

**Between a City Divided and an Oasis of Peace:
Narratives of Identity and Belonging in the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict**

by

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Hebron and Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam present a study in contrasts within the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Hebron is, perhaps, the most deeply divided city in the conflict. It is the only Palestinian city in the West Bank with Jewish settlers living in its center and the site of constant military presence and frequent hostilities. NSWS, on the other hand, is the only intentionally shared village between Palestinians and Israelis within Israel. Additionally, the Jewish settlement of Hebron and establishment of NSWS have oddly parallel histories stemming from distinct reactions to the changing environment within Israel in the aftermath of the June 1967 War, and both communities have produced texts that seek to explain and persuade a broader public of the merits and importance of their positions and activities through the articulation of collective narratives. The narratives produced by each community articulate starkly dissimilar approaches to the construction of identity and belonging. The different approaches of the two communities hold up mirrors, from opposite positions, to the construction of identity and belonging within Israeli society and its connection to the perpetuation of the conflict. Additionally, the absence of self-produced narratives on the part of the Palestinian community of Hebron illuminates the historic construction of Palestinians as an illegitimate people incapable of presenting itself to the outside world without the legitimating mediation of a 'reliable' third-party. Finally, the contrast between the construction of identity and belonging by the

Jewish settlers of Hebron and the community of NSWS, as well as NSWS's activities in the field of intergroup encounter work, point to the possibility of creating third spaces within the setting of the conflict for seemingly mutually exclusive sides to negotiate new possibilities of existence outside the essentialized and exclusionary confines of the current paradigm.

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.*

*Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
doesn't make any sense.*

~Rumi¹

¹ Rūmi Jalāl al-Dīn and Coleman Barks, *The essential Rumi* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1995). 36.

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1.0 Introduction:

In 1903 African American author, intellectual, and civil rights pioneer W.E.B DuBois articulated the following possible responses of an oppressed group to the conditions of their oppression:

The attitude of the imprisoned group may take three forms,—a feeling of revolt and revenge; an attempt to adjust all thought and action to the will of the greater group; or, finally, a determined effort at self-realization and self-development despite envioning opinion.²

The essay “Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others” in *The Souls of Black Folk* goes on to argue that only one of the three options above demonstrates a refusal to acquiesce to the belief that inequality based on group identity is inevitable. The first response stems from the anger generated by the experience of marginalization, and manifests itself as the conviction that, in order to be free, the oppressed group must separate itself from their oppressors, violently if need be. The second response, far from demanding justice of any sort, maintains that the oppressed group must adopt fully the ways of the dominant group and, essentially, deny the merit and existence of their own identity and culture. The third response acknowledges the differences between groups but refuses to accept that those differences are equated with deficiencies, as the dominant group asserts.³ Instead, the third response necessitates a robust pursuit of justice in order for the oppressed, in the words of

² W.E.B. DuBois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Bantam Books 1989). 34.

³ Ibid., 34-38.

Paulo Freire, "to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well."⁴ The third response to oppression put forth by DuBois is, in fact, the only response to oppression that calls for an altering of relations between peoples, and thereby necessitates an honest engagement with the systems that support inequalities and perpetuate injustices. Implied in the response is the need to participate in a reimagining of possibilities for the future outside the confines of the entrenched status quo.

Despite being written over one hundred years ago and in the context of a different conflict, DuBois' analysis is relevant to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict today. In the past twenty years, the Peace Process between Palestinians and Israelis has proven incapable of moving the two parties past the entrenched inequalities and injustices of the conflict. Even when the process has moved forward, such as during the early years of the Oslo Peace Plan, many scholars now argue, it has achieved little other than solidifying existing inequalities through the legitimizing framework of negotiations and institutions without addressing the actual sources of the conflict.⁵ At present, the conflict appears to be stuck between competing claims of belonging made by two nationalist groups over the same piece of territory, and the inability, or unwillingness, of those groups to disentangle themselves from each other demographically and geographically in order to realize the sovereignty of each group over separated pieces of territory. In other words, the Peace Process is limited by the homogenizing imperative of the nation state paradigm in which the conflict is embedded and by which it is perpetuated. As such, the current setting of the

⁴ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1993). 23.

