions, the way they conduct business, and how they approach life in general are all somehow impacted by their relationship to the land (Hirsch 1). Therefore, the way in which people of a landscape interact with each other, with foreigners, and with the land itself is directly correlated with their relationship to the place and space in which they live.

Hirsch presents two different, yet related, ways in which landscape can be applied to anthropological study. Firstly, it can be utilized as a "framing convention, which informs the way the anthropologist brings his or her study into view" (Hirsch 1). Secondly, and more helpful to the formation of this thesis, the landscape is specific to the physical surroundings of a people, leaning heavily on the way a terrain appears to those that live there. Because, as we will see shortly, indigenous peoples' way of life and culture is shaped by their relationship to the land, by studying this landscape we better understand the culture and lifestyle of said indigenous group. We see the natural environment, which wove itself into the indigenous peoples' traditions, daily activities, and cultural norms, through their eyes.

Indigenous populations across the globe tend to flourish when they are able to access resources located around them in their natural environment. For the most part, the

land provides the people that tend to it resources to provide them with their quality of life², and there are historic practices where indigenous groups honor the land for its life-giving role.

That which provides life can be categorized as “sacred” because of its nature of sustaining humanity in this world. Sacred is a word, which etymologically, is adapted from the Latin word *saceres* and based on the root *sak*, which means “to sanctify” (Online Etymology Dictionary). Developed from the most recent shift to the 12th century Old French word *sacrer* meaning, “consecrate, anoint, and dedicate”, “sacred” is an important concept for this thesis (Online Etymology Dictionary). Images of holy practice come to mind when thinking about dedication or anointing. From this etymological understanding, “sacred” is something inherently holy and timelessly honored. Including these ideas of holy practice to the most recent definition of the word “sacred”, it can be concluded that holiness and spirituality are directly linked to that which humans define as “sacred”. Certainly that which sustains life, such as land, should be revered and honored. Henceforth, the connection between human and land is, in fact, sacred.

Gregory Cajete, in his *A People’s Ecology: Explorations in Sustainable Living*, supports this idea that land is sacred by addressing it as a “spiritual ecology,” or “theology of place”³(Cajete 3). Indigenous people honor landscapes, physical places where humans and nature interact, because they provide the necessary resources for survival. Cajete states that this exact “sacred orientation to a place and space is a key element of the ecological awareness and intimate relationship that Indians have

² According to the Assembly of First Nations, there is a spiritual, divine, connection between the First Nations (indigenous peoples of the Americas) and Mother Earth (the land). “All are provided [for] by our mother, the Earth” (Assembly of First Nations).

³ Cajete’s “theology of place” connects spiritual devotion to the natural environment, or land (Cajete 3).

established with the North American landscape for 30,000 years or more” (Cajete 3). Indigenous peoples’ connection with the land is something venerable, as Cajete has shown with the Native Americans. This sacred element, interconnectedness between people and land, is not exclusive to Native Tribes of North America; people all over the world have felt a connection to land for centuries as it has provided their group with survival and generational continuance.

The Middle East is perhaps one of the best examples of human relationship to land deemed as sacred. Zooming in specifically on one chunk of land called by many names including, but not limited to, Palestine, the Occupied Territories, Haaretz, or the State of Israel, we find an area to which many groups have staked claim. So named by the early Israelites, the Holy Land has provided for and shaped many different indigenous populations over the course of human history. Likewise, it is deemed one of the most contested areas of land, holding sacred value for a variety of groups of people. All three Abrahamic religions⁴ trace their roots back to this sacred land, and therefore derive much of their spiritual identity from it. For instance, the early Israelites claimed this land, the Land of Canaan, based on the belief that their god had chosen them to inhabit, care for, and dwell in this space.

Get ready now, you and all the people of Israel, and cross the River Jordan into the land that I am giving them. As I told Moses, I have given you and all my people the entire land that you will be marching over. Your borders will reach from the desert in the south to the Lebanon Mountains in the north; from the great

⁴ Islam, Judaism, Christianity

River Euphrates in the east, through the Hittite country, to the Mediterranean Sea in the west.⁵(Joshua 1:2-4, Good News Bible, 2011)

As the Chosen People, the early Israelites drew upon the sacredness of the land to enhance their own identity as god's children.

In the same respect, indigenous Arab people living on this land of Palestine drew their identity from a sacred and spiritual connection to it. According to Lebanese/Palestinian scholar George Antonius⁶, ancient Palestine was home to the Arab people "since time immemorial" and therefore, he states, they are the "only authentic, long-resident, and indigenous population" of the area (Troen 875). Similarly, Edward Said, a renowned Arab scholar, asserts that the Arab connection to the land precedes the Israelite invasion and even the "Muslim conquests of the seventh century"⁷; he also notes that Palestine had an indigenous population "centuries before the first Hebrew tribes migrated to the area" (Troen 875, 877). Despite the assertions of these scholars, the earliest historical claim to this area will be disputed indefinitely. However, the lack of ability to solidify the truth of this sacred land's initial inhabitants does not discredit the reality that it holds meaning and truth for many indigenous groups.

The connection between early Israelites and Arabs to the sacred land is reflected in each of their cultures, traditions, and texts. And so, built upon both myth and spiritual connection, each indigenous group in and around the Middle East has fought over this sacred, holy space for centuries. Despite society's assumptions, which are based on

⁵ This Promised Land, set by the word of the Israelites' god, encompasses a large parcel of land boxed in from the north by the mountains of Lebanon, west by the Mediterranean Sea, south by the Red Sea, and the east by the Sea of Galilee.

⁶ Found in Antonius's 1938 volume *The Arab Awakening*.

⁷ Said, similar to Antonius, researched and wrote supporting pro-Arab claims to this contested area of land. He makes these claims in his work titled *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestine Question*.

collective history, many different groups do in fact hold claim and connection to the Holy Land. Understanding that this conventional belief is rooted in a hegemonic history, one where the conqueror writes the history book society learns from, the legitimacy of another group's claim to the same area, therefore, holds less power. In other words, the winner often writes history; so, how do we hear a holistic story with the losing side's perspective included? These are important, yet challenging, questions to ask of ourselves, as they break down the walls we have built in our psyche of certain issues in our world. This thesis is not only asking why we have walls, but it is also asking each reader to recognize the walls within their own lives.

From these relationships of indigenous groups to the sacred land they inhabit, a deeper connection between human and the natural environment is formed. This connection has roots in spiritual practices, rituals, and oral traditions, as seen in cave drawings, scriptural passages of the Torah, Quran, and Bible, tending to the land, and webbed into the legends of Native tribes. Labor, being a self-expression of man, is not simply a means to an end. In the context of tending one's land they feel a sacred connection with, labor becomes a meaningful expression of their human energy. The sacred connection lives on, year after year, in the experiences of indigenous peoples as they continue to draw their quality of life from the land they inhabit. As Cajete continues, a peoples' "sense of place" evolves as every generation contributes to the shift of the overall social dynamic (Cajete 4). For thousands of years, people have been shaped by their "direct and personal relationships to places" and landscapes (Cajete 4). That being said, an indigenous group's relationship with their sacred landscape is an essential thread of their identity. This is true because, "orientation [to sacred land] is essential for

indigenous people because each person belongs to a place” (Cajete 7). Identity of a people, like that of the early Israelites and Arabs, is connected to their orientation with the land in which they live and call sacred. Indigenous peoples are fully themselves, complete, by their connection to the land. It literally becomes a part of their identity.

That being said does a connection to the *sacred* make humanity *whole*? And if humanity becomes whole via the sacred, does the relationship between humanity and sacred land act as the model? If so, having a sense of place, belonging to a landscape, and knowing where to call home can make people feel a sense of “wholeness” (Selwyn 117). Modern political Zionist settlers of Palestine, now recognized by most as The State of Israel, reaffirmed this idea of interconnection between human and sacred land to create a sense of “wholeness” in individuals, or even an entire people. Focusing specifically on the Zionists, their reconnection to this sacred land was meant to regain some part of themselves lost over years of division and separation from it. Originally, the idea had a “strongly holistic ethic in which the ‘whole person’ was realized only within the encompassing framework of the nation organized on a basis of collective ownership and collective agricultural work” (Selwyn 117). Therefore, to regain a sense of “wholeness” for each of these individual Zionist settlers of Palestine, they had to feel connected to the sacred land through ownership and cultivation of food production. Wholeness, perhaps, is the ability to access power from physical relationships, such as that between human and land. Therefore, when we are separated from anything, people or land, are we less whole? Is a part of our identity lost without that sacred connection?

Drawing on sources such as Cajete, Selwyn, and others, I argue that the quality of life for people is not being met if they do not have a “theology of place” or a sacred land

to connect with. So, if a group of people is denied access to the very thing that makes them feel whole, are they being stripped of some part of their humanness, a humanness that acts as a thread, binding groups of people together and creating commonality of interests and needs? By denying access to land, are we denying access to the wholeness of humanity? And, are people who lack their wholeness of identity capable of forming positive relationships with those who have the connection, who are whole? Additionally, is the group denying access to the land also lacking in their wholeness?

As landscape has traditionally shaped groups of people in certain ways, it can be understood that there is a deep sacred interconnectedness between people and land. If humans define land as sacred, and therefore obtain their wholeness of being from that connection, a problem arises when they are disconnected from sacred land due to walls. A piece of their identity is divided when a barrier from this relationship is built. The result of this divide, therefore, is a lack of wholeness. Within this dilemma is a power structure of those with land, meeting the needs of their people, in stark contrast to those without access to land, resources, and basic mechanisms for survival. Created here are positions of people in relations to others, evoking levels of power based on something so seemingly simple as a connection to land. Humanity is of the land, henceforth honoring the sacred through interconnectedness with nature; it is in this relationship that wholeness or identity and quality of life are found. How, then, are people reacting to their own lack of wholeness due to separation from connecting to their land? Where is the justice in this disconnection of inherent interconnectedness?

Chapter 2

Historic Walls

To begin, it can be assumed that humanity has agreed that walls have consistently been a way for humans to divide themselves up. More simply put, the art of dividing is widely accepted and promoted in our culture. This ideology of divisions being normalized is strengthened through state building, especially when we see physical examples of these borders being expressed. Simply, we see walls and borders as “natural” and welcome them into society based on an ideology of accepting separation and division. However, my exploration of interconnection and relationships based on equal and restorative values complicates this accepted norm. Perhaps by considering human-made historic walls, we can explore why we have deemed division natural and normal. What causes humanity to erase the interconnection of relationship between the land, others, and us? Simply asked, why do we build walls?

One foundation of inquiry regarding divisions between humans lies in the history of wall building; therefore, it is important to step back many centuries to famous examples of walls and their purpose for being built. The story of walls is vast, woven into centuries of human conquests and movements across the earth. If humans draw some part of their wholeness, their identity, from a connection to sacred land, it would seem reasonable to want to protect that relationship. Could wall building be as minute as fencing in private property? On the other hand, who is to say that only one particular group identifies a strong relationship with that land; therefore, is the building of barriers to protect the relationship to the land, an act that fosters restorative respect as I have previously described? Or is the building of walls simply to exclude another group from their connection to the land and establish a singular ownership over that place?

Additionally, walls can be visually understood as symbols of dominance over the land, almost as if that group within the wall has some higher stature than those outside. “Walls,” from the perspective of Steikunaite, “are powerful symbols that tell us more about ourselves than we care to admit” (Steikunaite 2011). Whether to divide goods between individuals, stand as a symbol of economic wealth and protection, or to simply separate those within from those on the outside, the act of barrier building has been practiced, arguably, since the beginning of time. My aim is to understand who is building these walls and who benefits from their power, symbolism, and strength. Most importantly, and specific to the interconnectedness of people to people in this thesis, what does the establishment of a wall do to the relationship of humanity as a whole? Each wall has a story and it differs with the perspective of the person telling it. Therefore, by understanding the stories these ancient walls hold, we can begin to understand why humanity continues to build barriers, often without question.

Security is certainly a prominent reason for building walls. As scholar Mark Ehrman puts it, the story of building walls began in reaction to threats from opposing forces. “Ever since there have been invasions, there have been walls” (Ehrman 41). Territory proves vital to specific groups. Thus we can understand how one group’s claim to an area being threatened drives them to build partitions, barriers, and walls to protect the sacredness of their connection to the land from outside forces. Likewise, claimed land also proves vulnerable to outside forces, such as surrounding groups who perhaps lack their own bountiful resources. “Walls were built at strategic locations or to protect population centers, and usually made from locally available materials” (Ehrman 41). Walls demonstrate power, dominance, and a clear “ownership” of an area. Thus, it can be

concluded that one of the purposes for building walls is to protect what certain people have claimed.

So, when did we begin to see divisions between humanity in history? The oldest walls in history were built 11,500 years ago at the Gobekli Tepe temple in Urfa, Turkey (Mark 2009). Walls are commonly mentioned in congruence with cities in ancient texts, as seen in the biblical story of the Wall of Jericho. During 4500 BC, Mesopotamia's urbanized regions began constructing walls as forms of protection for their city (Mark 2009). Throughout history, the most common theme of wall construction is to protect cities, villages, and nations from outside invasions; "Walls have traditionally been built for defense, privacy, and to protect the people of a certain region from the influence or perceived danger posed by outsiders" (Mark 2009). The Great Wall of China, arguably the most famous wall in human history, is also the longest wall in the world. In total, the wall is 21,196.18 km and more than 2,300 years old (China Highlights). The wall was built by the hands of soldiers, peasants, and rebels, who pieced stone, soil, sand, and brick together to form this massive structure. The purpose of the wall, as an "integrated military defense system", has remained consistent throughout China's history (China Highlights). The wall also stands as a symbol for Chinese culture and national pride, having many legends and myths formed around the wall. Today, more than 70,000 people visit the Great Wall each day (China Highlights).

From 770—221 BC, also known as the Pre-Warring States Period, a Qi State duke built the first walls of China protecting the state from outside invasions (China Highlights). Before China was unified, there were many overlords within the territory, each fighting for land and power. Seeing the many claims to the land by these overlords

and the fighting that erupted from the power struggle, the desire to segregate groups from land was indeed present during the building of the Great Wall. According to *China Highlights*, the Duke of Qi ordered walls, built with flat stones, to be erected to prevent attacks from the Chu State. This wall created a domino effect of walls being built between every warring state in China, ordered by each overlord to protect their territory. Shortly after the unification of the state, the First Emperor of China from the Qin Dynasty connected the Great Wall, which secured the northern border. It was known as “Wan-Li Changcheng”, or “Ten Thousand Li Great Wall,” a “li” being a measurement of half a kilometer (China Highlights). The Han Dynasty, from 206 BC – 220 AD, lengthened the Wall to “protect Silk Road trade”, driven by economic factors (China Highlights). The physical wall that we see today, covering land in the Gansu Province, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Shaanxi and Shanxi provinces, Inner Mongolia, Hebei and Liaoning provinces, and North Korea, is the restorative work of the Ming Dynasty, from 1368-1644, and most recently updated with Badaling in 1957 (China Highlights). Interestingly enough, during the Qing Dynasty from 1644-1911, it was forbidden to build onto the Great Wall due to the fact that its original purpose was to keep out Manchurians, who made up the Qing Dynasty. Emperor Kangxi of the Qing Dynasty saw the construction of the Great Wall as economically unsound for his people and country, believing that protection for China was better found in international relationships and support (China Highlights). Ironically enough in the case of the Qing Dynasty, the very people the Great Wall was originally built to keep out ended up controlling what was in the wall for almost 300 years.

Moving further west, we see the famous example of an ancient wall in one of the oldest city in the world, Jericho. This wall is documented in sacred texts and gives an ancient face to the contemporary struggle between groups over the Holy Land (Wood, 2008). The book of Joshua tells the tale of the strife between the Israelites, who marched seven days around the wall, and the protected Canaanites, who relied on the strength of the wall around the city. This wall represented security for Jericho and her people, built grandly with three layers sloped upward towards the center of the city (Wood, 2008). Essentially, this wall appeared unreachable by human action...but the story does not end without the collapse of the wall, a result of a prayerful call upon god and a belief in his almighty power to bring the Israelites victory (Joshua 6:1-27). The physical presence of such a wall in ancient Palestine provides insight into the necessity for protection of this sacred space by multiple groups.

While military technology continued to advance during the use of walls as protection, the ability to keep regular people (not armies) out is still a function of walls (Ehrman 42). It is true that walls are designed to regulate the movement of people, blockading them from certain regions or areas for whatever reasons held by the powerful wall builder. But, as Steikunaite notes, “the story of our species is one of migration and we continue to defy barriers whatever the consequences” (Steikunaite 2011). Whatever this defiance is, it is rooted in something powerful that drives humanity to break down these physical barriers they come up against. Perhaps this desire comes from an innate interconnectedness between diverse groups of people to one another, acknowledging that their differences can be respected rather than feared.

Walls inspire a segregating “us and them” mentality (Steikunaite 2011). But officially, walls are erected as a statement of securing one side from the other. This is a prevalent theme of the Berlin Wall, a memorable and emotionally charged modern example of wall building. Christened “The Mauer” by its native country, this wall stood for over twenty-eight years as a divider of peoples and ideas (Ehrman 40). Barbed wire was first rolled out on August 13, 1961 as a mechanism for outlining a physical border where later in that same month the stone wall was built (Ehrman 42). The Berlin Wall stood as a symbol of “division and oppression” to the people, and ideologies, it divided (Steikunaite 2011). Ehrman calls this wall a symbol of the “grim oppression and apocalyptic conflict that was the Cold War” (Ehrman 40). Eventually, the Berlin Wall was restructured to include everything from electricity to dogs, ditches and watchtowers to buffer the Eastern side of the physical concrete block wall (Ehrman 43). The wall came down in on November 9, 1989 and with it, the psychological barrier of the Iron Curtain of the Cold War.

Understood clearly in the Berlin Wall example of physical barriers, walls are reminders of a failure to collaborate or dialogue with opposition. Steikunaite puts it more explicitly as walls being “the legacy of failed policies – desperate measures when political will for real solutions is non-existent” (Steikunaite 2011).

From these examples of walls in human history, it can be understood that the desire to divide groups from land or from other people is rooted in the fear of losing access to or control of a specific area. The Great Wall of China was continuously added to by the Dynasty in power at the time, the people who held power to claim ownership to pieces of land. The many walled cities of Ancient Europe stood as determinate symbols

of power and dominance of the current occupying Empire against invaders from the outside. While some walls may seem physical only, they often create a psychological barrier between both sides, as seen with the Berlin Wall example.

Walls, as many scholars have attested, are formed on the basis of political power and as a display of that power. But they also document an inability of groups to collaborate, have a dialogue of opposing views, and work towards a more fluid solution to live within the same region together, in a peaceful and reciprocating relationship. In this sense, I view walls as a temporary solution to problems rooted in a human desire to hold power over the other, despite the innate interconnection we possess. For example, we make so many assumptions as the years progress...as seen in Israel and Palestine with a firm division between state and de-facto power. Are these two groups actually innately separate? Or has the accepted ideology of dividing people based on different perspectives, ideologies, religions and doctrine held fast, perpetuating the stigma that we are not all human and belong to one another with a relationship that restores and highlights one another's diverse qualities? Seen in bio-diversity, the tree does not tell the bush to leave the forest because the tree has claimed that space for only trees. Instead the tree and bush and lichen live with each other and operate out of a restorative relationship with one another. This fluidity is within relationship and interconnection but is lost the moment a society normalizes the acceptance of divisions for the purpose of asserting dominance over others. How have we lost sight of similarities, and devalued diversity thriving in one place, so much that we resort to the physical barricading of people from land and their fellow humans? Going forward, this question is particularly important to ponder.