⁵ Derek Gregory, *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2004). 102-06; Jeff Halper, "The 94 Percent Solution: A Matrix of Control," *Middle East Report*, no. 216 (2000): 14-19; Noura Erakat, "Beyond Sterile Negotiations: Looking for a Leadership with a Strategy," *Jadaliyya* (2012), http://www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/4259/beyond-sterile-negotiations_looking-for-a-leadersh.

Palestinian/Israeli conflict calls out for the kind of radical reimagining of possibilities for existence between peoples implied in DuBois third response, and the imperative to engage in a creative reassessment of the future possibilities for the Palestinian/Israel conflict forms the central position of this work.

Additionally, this paper adopts an analytical approach that is critical of received wisdom concerning the lenses through which the conflict is viewed. For instance, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is often discussed as a series of fragmented conflicts such as the one between Hamas and the State of Israel, or the struggle of Palestinian-Israelis, also referred to as Arab Israelis, for equality within Israel, or the conflict between Hamas and Fatah, or the negotiations between the State of Israel and the Palestinian Authority. As such, the conflict appears as a series of separate inter-group tensions requiring distinct responses and solutions. While focusing on the separate parts of the conflict provides for in depth analysis of its different currents, it ultimately obscures the essentialized construction of identity and its connection to exclusionary claims of belonging that form the root of the conflict. Consequently, it obscures the resultant, unifying experience of dispossession, displacement, and occupation employed as a systematic policy of separation that has created the gradations within the conflict.

In fact, despite the various fragmentations of the Palestinian people within the conflict, for the approximately 5.8 million⁶ Palestinians living in the historic territory of Palestine, between the Gaza Strip, Israel, and the West Bank, the State of Israel exercises ultimate political control. Within Israel, Palestinian Israelis are minority citizens of the

⁶ "The World Factbook," Central Intelligence Agency, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>.

“self-proclaimed state of the Jewish people.”⁷ In East Jerusalem, Palestinians are considered permanent residents of the Israeli State, but are not granted full citizenship rights. Additionally, despite ‘disengaging’ from the Gaza Strip in 2006, Israel continues to control the airspace and borders of the territory, effectively exerting authority over Gaza’s contact and commerce with the outside world. Finally, as agreed upon in the Oslo negotiations, the West Bank is divided into areas A, B, and C. Area C, 61 percent of the territory, is under complete Israeli control, Area B, 21 percent of the territory, is under Israel military authority and Palestinian civil authority, and Area A, 18 percent of the territory, is administered by the Palestinian Authority.⁸ However, checkpoints and bypass roads built by Israel for Jewish settlers living in the West Bank divide the areas of the West Bank under the control of the Palestinian Authority from each other, the borders between Areas A, B, and C are often ambiguous and unmarked, and Israel maintains control over resources below the ground, the airspace, and the borders of the territory.⁹ Anthropologist Jeff Halper refers to the system governing the lives of Palestinians as a “matrix of control” that enables Israel to exercise ultimate authority over the Palestinians by fragmenting the territory and setting up a series of obstacles to block Palestinian self-assertion while simultaneously relieving Israel of responsibility for the inhabitants of the territories.¹⁰

Ultimately, the lens of fragmentation magnifies particular divisions within the conflict while obscuring its underlying dynamics of control. However, those dynamics form

⁷ Dina Matar, *What it means to be Palestinian: Stories of Palestinian Peoplehood* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2011). xii.

⁸ See PASSIA’s Palestine Map series for detailed cartographic depictions of the spatial fragmentation of the Occupied Territories. http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/0_pal_facts_MAPS.htm.

⁹ Gregory, *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq*: 103-04; Wendy Pearlman, *Occupied voices: stories of everyday life from the second Intifada* (New York: Distributed by Publishers Group West, 2003). xiv; Matar, *What it means to be Palestinian: Stories of Palestinian Peoplehood*: xii.

¹⁰ Halper, “The 94 Percent Solution: A Matrix of Control,” 14-19.

the unifying link between the experiences of Palestinians, whether as second-class citizens struggling for equality in Israel or as residents of the West Bank attempting to negotiate the blockages and bureaucracy of occupation. Furthermore, the regime of control exercised by Israel over the Palestinians, stemming from the logic of essentialized identities and exclusivist claims of belonging, aims to create a separation between the two peoples while maintaining the existence of Israeli hegemony over the territory. Therefore, the approach adopted in this paper views the experiences of the intentionally fragmented areas of the conflict as intimately related to one another, and explores an approach to peace, following from DuBois' third response to oppression, that necessitates an engagement with and transformation of established dynamics through a reimagining of possibilities for existence between peoples.