Chapter 3 Israel-Palestine

“The Middle East is distinguished in several aspects: 1. It is the richest area with natural resources on earth. 2. It has the most moderate and the best climate on earth. 3. It is the origin of all heavenly religions on earth. 4. It has the cleverest ordinary people led by the most ignorant people on earth. 5. In it the blind leads the sighted, the spy teaches the patriotic how to love his country, and the thief gives the honest person lectures in morality. Damn this area which I love.”⁸

As a preface for this very controversial and globally involved topic, I bring a passage from J.M. Coetzee’s *The Lives of Animals*, which conveys the very tenderness we feel when conversing about tough, polarizing, dividing issues:

Pardon me, I repeat...I know how talk of this kind polarizes people... I want to find a way of speaking to fellow human beings that will be cool rather than heated, philosophical rather than polemical, that will bring enlightenment rather than seeking to divide us into the righteous and the sinners, the saved and the damned, the sheep and the goats. (Coetzee 22)

Moving forward, I aim to bring this separation barrier between the State of Israel and the Occupied Territories of Palestine to the foreground to not further divide, but rather unite a community based on historical, political, social, and cultural factors. Please, allow me to make this move...

⁸ I am including this opinion from a Middle Easterner because I find it helpful, illustrating the identity and connection between the landscape, complexities of the region, and the beauty so many individuals identify with; an opinion found on Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/MeetTheMiddleEastUS/>.

The Jewish Torah, the Muslim Quran, and the Christian Bible are three sacred texts rooted in the Middle East. But, the land is not the only similarity among these texts and traditions; these three religions are monotheistic and “view God as creator, revealer, savior, and judge” (Johnson 4). Additionally, they share the same human lineage through Abraham by means of his sons Isaac (Jewish and Christian) and Ishmael (Muslim)⁹. Despite their many similarities, there have been moments in history where these three groups of people have been pitted against one another. In 7th Century Arabia, where Christianity, Islam, and Judaism all cohabitated, Muhammad anticipated an “acceptance and eventual conversion of the Jewish tribes to Islam” (Esposito 16). However, many Jews did not recognize Muhammad as a prophet and therefore fought against him in the Battle of the Ditch, where Islam proved physically stronger than the Jewish opposition. The result of this battle left a bad taste of Islam in many people’s mouths, thinking what Muhammad did promoted anti-Semitism. But, as Esposito points out, this tension between the two religious groups was based in political strife rather than theological or even ethnic prejudice (Esposito 17). The contemporary moments of dispute between these three groups occur because of a variety of factors. Thus, the conflicts between Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are not based only on religious differences. The multiple and complex relationships between these three traditions are exacerbated by the fact that they all continue to draw their identities from the same land.

Despite historic periods of peaceful coexistence in this region, within the last century we have witnessed very little peace and seemingly minimal efforts at coexistence. Clearly we have a pressing issue that deals with years of historical context convoluted by contemporary power struggles. The habitation of this 8,019 square mile

⁹ Esposito 6.

territory by groups held in tension creates a difficult understanding of what landscape means to people. As we saw in the First Chapter, connection to land is a piece of identity; so what does disconnection from land do to personal and collective identity? Before looking forward, we first must look at the historical context that has set up this contemporary division between Israelis and Palestinians.

Israel and Palestine: Our Shared History

The history of this small area is dense, complex, and ultimately rooted in a tradition of movements of people, ebbing and flowing, throughout time. For the purpose of furthering our contemporary understanding, I will start with a brief history of the important moments leading up to the drawing of the 1967 borders, which set up the area that is now the State of Israel. It is necessary to acknowledge that this is not where conflict of this region ultimately began; rather, the 1967 drawing of borders is a climactic moment, where two sides met on the brink of change. The ownership of this land is complex, as stated above, making the issue a rather dense subject to research. Going forward, it is necessary to note that the issues and conflicts that have since arisen can be traced back many years. History is one of our mechanisms through which we understand structures politically, militarily, and economically in our societies. It is our duty, therefore, to continue telling this history as to aid in holistically tackling the problems at hand.

The desire for a Jewish State became prevalent in the late-19th Century, when a secularist group of Jews professed the necessity for a landscape to call their own and a self-governance to nationalize their group. In 1896 a secular Jew named Theodor Herzl founded political Zionism, named for the hill Zion on which the Temple of Jerusalem

was built. Explicitly, I am limiting my focus of Zionism to the political rather than religious realm, as it benefits more towards the focus of this paper. “The aim” of political Zionism “is to create for the Jewish people a home in Palestine secured by public law,” otherwise understood as the return of Jews to the Land of Israel (Gelvin 52). Not surprisingly, given that Herzl was secular, political Zionism is a concept which does not find its roots in sacred texts. Instead, it calls for Jews to return to their homeland despite the traditional idea of waiting for the messiah’s coming to establish a Jewish state. There were Jews who opposed this movement, many of them living in Europe and America, who claimed that they “did not support (political) Zionism in part because they viewed Judaism as religious doctrine and not as a race (Grose, 1983),” which would require the coming of a Messiah to create a Jewish state (Pierce 415). From the teachings in the Torah, the establishment of a Jewish state has been widely opposed by the greatest rabbis and leaders of the Jewish faith throughout time.

From the position of the inhabitants of this area at the turn of the 20th century (91 percent of the population of Palestine¹⁰ being Arab and only nine percent Jewish)¹¹ many factors set the stage for conflict. After the Ottoman Empire was dissolved, the British and French agreed to parcel up the land in the Sykes-Picot Agreement, where Great Britain was to control Transjordan and Iraq.¹² In this agreement, Arab Scholar Ahmed states, the goal for Palestine was to be given international status. However, according to the Balfour Declaration of 1917 from Great Britain, “the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people” was the goal (Ahmed 1990). Within this very declaration,

¹⁰ The use of the name ‘Palestine’ refers to the area of Transjordan being contested over for the creation of a Jewish state after the dissolving of the Ottoman Empire’s control.

¹¹ Ahmed 1990.

¹² Ahmed 1990.

“almost every provision denied the right of the indigenous people of Palestine to self-determination” (Ahmed 1990).

The League of Nations, an entity created post World War I, allowed the British government a mandate over Palestine in 1922. The Mandate allowed for “provisions calling for the establishment of a Jewish homeland, facilitating Jewish immigration and encouraging Jewish settlement in the land” (Pierce 2011). A debate arose in the United States about this new agenda for Palestine. Massachusetts representative Henry Lodge advocated a pro-Zionist policy in the Senate at the time while Congressman Hamilton Fish III similarly advocated in the House of Representatives. This declaration was endorsed by the House and Senate and signed by President Harding on the 21st of September.¹³

Complicating this issue, Great Britain’s Winston Churchill visited Palestine to help carve out the borders of Palestine from the Ottoman Empire, all the while “assuring the Palestine Arab Delegation...that binationalism was a distant prospect and that Jews were not going to be the exclusive inhabitants of Palestine” (Sochen 72). This binationalism that Churchill referenced was expressed by historian Arnold J. Toynbee as a “highly explosive compound,” which was proven in the lack of follow through in British diplomats’ promises to all parties (Sochen 74). The British Mandate, accepted by political Zionists, was rejected by the Arabs, and, as Sochen states, the “foundation for future strife was laid” in this initial lack of collaboration (Sochen 72). As Jewish settlers continued to swarm the borders of Palestine under the Mandate, the price of land increased exponentially. The *effendi*, Arab landowners, profited off the increase in their economic power over the *fellaheen*, the “poor, landless Arab farmers,” as the price of

¹³ Pierce 2012.

land increased (Sochen 78). Sochen claims that lack of development of Jewish efforts to create a “good neighbor policy” with the Arabs was a severe downfall (Sochen 80).¹⁴

Given that control of the area referred to as Palestine was promised a multitude of times to a variety of different actors, the foundation for peaceful collaboration between these groups lacked stability. The recognition of Palestine as a home for the Jews, or for the Arabs, jumbled the process. This web of promises was all for the national interest of those pushing the Balfour Declaration, such as the political Zionists in Great Britain and the United States of America. For example, “Britain herself wanted Palestine. London believed that, by controlling Palestine, it could better secure the Suez Canal and maintain the puppet monarchy it had installed in Cairo” (Ruthenberg 159). An actual plan for the territory was not solidified, and therefore Great Britain promised it on a number of occasions for the benefit of many different groups. As Jonathon Schneer writes,

Palestine was not thrice promised. It was promised, or at any rate dangled as bait, four times: before the Zionists and the Arabs, before Picot by Sykes in the shape of an as-yet-unformed international consortium, and before the Turks, who would otherwise lose it as a result of war. (Schneer 368)

Clearly, the formal statement for ownership of the land was not made explicit. Therefore, the claim to the land was complex for all groups involved.

In 1930, the All-India Moslem Conference on Palestine declared that Palestine should not, and would not, be used as a “dumping ground for Jews of the entire world” (Sochen 76).¹⁵ Because of British dealings in India, and the Conference’s call for an end to the British Mandate and the revocation of the 1917 Balfour Declaration, Great Britain

¹⁴ “All local attempts at bridging gaps and creating trust across cultures never materialized”, states Sochen (Sochen 80).

¹⁵ Sochen pulls this quote from “The Jewish-Moslem Dilemma,” *Commonweal*, 12: 147.

began to restrict Jewish immigrant permits.¹⁶ All in all, the constant back and forth of Great Britain's commitment and promises to all parties involved was causing a lack of stability in the territory. "The borders," Journalist Lagerquist states,

Of the British Mandate of Palestine were no more real than such things tend to be: lines of ink on a map, in some places adhering to a body of water, but otherwise often unmindful of terrain, also of people, as was often the case in those vast expanses of the world carved up by Europe's imperial powers. (Lagerquist 62-63)

The reality that Lagerquist is toying at here is the lack of knowledge and understanding of territories, the people who inhabit them, and the cultural traditions and social relations of those people. When lines are drawn without knowledge of the intricacies within a space, internal frustrations and conflicts are bound to arise. Ultimately, this ignorance leads to conflict. Drawing back to the intimate connection of humans to their landscape, the result of the borders created denied this very relationship of people to land.

In 1939, the British government created the White Paper, which called for a specific limitation of Jewish immigration and restrictions for Jewish land purchases in Palestine. This Paper implicitly recognized the one million Arab people currently living in the area, who had lived there for many generations before. However, because it did not *explicitly* address the need to recognize those currently living on this land, its proposition for an "independent and democratic state in Palestine in 10 years," which would give control of Palestine to the Arabs by the year 1949, lacked significant strength (Pierce 416).

With the escalation of World War II in Europe shortly after the White Paper was commissioned, the conflict of Palestine fell off the global agenda for Great Britain and

¹⁶ Sochen 77

the United States of America. However, Jews continued to smuggle themselves into Palestine. As the growing influx of new immigrants added to an overpopulation of this small area, the British were unable to keep up with the building tension between Arabs and Jews.

At this time, Palestine was “populated by nearly a million Arabs who practiced de facto authority over the territory under Ottoman rule until the British took control of Palestine at the end of World War I” (Pierce 415). While pro-Zionist parties and conferences were held during this time, working to rally support from the United States for the creation of a Jewish state, there were also conventions from the other side. The Arab National League met in 1944, stating that “any approval of a Jewish state...in Palestine against the will of its native Arab inhabitants...is irreconcilable with the principles of democracy (Davidson 31)” (Pierce 417). Frankly, “both the Zionists and the Arabs of Palestine were in a conflict, and... a resolution favoring recognition of sovereignty over Palestine by either party would put the other at risk” (Pierce 417). On November 29th, 1947 the UN recommended a partition of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. One year later, the British forces left Palestine, ending the Mandate.¹⁷

In order to end hostilities and cultivate “respect for the sovereignty of all states in the area,” the U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 called for a withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories of Palestine (Friedman 1). At this point in the conflict, the division between Palestinians and Israelis was becoming more clear and explicit. Making this split more formal, David Ben-Gurion became the head of a pre-Israel government and then served as Israel’s first prime minister, beginning on May

¹⁷ Lagerquist 67

14th, 1948. On the other side, Arabs recognized the Palestine Liberation Organization, PLO, as the “sole legitimate representation of the Palestinian people” (Friedman 2). Even though the British Mandate was terminated, symbolizing the falling of a wall of the overall power dynamic from the outside, divisions were rapidly erupting within this small area of land between Jews and Arabs. The Six-Day War in 1967 led to formal lines dividing the new State of Israel being drawn. The basis for the conflict between Arabs and Israelis was firmly set up at this point and made more solidified by the backing of two large global powers, such as the United States and the Soviet Union.

A number of other events strengthened the division between the two contesting groups who drew their identity from this land. The Yom Kippur War of 1973 involved Egypt and Syria launching attacks in Sinai and the Golan Heights, surprising Israel on Yom Kippur. Geopolitically, the Arab oil embargo and a U.S.-Soviet “brinkmanship over the war” deepened the tension, resulting in the United States’ decision to flex its diplomatic muscles to work towards resolution (Friedman 2012). From the years 1973-1975, the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War remained intense. Henry Kissinger, the United States Secretary of State, attempted to calm the crisis resulting from the Yom Kippur attacks by holding negotiations in the form of bilateral talks. The hope within this peace process was to advocate for an Arab-Israeli settlement of pre-1967 borders. During this time, however, the diplomacy of U.S. leaders broke off as leadership positions change when President Nixon resigned and Yitzhak Rabin assumed power in Israel.¹⁸ The Palestine Liberation Organization, chaired by Yasir Arafat, was recognized as the “sole legitimate representation of the Palestinian people” by other Arab leaders in 1974 (Friedman 2012). From 1977-79, global leaders, such as U.S. President Carter, Israeli

¹⁸ Friedman 2012.

Menachem Begin, and Egyptian Anwar Sadat all expressed an “appetite for peace” (Friedman 2012). Meetings were held, resulting in the Camp David Accords and an Egyptian-Israel peace treaty, which no other Arab neighbors joined. Clearly, the intention for a peaceful solution would never be actualized when half of the parties involved were not a part of these talks.

Sadat was assassinated in 1982 and Israeli forces attacked the PLO in Lebanon. The U.S., this time lead by President Reagan, attempted a fresh start by calling on Jordan to collaborate with Palestinians in hopes of forming self-governance. Unfortunately, the work did not ever happen, and the conflict grew. The First Intifada¹⁹ occurred in 1987 and lasted until 1993, where the Palestinians erupted against Israeli occupation of and control over the West Bank and Gaza. During this time, Hamas²⁰ was founded by Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who called for “Israel’s destruction and the creation of an Islamist Palestinian state through violent jihad” in their 1988 charter (Friedman 2012). President George H.W. Bush, along with the Soviet leadership, calls for a Madrid conference in 1991 that included voices from Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine. 1993-1994 lead to The Oslo Accords, which were struck between Israel and the PLO from talks in Norway. These accords “recognize one another” and sketched out a five-year plan during which Israel would transfer control of the territories to a new Palestinian leadership. This Palestinian authority would then “crack down on terrorism before a final peace agreement” (Friedman 2012). However, these talks were only taken for face value; the reality being that neither side had taken physical steps towards positive change. As a result, “Israel was fed up with Islamic terror and dubious of the fledgling Palestinian

¹⁹ Intifada is defined as “the Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation” (Gelvin 273).

²⁰ Hamas, an organization founded during the intifada, is an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement (Gelvin 272).

Authority's ability to do anything to curb it, sealed off Gaza in 1994 and the West Bank 8 years later" (Ehrman 40). Overall, many Palestinians felt the Oslo Accords were a break in the momentum that they had achieved during the Intifada, and Rabin's agreement with the Israeli leadership was seen as a failure. A Jewish extremist eventually assassinated Rabin and the hopes for a two state solution continued to dwindle.

In the year 2000, back at Camp David, President Clinton hoped to flesh out issues brought up in the Oslo Accords with Arafat and Ehud Barak, Israel's Prime Minister. These issues included borders, security, settlements, refugees, and the Old City of Jerusalem; during these talks, however, the Second Intifada ²¹ violently erupted.²² One year after the terrorist attacks on 9/11/01 occurred in the United States, President Bush called for an independent Palestinian state amidst the US momentum towards war in Iraq. However, these steps led nowhere, as the peace process continued to prove unsuccessful in reconciling the two sides. Friedman notes that from 2007-2008, President Bush called for a conference, inviting both Israel and its Arab neighbors. Hamas, however, was not invited, even though their influence and actions were a significant part of the overall conflict. In 2008, Gaza was targeted by an Israeli military offensive, and as a result, the thread of communication for peace between Israel's Ehud Olmert and the Palestinian Authority's Mahmoud Abbas was severed. ²³

According to Friedman's timeline, President Obama secured a 10-month settlement freeze in 2009-2010. In the more recent years of 2011-2012, United States President Barack Obama and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu dialogued about the pre-1967 borders, although the negotiation was not well received by Israel. At the

²¹ This second Intifada lasts from 2000-2005 (Gelvin 273).

²² Friedman 2012

²³ Friedman 2012

same time the “Palestinians pursued statehood at the United Nations in lieu of talks” (Friedman 5). At this point in the chronological timeline, the interactions between Jews and Arabs in this land (and abroad) left less than hopeful thinking about a peaceful resolution.

Clearly seen in the events detailed above, this issue is a complex one. There are many factors, internal and external alike, that continue to complicate this conflict. Simply put, the conflict is not only about religion. Nor is it just about ethnicity, economics, environment, politics, or culture. Instead, it is more complex than the media portrays, quite convoluted by multiple factors from both Arab and Jewish paradigms. The region is intricately connected in a web of historic and contemporary factors, all attributing to this colliding conflict we see today.

It is impossible, I believe, to fully understand the complexity of this conflict without digging into history. This landscape, sacred to the three Abrahamic religions, has been transitioned throughout time to accommodate varying peoples. However, not until recent events has this sacred land become solely a topic of dispute, requiring a government-backed building of walls that act to divide certain groups from the land. While this wall may prove a physical point, it also acts as a symbolic gesture of power and privilege. Depending on your ethnic heritage, your position to the wall is laid on a spectrum of power to powerlessness. What does it mean to have a symbol of dissent within an area so important to a diverse conglomerate of peoples throughout history? How is this wall acting as a barrier not only to physical interaction of diverse cultures and traditions, but also interfering with the ability for just moments to occur? Is this oppression?

The Wall: The Fence: The Barrier

Called by many names, ranging from the Security Barrier, Anti-Terror Fence, Geder²⁴, or simply The Wall, the separation between the State of Israel and the Occupied Territories of Palestine has been in the works since 2002 (Ehrman 46; OCHA 1). The Israeli Cabinet agreed to allow a “continuous fence” to be constructed in June of 2002; and currently, according to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 62.1% of the wall has been built (OCHA 1). The construction follows the 1949 Armistice Green Line²⁵ and continues to cover more than twice of the initial agreed area (OCHA 1). The Green Line’s main goal was to separate the West Bank from Israel. However the current completed sections of the Wall have already breached this agreement invading West Bank areas and plan to isolate 9.4% of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem (OCHA 1). The barrier is made up of concrete walls, ditches, razor wire, fences, electronic monitoring systems, patrol roads, a buffer zone, and groomed sand paths, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA 1). In total, the complete wall is approximated to be 708km long (OCHA 1). In 2004, the International Court of Justice gave its Advisory Opinion, stating that the “sections of the Barrier which runs inside the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, together with the associated gate and permit regime, violate Israel’s obligations under international law” (OCHA 1). In this Advisory Opinion, the ICJ called for Israel to stop all construction inside the West Bank, take down the completed sections, and thus, repeal all legislation of that matter (OCHA 1).