However, the reimagining of possibilities must be connected to material realities in order to avoid the all-too-common disjointedness between theory and the lived experiences of the conflict. Therefore, the following study is grounded in the settings, histories, and narratives of the Jewish settlers and Palestinian residents of Hebron and the bi-national and bilingual village of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam [NSWS]. My personal experience of visiting both Hebron and NSWS over the course an extended trip to Israel/Palestine during the summer of 2010 forms a significant rationale for choosing these locations to study. Although I did not spend enough time in each location to conduct an ethnography, I have returned to my impressions of them time and again when thinking about both the challenges and possibilities of the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.

Hebron and NSWS present a study in contrasts within the conflict. Hebron is, perhaps, the most deeply divided city in the conflict. It is the only Palestinian city in the

West Bank with Jewish settlers living in its center and the site of constant military presence and frequent hostilities. NSWS, on the other hand, is the only intentionally shared village between Palestinians and Israelis within Israel. Additionally, the Jewish settlement of Hebron and establishment of NSWS have oddly parallel histories stemming from distinct reactions to the changing environment within Israel in the aftermath of the June 1967 War, and both communities have produced texts that seek to explain and persuade a broader public of the merits and importance of their positions and activities through the articulation of collective narratives.¹¹

The narratives produced by each community articulate starkly dissimilar approaches to the construction of identity and belonging that hold up mirrors, from opposite positions, to the construction of identity and belonging within Israeli society and its connection to the perpetuation of the conflict. Additionally, the absence of self-produced narratives on the part of the Palestinian community of Hebron illuminates the historic construction of Palestinians as an illegitimate people incapable of presenting itself to the outside world without the legitimating mediation of a 'reliable' third-party. Finally, the contrast between the construction of identity and belonging by the Jewish settlers of Hebron and the community of NSWS, as well as NSWS's activities in the field of intergroup encounter work, point to the possibility of creating third spaces within the setting of the conflict for seemingly mutually exclusive sides to negotiate new possibilities of existence outside the essentialized and exclusionary confines of the current paradigm.

¹¹ According to Salomon, "Collective narratives are the comprehensive collection of stories, beliefs, aspirations, histories, and current explanations that a group holds about itself and its surrounding. *Collective narratives are social constructions that coherently interrelate a sequence of historical and current events; they are accounts of a community's collective experiences, embodied in its belief system and represent the collective's symbolically constructed shared identity*" (Gavriel Salomon, "A Narrative-Based View of Coexistence Education," *Journal of Social Issues* 60, no. 2 (2004): 274.).

In order to develop a robust and grounded understanding and analysis of Hebron and NSWS, the first chapter sketches a series of vignettes that illuminates the basic geographic and spatial composition of each place as well as scenes from everyday life that speak to the experience of the conflict within each. Building on the sensory impression of spaces and experiences in chapter one, chapter two presents the histories of both Hebron and NSWS from their roots prior to 1967 through their inception in the aftermath of the June 1967 War and outlines the historical events and trends that have shaped the contemporary settings of both places. Chapter three moves on to focus specifically on the Jewish settlers of Hebron and the narratives of identity and belonging articulated by the Settler community. The chapter also analyzes the Hebron settlers' narrative in relation to the secular Zionism's narrative of identity and belonging. Chapter four shifts focus to the Palestinian community of Hebron and the historic construction of their reliance on third parties to relay their experiences and voices to the outside world. Additionally, the chapter analyzes the Palestinian voices and perspectives that are heard to try to understand the conceptions of identity and belonging developed by Palestinians living in Hebron. The fifth chapter focuses on the approach to identity and belonging developed and articulated through the ideologies, construction of space, and activities of NSWS. Also, the chapter analyzes NSWS's approach to identity and belonging in comparison to the approach characterizing the mainstream of Israeli society. Finally, the conclusion synthesizes the analysis of the preceding chapters into a critique of the limiting effect of the conflict's situatedness in the essentialist and exclusionary setting of the nation state paradigm, and builds from NSWS's work to propose the possibility of creating third spaces for the reimagining of possibilities for existence between opposing sides in the conflict.