²⁴ Hebrew for “Wall”.

²⁵ This armistice was a result of 1948 War.

The wall has allowed for fragmentation of the Occupied Territories of Palestine from greater Israel, and a severance of neighborhoods from each other, families and friends, urban areas, municipal services, work places, and agricultural land (OCHA 1). Because they must obtain permits to cross the barrier checkpoints, many people have suffered. Those who hold these permits can enter East Jerusalem through just four of the 14 total checkpoints around the city (OCHA 1). Many, unable to obtain these coveted permits, smuggle themselves into the city, looking for work.²⁶ Additionally, ambulances, fire trucks, humanitarian workers, and emergency responders, are impaired and held up by the checkpoints.

In their evaluations of the fence, government officials noted with some mixture of sympathy and amusement that it was making life difficult for natives living on either side of the border, many of whom had previously braved it to visit relatives, trade, or work land. They were less amused when those natives promptly dismantled some sixteen kilometers of the fence within the first two weeks of its construction.... as a model of rule, Tegar's Wall²⁷ proved prophetic. Sheathing the edges of the land, it became a metonym for that authority the government was so relentlessly asserting in the interior. (Lagerquist 65)

This wall is a physical barrier from individuals to their agricultural lands. Of the 150 Palestinian communities isolated from their land by the Wall, the ability to access this land is allowed through just 80 gates of which are, for the most part, only open during the harvest season (OCHA 1). During this season, which is approximately six weeks long,

²⁶ According to a 2011 study done by the Israeli Government Special Committee.

²⁷ The British first had the idea to build a wall, in this case a fence, to keep out Palestinian 'terrorists'. It was suggested by Sir Charles Tegar in 1938 and, as Lagerquist suggests, proves prophetic for the future of this issue.

the gates are only open for a limited period of that time (OCHA 1). Increasingly, an application process bars the access to this agricultural livelihood that so many people had survived on for hundreds of years before the occupation. The Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs shows that in the 2011 olive harvest, “about 42% of applications submitted for permits to access areas behind the Barrier were rejected citing ‘security reasons’ or lack of ‘connection to the land’” (OCHA 1). The result in this ban based on grounds that the farmer “failed to prove his ‘connection to the land’ to the satisfaction of the Israeli authorities” is a decline on labor-intense crops and a switch to low-value, rain-fed crops, which leads to a decrease in economic stability and security (OCHA 1). In fact, the decline in the livelihoods reliant on agricultural production was calculated in a satellite survey. In the districts of Tulkarm and Qalquliya, the “number of Palestinian greenhouses on the Israeli side of the Barrier declined from 247 in 2003 to 149 in 2010” (OCHA 2).

Other issues that the Barrier has created in these areas are in access to health care, education, markets and trade facilities in the City of Bethlehem (OCHA 2). Construction in Jerusalem has segregated neighborhoods, like Kafr ‘Aqab, from the urban center of the city, resulting in a lack of municipal services on that side which creates a “security vacuum” and allows for an increase in unregulated crime (OCHA 2).

According to International Law, under the General Assembly resolution 2625 of the United Nations Charter, self-determination is a right of peoples (I.C.J. 137).

Therefore, the Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice states that the “construction of the wall severely impedes the exercise by the Palestinian people of its right to self-determination and is therefore a breach of Israel’s obligation to respect that

right” (I.C.J. 137). Continuing, the wall impedes on the basic human rights to exercise the ability to work, to health, to education, and to an adequate standard of living (I.C.J. 137). The key is that the building of this wall is not necessary, according to the International Court of Justice. Based on customary international law and the conditions of the specific case of the State of Israel, the construction of such a wall is “not the only means to safeguard Israel’s interest against the peril invoked” (I.C.J. 138). The Advisory Opinion calls for all other states to “not render aid or assistance in maintaining the situation” resulting in the building of the wall (I.C.J. 138). On top of that, the present of the Wall, and the power it supports, is disintegrating the connection between Palestinians from their land; this is seen in the fact that the Israelis can disprove the connection of Arabs from their land, in the case of permits for the olive harvest.

The Troubles of Cohabiting

Michael Walzer is an American political theorist professor at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton and co-editor of *Dissent*. His essay titled *The Four Wars of Israel/Palestine* is published in this intellectual journal. According to Walzer, there are four different wars within the complex issue that is Palestine and Israel. The first two are Palestinian, one aiming to destroy the state of Israel and the other to establish an independent state alongside Israel which would end occupation of Gaza and the West Bank. The other pair of wars are Israeli, one fighting for the state of Israel within the borders set in 1967, the other is a war for “Greater Israel” including the settlements and occupied territories (Walzer 26). Because this issue is so complex, heavily convoluted by historic and contemporary influences, it is difficult to pinpoint which war is happening at what time and Walzer even argues that these wars happen simultaneously. It is directly

because of this complexity that our global community has such a difficult time understanding the truth of the situation. Instead, we often find people siding with one group without realizing the perspective of the other. Therefore, it is important to look deeply at each instance of violence or unpack each political move to sift through the surfacey symbols to find the underlying current that propels each action.

Whenever there is an attack against Israeli individuals, it is widely accepted as an act of terror. While there are radical groups whom use this method of destruction to get their message across, such as Hamas and Islamic Jihad, this is not the summation of the Palestinian liberation movement as a whole. This point is crucial. There are other groups within this movement who take very different actions to work towards their end goal. Already, we can see the complexity within just the first war that Walzer introduces. This sector of Palestinians could be more clearly located, but not only found, in the second war for an independent state alongside Israel. Walzer returns to 1967, when most Palestinians were fighting solely the first war against the establishment of a State of Israel. Presently, those fighting for a state alongside Israel have Walzer's support simply because it is necessary for protection, stability, and survival of a people to have the security of a state.

Before, when it was in the beginning stages of occupation, there was a denial that occupation was even occurring. However, due to certain events such as the continual building of settlements in these territories and the declaration by the Prime Minister Menachem Begin that the whole lands were the "Land of Israel," a shift occurred in the movement, what Walzer identifies as the "ideology of conquest and settlement" (Walzer 27). So, because of these instances, it seems necessary for Palestine to seek a secure state

of their own. During the first intifada of 1987 in the West Bank and Gaza, a call for this independent state alongside Israel was made. In 2000, when the intifada gained life again, it moved beyond the relatively peaceful struggle to a violent fight for the Occupied Territories.

From an Israeli perspective, the war against terror is the main reason so many people are fighting. In 2002, 95% of the reservists in the Israeli army showed up, Walzer argues, believing that they are fighting for their country's security and safety from the terrorists (Walzer 28). This third war is similar, grounded in morality, to the second war. Both of these movements are for the establishment and protection of each respective sides' families, homes, and institutions. However, to further complicate this war, Walzer introduces the problems that crop up when you are fighting to protect Israeli homes that are on the "wrong side of the green line" (Walzer 28).

So what does this all mean in the context of a real world example? As activist and author Deborah Rohan Schlueter shows in her book *The Olive Grove: A Palestinian Story*, the lives of people have been and continue to be radically changed by this barrier. This fictional narrative is based on the very real, very tangible pain felt by the Palestinian Moghrabi family during the creation of the State of Israel. Beyond the separation from their land and division from ancestral ties and traditions, this account is a culmination of the complexities involved in a larger global issue. The British power, the Ottoman Empire, and the economic and commercial factors involved radiate through the voice of Kamel, a prominent figure in the old city of Acre, or Akka. For centuries, this classic Palestinian city housed Muslims, Christians, and Jews. Kamel grew up with the kindest neighbors, who just happened to be Jewish, but their religious identity was not a topic of

dissent until the distinction between religious tradition was made a focus. It was not a problem, until the sides between Judaism and Islam were drawn. “The only thing that could hurt me more than losing my past, more than losing the land that defines us as a people, is to see my own children feel the pain of statelessness. The pain of not belonging anywhere” (Rohan Schlueter 425). From this story of a Palestinian farmer, losing their olive trees from the destruction of the land as a result of conflict, it is clear the personal effects the situation has had on many. The division created has impacted each life, on both sides of the barrier. So, why should we care about this ever-evolving landscape, tainted by the motives of various actors, and made immensely more complex by the identities of so many groups of people? Why should we care about Israel and Palestine?

Chapter 4 Divisions and Reconnection

Coming back to poet Theo Horesh, whom I presented at the beginning of this project, I would like to reiterate a few key lines from his work:

To see myself in all these roles is to recognize my interconnectedness and in recognizing my interconnectedness try to see a path beyond mutually assured destruction.

To see myself in all these roles is to recognize my separateness and in seeing my separateness try to find a way to come together.

I am all of these roles because I am human and in being human cannot help but be all things.

These thoughts tie the interconnectedness of people to people and people to land, which I addressed in the first chapter, to the purpose of this thesis, which is to understand the impact walls have on humanity. Additionally, Horesh proposes the idea that seeing himself in the other allows him the space to recognize the separateness between perspectives while also seeing the path that connects these perspectives; the most compelling piece of this complex web is humanness, which we all share, and that is so vividly portrayed in this poem. Being human, enabled to connect with other humans and to recognize similarities that tie us to one another, is the vitality of living. Being all things, interconnected yet still distinct in our own right, we become better acquainted with those with whom we share the world. And furthermore, by coming to understand and respect the paradigm through which others see the world, we become better able to thrive as a community of souls sharing humanness. We are connected, to each other and to that which brings us life. Let us not forget that fact.

Through the research done in this work, I have come to see that interconnectedness in relationships of people to their land and people to other people is an important thread of identity. According to the Earth Charter, in order to have a sustainable future we must first look to the relationships in our lives to introduce balance, harmony, and peace. Essentially, we need to “recognize that peace is the wholeness created by right relationships with oneself, other persons, other cultures, other life, Earth, and the larger whole of which all are a part” (Earth Charter 4). That being said, disconnect of that relationship hinders people from a complete wholeness of their identity. Wholeness to me, in the sense of being fully connected, cannot occur when people are divided from important threads making up their identity. So, what is to be done for groups who cannot reach their whole identity due to a division or lack of connection to that which makes them whole? Explicitly, what do walls do to our identity?

Herbert Kelman, in his literary piece titled *The Interdependence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities: The Role of the Other in Existential Conflicts*, presents the idea of prejudice and the interconnectedness of identities of supposedly opposing groups. He introduces Gordon Allport’s 1954 work about prejudice, identified in the context of two opposing groups living in conflict. Allport proposes that in order for prejudice to be reduced, commonality must be found between the opposing groups from an equal playing field, or what he calls “equal status contact” (Kelman 582). This idea of having a common goal to pursue, because of and able to retain the distinctions between two groups, presents a way to transcend previous divisions.

As seen in the detailed history discussed in the third chapter, the interaction between Israelis and Palestinians during the creation of the State of Israel was largely

negative. And yet, these two groups share a commonality, an extremely personal connection to the same area of land. If they share this commonality, how are we still having a conversation about their division? Why are they pitted against one another? This interconnectedness to the land, which had the potential to initially draw each side to each other, has further divided them. The very piece of each groups' identity, which makes them more whole, lies in the fragmentation created by their division from that land, enhanced by the opposition of the other group. Restated, the disconnect between these two groups seen in a lack of dialogue between everyday citizens and neighbors of distinct perspectives and the general opposition to each other's existence in this place, has eliminated the chance to reconnect the land and people to each other. Ultimately, in my view, a reconnection based on that commonality would establish wholeness in both Arabs and Jews once more.

In Kelman's opinion, in order for peaceful cohabitation to occur in the same land there needs to be a "development of a larger, transcendent identity" which encompasses, but does not eliminate the distinctions, of both Palestinians and Israelis (Kelman 586). Horesh echoes this call in his poem when he places himself in the position of each actor, understanding where perspectives are formed, and respecting their distinctions, while ultimately working towards finding a common goal. Instead of calling for the two groups to put aside their historical struggles for national identity and culminate as one group, Kelman proposes a transcendent identity that not only respects but also fortifies the separate identity of both groups under an umbrella of overall unification. Explicitly, he suggests that the "transcendent identity could take the form of belongingness to the same land, the land that Palestinians call Palestine and that Israelis call Eretz Yisrael," which

supports my earlier claim that sacred connection to the land is shared between these two groups (Kelman 587). As Kelman notes, the relationship to the land is the root in the national identity narrative for both Israelis and Palestinians. Additionally, for me, it acts as another thread making each group whole. Since identity is drawn from the connection to the land, neither of these groups can truly be whole without this crucial piece. And, because of the similar separation from that piece, the ability to fully grasp their identity is unattainable without the acceptance of another group's similar connection to the land.

But, since each group's claims to this land are exclusive, they do not allow another group to make similar connections to the same land. "This exclusiveness of each group's national identity is embedded in a pattern of negative interdependence," Kelman states, which acts as road block for the possibility of a shared, transcendent identity to be actualized; essentially this negative interdependence hinders the process of dialogue and connection between the two groups because "each side perceives the other as a source of its own negative identity elements" (Kelman 588). Simply put, the identity of one group is a threat to the other and eliminates the possibility of sharing a transcendent identity of similar connectedness to the land. From the same genial line, these Abrahamic people share a unique relationship to the land that intricately ties them to one another. These identities of Palestine and Israel are held in opposition of the other, but through acceptance of a shared history and connection to land, they can both become whole. But, how does this restorative relationship become possible?

For Kelman, the next step is to remove the negative connotation attached to each group's identity. This, he states, is the only way for Israelis and Palestinians to relate and identify the interconnectedness between them. If asserting that "one's own identity

requires negating the identity of the other,” there is a fragmentation of that initial identity (Kelman 593). Since the success of one group is seen as a weakness of the other, the separateness of each group negatively impacts each side; it is a political tug of war game. Kelman suggests heavy negotiating to restructure the relationship between Palestinians and Israelis, both in the formal and informal setting.²⁸ Identifying points of similarities that fortify the other and strengthen distinctions at the same time could formulate a more positive interdependence between Israelis and Palestinians. Kelman sees this solution as completely legitimate and possible, and I would have to agree (Kelman 598).²⁹ Additionally, he supports the idea of a single country that would allow “the two societies to pursue more effectively their functional interests in such domains as industry and trade, public health, environmental protection, management of water and other resources, and tourism” (Kelman 587). While I am not prescribing a solution for this current conflict, I agree that the mechanism of dialogue on an equitable playing field would be a positive step towards peace and moments of justice. That being said, in order for the wholeness of Israeli and Palestinian identity to be actualized, a shared connection to the land needs to be seen as a common goal that can formulate a transcendent identity for all.

Without finding this root that can bind these groups to each other, a significant piece of their identity cannot be fulfilled. So, it is important to understand the continual consequences of divisions from the inherent interconnectedness of people from land and people from others. What do the physical and psychological barriers of walls do to us, as individuals who share humanness? Who is left on the outside, not benefiting from the

²⁸ Kelman 596.

²⁹ Allport strengthens this idea of positive interdependence from his “equal-status” interactions, which would allow constructive solutions that would accommodate each side in the solution and peace process (Kelman 598).

barriers created, and who is protected, remaining securely on the *right* side of the wall? Additionally, it is important to incorporate the factors beyond the *physical* wall that have impacted society. The dichotomy of these physical and metaphorical walls is profound.

Physical walls are often made of strong material, such as brick or concrete, perhaps even incorporating barbed or electrical wire encircling the top; because of these materials, physical walls are difficult if not impossible to cross, knock down, or dig under. Therefore, walls enforce a physical limitation to people in a space. These people are kept *out* or kept *in* by the physical wall, which may hold a wealth of resources or a desert wasteland. Metaphorical walls, on the other hand, are more difficult to detect, especially when an individual does not experience them in their everyday life. Often times we see these metaphorical walls fade into the background because they have become such a common thread in society. The gender ceiling, racial divides, age requirements, linguistic barriers; every one of these “walls” can be seen in our world today. The only difference metaphorical walls have from physical walls is that these barriers are not made out of barbed wire or 30-foot high stone. Instead, they are often transparent. And yet, that characteristic in no way limits their restraint they can have on people. As I have stated in the above chapters, when we accept these divisions, physical and metaphorical alike, the basis for interconnection is eliminated. And as more and more physical walls become normal, to divide instead of connect, they slowly manifest into metaphorical separations in society. Walls, physical and metaphorical alike, become normalized.

Both physical and metaphorical walls divide, equally stopping us from looking one another in the eye. The Lithuanian philosopher Emmanuel Levinas says that the

connection human beings experience when they see eye-to-eye is transcendent, it is a moment when justice happens; one is able to pass from themselves, the physical body they inhabit, into the body of the other. Because the other's face is expressive, it has the power to draw an immediate reaction from the receiver of that expression. Explicitly, what is seen in another person's *unguarded* eyes, acting as the windows into their soul, can have a great emotional impact on the other. Levinas says we feel "command" and a "summons" from the defenseless expression of the other (Bergo). Face-to-face relationship, as Levinas calls this interaction, becomes the event of being within another person's expression, connecting mutual belonging to the other. As a reminder, this use of the term "relationship" is the same as in the first chapter: relationship is restorative and should make each party more whole. So, how can we tell we have mutual belonging when walls are put up? When one looks into another's gaze and does not find that experience of belonging, it can either be inferred that they do not see their worthiness of human connection, or pertaining to this thesis, there is a wall up meant to divide from the other because of fear. There is a difference between looking and really seeing, experiencing mutual humanness, and making a joint connection rather than a division rooted in fear of the other.

From the Levinasian transcendence between beings, conclusions can be drawn that a lack of an expressive connection can separate humans from their innate desire to belong to, and with, each other. If this is true, the general assumption that humans have based on wall building for generations wavers. Therefore, it is within the capability of those who built these walls to ultimately tear them down. Just as it is within our power to break down these walls, it is also within human power to have moments of transcendence

with the other. Perhaps without these concrete structures blocking the Levinasian transcendence of eye-to-eye interaction, we might move from the other-ness to a deeper connection. Bergo refers back to the demand and summons components of a Levinasian expression and says that, “the demand the face makes on me (described phenomenologically as the ‘I’) is unavoidable, at least in its coming to pass” (Bergo). We are called to the other from this unguarded gaze, connecting our eyes and discovering the belonging we share as humans. This interconnectedness parallels a deeper understanding of the other’s way of life.

Therefore, how can we fully understand the actions, cultures, religions, and languages of the other if they are physically blocked from our gaze? How can we be like Horesh and put ourselves in the shoes of the other if we are focused only on separating ourselves from them? If justice is about meeting each other’s gaze, how does either side meet in an equal setting? For Levinas, equality is found in the unguarded gaze between people. Walls, then, are the structures that blind us from the human connection we share. Therefore, these connections made between each other ultimately reinstate justice and peace as a center of society and can break down the barriers, physical and metaphorical, that have always been seen as crucial.

If humanness is common and shared between all people, why do we divide? For obvious reasons, stated in the history of classic walls above, the fear of the “other” often drives people to create divisions. But, can we look deeper into this ideology of fear to finally eradicate this root that acts to divide us all? Is there something we do not fully understand, which results in an overall inability to see what connects people to each

other? Are we simply afraid we will not find the shared humanness in the other, or are we afraid that we will?

From *The Sukkah of Shalom*, by Arthur Waskow, we can learn about vulnerability and the space it creates to build relationships between people. Waskow's example of relationship building is from the tradition of Judaism; this tradition draws upon another connection between all peoples of this land, as descendants of Abraham. A sukkah, from the Jewish festival of Sukkot, is a fragile structure made to last for about one week during harvest season. This little hut is designed to be vulnerable to time and space, standing for just one week and allowing rain, wind, and starlight to leak through its roof (Loeb; Waskow 106). This structure is the opposite of protecting, as it is totally incapable of providing security from outside forces should they invade. But, instead it is specifically designed to allow peace, *shalom*, to enter into those living within; this peace acts as a mechanism for remembering what humans share. Humans are all vulnerable. This is true of the most wealthy, most educated, politically powerful, and physically strong people in the world, as not even these shields can protect them from acts of sublime force (such as mortality). Humanity has focused so entirely on building strong walls between one another that it has forgotten the very vulnerability that Waskow argues brings peace, this *shalom*.

The sukkah creates a space where both minds and bodies are vulnerable to new ideas and elements; this vulnerability allows hope to grow, as living in a state of openness makes the "simple truth" visible (Loeb; Waskow 110). During the traditional week of living in this shelter, Jewish beliefs show that one lets go of "not only the rigid walls and towers of our cities, but also our rigidified ideas, our assumptions, our habits, and our

accustomed lives” in this world (Loeb; Waskow 107). We are pushed out of the security that walls and towers, traditions and regulations, provide and stand under the sukkah open to the possibility of differing and opposing perspectives. Under this shelter, where all come together as equal participants, interconnection is remembered and realized. Is this where our wholeness lies?

As Waskow mentions, our culture has little time and space for a sukkah-mentality, deeming this reflective way of life weak and easy to destroy. But, without the physical and mental vulnerability the sukkah provides, our culture tends to refrain from drawing upon new, uncomfortable ideas; our walls remain up to the “outside” world and refuse to let the perspectives of others influence our societies (Loeb; Waskow 108). What Waskow is getting at here is that in periods of extreme vulnerability, such as the Holocaust or 9/11 attacks, we could lean into vulnerability as a response to violence. To simply deny the human characteristic of vulnerability is to reject a part of the overall human identity. So, in times like these, Waskow implores that we respond with vulnerability instead of rigid and forceful opposition to weakness. To deny that we are vulnerable is the very space in which we sever the ties that bind us all together. This is not to say that vulnerability resolves these horrendous events, but by looking back in history, there are moments where rigid and forceful tactics perhaps shaped the structures that led to these events initially.

By reflecting on the structural violence created over years of refraining from vulnerable relationships, we can ask ourselves some pertaining questions: “Have we ourselves had a hand in creating the pain? Can we act to lighten it? Can we create for ourselves a sukkah in time, a sukkah of reflection and renewal, as well as recognizing the

sukkah of vulnerable space in which we actually live?” (Loeb; Waskow 110). This is a challenging way to interact amongst distinct groups of peoples, particularly because we tend to refrain from that which we do not understand. Not knowing if this new and different way of life is, in fact, a threat to our own lives, we shy away from the vulnerability that allows us to experience the “other” for ourselves. But, as Waskow asks, is the physical and mental barrier of strong walls necessary to put up between people? Perhaps on the basis of humanity being afraid of the “other”, but not in the sense of seeing it as a common thread we all share. Waskow challenges us to define the world in a different way, one where walls and fences “that must be built ever higher, ever thicker, ever tougher” are no longer necessary (Loeb; Waskow 110). Through living next to the “other”, sharing space and place, swapping ideas and perspectives an “open weave of compassion and connection” would shine through this vulnerability; if we live in an “open sukkah” of the mind, amidst others doing just the same, how different life would be (Loeb; Waskow 110)? Would, then, we finally encounter shalom?

Personally, I believe vulnerability has its positive results. At the same time, I recognize that situationally, issues should be gauged by the benefits or consequences of solutions formed from vulnerability. We need to respond realistically but not on the basis that we already know what, or who, the other is and how they will react to certain events. These assumptions, frankly, are the foundation for the current divisions in society. All in all, a better way to respond to events may or may not be with a “sukkah” mindset, but we need to start incorporating that narrative into our resolution response repertoire. As seen in our world today, rarely do we chose to open ourselves up and instead, we rely on force as a prominent way of action. My question for this response is, is it even within our

current capabilities to restructure how we interact with the “other”? Can we incorporate vulnerability into our process of conflict-resolution? Or, are we doomed to continue along the same path and never find interconnectedness?

These questions are largely to create creativity in the minds of the reader, and to inject some critical analysis of the “sukkah” mentality Waskow has produced. At the same time, there are real-world examples that pertain to the very response in which I have outlined above. These stories, where vulnerability has been accepted and ultimately, worked to form a bond between two distinctly different people, prove as exemplary forms of human interaction based on respect, connection, and positive relationships.

First, this is a story from a dear friend who continually experiences, personally and with her family, walls discriminating her race and religion. Flying into the State of Israel, as a Palestinian-American, is never simple; there are hours of holding in security where questions are asked to determine whether the “safety”³⁰ of the entire state can be ensured. This process is even more grueling if the individual is a young man who studies mechanical engineering. These factors are major red flags for the militant guards standing watch over international flights and charged with the task of questioning individuals whom wish to enter the state of Israel. This young man, arriving at the airport, is placed into the holding area because of his physical characteristics...ready for a delayed entry into the State, he moves into the room where security would make inquiries about the purpose of his visit. But, a Levinasian exchange interfered this dehumanizing process as an Israeli Head Guard walked in. He looks at the man’s last name on his passport and, to his surprise, asks about the health and whereabouts of his grandfather. The guard

³⁰ In this sense, “safety” implies a bias of security based on an individual’s ethnicity and religious identity. If this identity proves opposite then the basis of said State, the person is then held into question and potentially seen as a threat.

mentioned knowing him a long time ago and then allows the young man to enter Israel in a record time of just 30 minutes.

This story shows the power of interpersonal relationships, exemplifying how vulnerability can create a space where connections between people are made. The fact that this structure of security, built to protect the State of Israel and also act as a symbol of political and regional power, was dissolved in one simple moment of recognition is profound. Despite the soldier being Israeli and a Head Guard, he still acknowledged the young man as more than just the three red flags his papers showed. Instead, this young man was the grandson of a dear friend from the old days, when the structure of power did not cripple relationships between people of distinctly different ethnicities, religions, or experiences. Levinas would inject that through this moment of connection, human to human, a sense of belonging overpowered the structural violence that was working to disconnect them. Because of the gaze between the young man and the old guard, the walls between them were vanquished in that moment of justice. The recognition that this young man was indeed human shook the powerful assumption that divisions protect; additionally, this connection produced a residual byproduct of positive relationship between two people previously separated from understanding the other's perspective.

Another story pertaining to openness and vulnerability as a mechanism for inspiring positive change is one from Ben-Ami, a liberal Israeli. Recently, Ben-Ami started working with a Palestinian tour guide, taking tourists around Israel and to the West Bank. Through his work and interests, he began asking questions about the tension held on both sides of the wall:

I have to be honest with what I see,” said Ben-Ami “what I see is a country where two societies live, and they ignore one another. People travel here without passing through the sphere where the alphabet is different from their own. They turn on the radio, they hear music they don’t like, they immediately switch to the music they do like — or to global pop music. That is another way in which Lorde’s music is an asset here. It’s present on both sides of separation barrier.³¹

Ben-Ami found similarities between himself, an Israeli from Tel-Aviv, and Rasha, an Arab-Israeli from Haifa, through music. This commonality was a way to connect with one another and share a transcendent identity, which Kelman calls for. “By the time Rasha came, it was less about Israeli versus Palestinian. It was more about all of us making music, and breaking down the dichotomies,” Ben-Ami said. “I thought of her less as a Palestinian and more as an 18-year-old, and I felt that I could learn a lot from that.”³² Because of the interconnectedness between the two, despite their distinct differences of religious or ethnic identity, a relationship was formed. Again, this story shows the hope that walls can be broken down through positive interpersonal connection.

An important ingredient aiding the impact that vulnerability in relationship building can have is dialogue. The only way that I can see our world creating peace and prosperity, in an equitable fashion, is by instilling an open line of communication. When people of different backgrounds, specialties, and perspectives come together and share in discourse, with open minds and hearts, a deeper connection is formed. Additionally, for this open line of communication to occur, compassion must be involved, as Fr. Greg Boyle consistently states. Compassion imparts empathetic emotion on the “other,”

³¹ Quote from the podcast and article about Ben-Ami’s inspiration for peace building between Israelis and Palestinians with the use of Lorde’s music (Ghert-Zand 2015).

³² Quote from podcast and article in The Times of Israel written by Renee Ghert-Zand (2015).

binding the sides together. Compassion comes from within, from the very core of our being that knows and desires the belonging of ourselves with, and in, others. However, the differences that walls highlight bring us to the very reason why compassion is so difficult to practice. Walls tell us to separate because we are different, but compassion screams at humanity to remember their belonging to one another. As Fr. Boyle says, “If we love what God loves, then, in compassion, margins get erased. Being compassionate, as God is compassionate, means the dismantling of barriers that exclude” (Boyle 75). Compassion literally erases borders, tears down walls, and eliminates divisions. Compassion, simply, unifies.

To me, this is where justice works in our communities. Discourse does not have to rely solely on the physical communicative skills which linguistics allow. However, emotions become a significant part of the equation, allowing individuals of distinct backgrounds to form relationships with others. Reuniting the two sides of the wall is fruitful, in my eyes, when an open line of communication is able and willingly used and when both parties feel compassion for the other.

Most importantly, this idea of discourse and open dialogue does not blend the two sides together. Instead, this method uncovers the parallel complementarity that results from the inherent connection of two people. When you bring two different people together, you do not melt them to one another but instead understand their unique characteristics and acknowledge where they individually come from. Not respecting diversity can lead to greater divisions and even possibly violent conflict. This strife stems from the normalized acceptance that differences cannot come together, intermix, and

form a positive union. Instead, by breaking down the walls in society, an innate human desire to belong to one another comes forth.

This does not mean that we all mimic the most desirable characteristics demonstrated by a certain group of people. However, it means that we allow the two worlds to interact and let the parallels complement one another. If one side has an opposing perspective on a particular subject, let them speak their mind. Hearing the other side's opinion is the only way we can actually come together in peace. This is not a melting pot where we will eventually create a uniform soup, tasting the same with each bite. Instead, this is the dinner in general; there are proteins and vegetables, grains and fruits of the earth, which all contribute to fulfilling a certain need in the health of the overall meal. This is the combination and complementation that each food (distinct culture) brings to the table. We should not add all ingredients into one pot and stir. In addition, turning up the heat definitely does not help, as it further melds the foods together, which causes the loss of each distinct flavor. Instead, the perfect dinner, much like the ideal society, should be a complimentary relationship between differing opinions, perspectives, and ways of life. Indeed, it is important to keep these unique qualities of each culture and value the overall diversity.

With dialogue rooted in this diversity, there are important perspectives each culture brings to the table. By having a diversity of values and beliefs we allow each creative mind to flourish. Instead of allowing these differences to create barriers between us, why not allow them to create a more holistic way of thinking? What would our world look like if we allowed each individual's gifts to shine? In my view, we have a better chance of establishing this ideal society by choosing to value diversity rather than

accepting the divisions we have in place today. Additionally, knocking down the wall does not mean equalizing the individuals in this new environment. This is not a factory, producing exact replicas of the most ideal form of human being. Instead, we are allowing those whom have been left on the outside of these dividing walls the ability to flourish in an open and inclusive society. By valuing the gifts of all individuals, we are diversifying our current system and fostering a more productive and prosperous society.

Before this inclusive and diverse world can be appreciated, we must allow each group to speak about their experiences. We must try to see the wall from both sides and understand the paradigm through which they express themselves and how they view the world. In the case of this project, it is important to hear the perspectives from the Israelis and the Palestinians alike. We often hear how the establishment of a State for Jewish people heals thousands of years of diaspora and a detachment from their full identity. When viewing the physical wall that divides Israel from the Occupied Territories from the Israeli side, the stone is clean and gray. It represents the distinction of a land where Jewish peoples can connect with their historic and religious roots. On the other side, or how the Palestinians view the wall, graffiti and artwork cover every inch of stone. Each word, drawing, and stencil tells a story of entrapment, dehumanization, historical repetition, and oppression. For Palestinians, the wall reminds them of connections torn away by division, and a constant symbol of their powerlessness.

Ultimately, this wall represents very different feelings for those who are liberated and those whom are oppressed by its presence. The point I am trying to make is that failing to recognize this difference in experience is unjust and ultimately, causes great harm to communities of people. Therefore, we must actively work to eradicate disparity,

and bring together (in an equitable fashion) these two experiences. Because, when both groups share a connection to the same sacred land, and fail to recognize the importance of that connection in the identity of the other, divisions are inevitable. So, how do we move forward, with a pursuit of eradicating injustice and promoting peace for all? How do we ensure each voice is heard?

For example, for those being oppressed by the presence of this wall, how can we move forward and allow them an equal opportunity to pursue happiness and fulfillment? These structures, physical and mental alike, put in place to contain the Palestinians in these areas limit their ability to contribute to their community. They have no mobility, no opportunity to move from this system of oppression, so what do we see them doing?; literally anything that will draw attention, or give them a temporary feeling of power. This is why we see young children trying to blow out part of the Wall, throwing stones, and violently attacking persons of Israeli distinction. They are fighting to survive but retaliating in drastic, negative ways that only increase the division between Israelis and Palestinians. These frustrated Palestinians are fighting individual Israelis, but are actually expressing frustration with the institutions that oppress them. The institution that bars them from living their lives fully, in ways they would like to and are inherently rightfully entitled, is what they are angry with. But, how do you attack an institution and structure of power when you have no power yourself? You fight anyway you can, by attacking individual Israelis, hoping the government and policy makers feel pain as a byproduct of the physical pain of the Israelis being hurt.

And this frustration with the current situation is happening in the reverse context as well, where Palestinians are targeted and attacked. As I have stated before, the

constant reminder of the “other” as negative to one’s own identity removes the ability to belong to each other. Because of this constant separation rooted in fear and hatred of the “other,” this wall will continue to stand between Israel and Palestine until the connection is understood and valued. This is not just, this is not right, but this is the reality. So, how do we change this reality? How do we get 10 year olds to stop chucking things over the separation wall, hoping to hurt one of those “bad guys” on the other side? Can we stop 13 year olds from getting shot in the head on their way to school? How do we get people to use compassion as a weapon, rather than resorting to violence to feel like they will be heard?

First things first, we talk. We share in the pain and suffering, happiness and joys. The wall as it stands today, has acquired layers and layers of pain. When we dialogue, we work on taking down these layers. It is a slow, grueling process that requires respect for all individuals involved. When working to establish positive and inclusive systems, we cannot pick and chose what perspectives are important. Each perspective must be heard, which means that the 90 year old Arab who has tilled the land for his entire life has just as much of a right to speak as the young Israeli who has never had a positive encounter with a Palestinian because of the uniform she wears as a soldier. By giving each member a voice and place in the dialogue, the layers slowly peel away. Once these barriers are taken down, we can finally look one another in the eye and have the Levinasian exchange that reminds us of our shared humanness. As Zoughbi Zoughbi says, “There is no future in the Middle East without restorative justice”. These mechanisms for restorative justice do not holistically solve the institutional and structural violence, but they are a step on the right path of a long journey of creating just systems. This step wipes a portion of the

complex issue away and provides a moment of human relational belonging that we all experience, but sometimes don't value, because our differences shine brighter than our similarities. So, we tear the wall down, look one another in the eye, child to adult, soldier to mother, politician to schoolteacher, refugee to settler, Jew to Arab, tourist to rabbi, and remember how we all share a sacred connection to each other through our humanness. We realize that there is a part of our identity in the other. We all just want to be whole again.

Conclusion

The ideologies we consistently refer back to when creating policies and establishing systems that divide should be held into question. Is the ideology we base our acceptance of separation, division, and wall building on one we wish to continue to rely? Or, is this ideology no longer helpful in our contemporary setting? Working towards a common goal, or as Allport calls it, sharing a commonality, establishes hope for the future. One in which each voice is heard, respected, and valued. At this point in our world, we have come to an important moment. We can chose to further divide, resting in our comfortable acceptance of divisions, or we can restructure our systems regaining the interconnectedness we share through our transcendent identity, humanness. We can reskill ourselves to become open to the perspective and point of view of the “other,” and we can *value* that position without conforming or assimilating to it.

Because we know that separation works to eradicate the roots that tie all things together, why do we still accept it? Building a wall between Israelis and Palestinians has pushed aside the shared heritage of the land that ties these groups together, and instead a negative opposition of one another is painfully and vividly expressed. Yes, Israel and Palestine is an issue where walls have segregated people from their interconnectedness and oppression has further divided humanity. But, it is just *one* part of the story. The story is that of segregation and isolation ultimately rooted in the fear of the “other”. This story is weaved with a language that divides rather than unites. Beyond the politics in these conflicts, we should be focusing on finding the connections in each of our hearts. What is this moment, when compassion liberates us all from the walls that divide us?

Dialogue, in my view, framed after Levinasian transcendence is the step towards regaining that interconnectedness walls eradicate. This is where we begin, with open and vulnerable communication under the sukkah of peace. The stage being set is an inclusive one, representative equally by all sides involved and respecting of distinctions.

Additionally, this dialogue should be happening on the streets as much as in places of power. Integrating the voice of every gender, age, religion, economic status, and political affiliation is the only chance for sustaining an equitable future. This unconventional form of politics goes beyond the structures we have in place today. It recognizes that there are certain people who have been displaced in our society, and our world at large. It challenges the assumptions we have built these systems on. And ultimately, it reminds us that our shared identity, humanness, equips us with an infinite capacity to evolve and progress.

We are a regenerative people, capable of finding the energy to sustain and become more resilient. Resilience, to me, reminds us all of our shared suffering in this world and instills in each culture the hope for a better future. This future can more quickly and peacefully occur when we stop accepting the divisions that walls are built upon. When we hear each other out, we instead foster areas of common concern, and it is in these areas that we find our interconnectedness.

If we cannot humanize those whose destinies have impinged upon our own, if we cannot increase empathy and vanquish self-righteousness, if we cannot expand our moral imaginations to discern and accept the pattern that connects us all in a common human condition, then we shall all continue to have lost...to perpetuate a struggle in which there are no winners. (Jamieson 376)

Diversity is the foundation for ending this struggle, ultimately sustaining humanity. Diversity is something that does not let power and oppression create barriers, whether symbolic or physical in nature. Instead, it reminds us to respect distinctions and appreciate them in order to thrive as a society. Diversity values distinctions and is capable of initiating a peaceful, inclusive society because it binds all together first by our shared human identity. Recognizing, accepting, and incorporating this mosaic of voices into our world can, I believe, establish an ideal form of relationship that we all desire. The time for accepting divisions, allowing walls to be put up between us, is over. The time for collaboration and reconnection of our shared identity is now.

Going forward, I am reminded of many other factors that add to the complexities of sustaining an open and vulnerable sukkah in our society. What happens when individual selfishness conflicts with the importance of respecting positive communal, and diverse, success? Additionally, more specifically focusing on the case study of Israel and Palestine, what power did gender have in the story of the division of these Abrahamic religions? And finally, as our environmentally degrading institutions continue to eradicate the natural resources of the world, will people be able to thrive together under these predicted extreme conditions?

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