2.0 Impressions of Place:

2.1 Imagined Geographies:

During the height of European imperial expansion in the nineteenth century, no place in the Middle East other than Egypt garnered more attention than the province of Ottoman Palestine. Pilgrims, government representatives, and travelers of all sorts flocked to the territory in order to “rediscover” the Holy Land. The travelers came, according to Beshara Doumani, “with a single fervent wish in their hearts: to traverse an unchanged landscape where biblical journeys could be endlessly reenacted.”¹² As a result, while walking over the territory of Ottoman Palestine, nineteenth century European writers constructed an imagined geography¹³ of the land and the people who inhabited it through the lens of biblical and Western imperial narratives. The land imagined by European writers was empty of civilization, and the writers’ depictions of it formed the epistemological basis for European domination, exploitation, and occupation. Now in the form of debates concerning the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, the dominant discourses on the land of Palestine, its people, and its history continue to follow the basic contours established by the nineteenth century writings.¹⁴

Departing from the footsteps of the past, the following section presents vignettes of various settings and scenes one might encounter in Hebron and NSWS. Instead of imposing

¹² Beshara B. Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 21, no. 2 (1992): 6.

¹³ Gregory builds off of Edward Said’s term *imagined geographies* to refer to narrative “constructions that fold distance into difference through a series of spatializations” (Gregory, *The colonial present: Afghanistan, Palestine, and Iraq*: 17.) in our minds. Imagined geographies, in the words of Said, “allows one to see new things... as versions of a previously known thing.” (ibid., 18.)

¹⁴ Doumani, “Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History,” 8-9.

predetermined metaphoric significance on Hebron and NSWS, the vignettes depict snapshots of them as physical and human spaces. The depictions do not delve into the intimate details of life for the groups and individuals living in each place, but present striking aspects of their public space and public life related to the conflict. The material for the vignettes is drawn from my visits to both locations in the summer of 2010 and an array of online content depicting various facets of life in both Hebron and NSWS from multiple perspectives.¹⁵ The purpose of the vignettes is to render an impression of the spaces from which to build an understanding of the people, ideologies, activities, and narratives of each, and to situate these spaces in relation to the broader conflict and the questions they raise about belonging and identity in Israel/Palestine.

2.2 Hebron: A City Divided:

In vain do you seek the barbed wire fences.

You know such things

Do not disappear. Another city perhaps

Is now cut in two: two lovers

Separated; other flesh is tormented now

With these thorns, refuses to be stone.

~ Jerusalem 1967 by Yehuda Amichai¹⁶

Other than the sand colored stone buildings that spread out from the Old City at Hebron's center, the city's landscape is mostly arid. The occasional clump of trees, shrubs, or flowers breaks the otherwise flat tones of the surroundings. In the old city, closely crowded buildings with flat utilitarian facades line the streets, and the large, drab green metal doors covering the commercial spaces on the ground floors of the buildings are

¹⁵ "Neve Shalom Wahat al Salam," (2010); "A Presentation of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, the Oasis of Peace," (2009); "Arabs with Drums and PLO flag March in Hebron," (2010); "Hebron: A World Divided," (2009); "Hebron," (2009).

¹⁶ Yehuda Amichai, *A Life of Poetry 1948-1994*, trans. Benjamin and Barbara Harshav (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994).

mostly closed. In areas close to Jewish settlements in the city, many of the gates are spray painted with large, black Jewish stars, and Israeli flags are draped from windows and strung across the streets. Graffiti, in Arabic and in Hebrew, abounds in most parts of the city.¹⁷

At the heart of the old city is a monumental building made of impressively large stone blocks. According to the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, the building, known as the Ibrahimi Mosque or Cave of Machpelah, sits atop the burial site of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs of the three religions. Additionally, according to Jewish tradition, the building is constructed on the location of Abraham's first purchase of land in the Promised Land. A checkpoint stands between the street and the entrance to the building, and a soldier wearing an olive green uniform checks identity cards as visitors pass through a metal detector. Up a set of stairs leading to the entrance, two more soldiers stand with their hands resting on assault rifles. Behind the soldiers there is a stout, indestructible looking metal cube with thick, bulletproof glass windows and a thick door that locks from the inside.

The space of the building is divided in two. Prayer carpets line the floor of the Muslim section, ornamental chandeliers hang from the ceiling, two large mausoleum-like structures mark the location of the graves of two of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs, and bullet holes¹⁸ are still visible in the walls despite being plastered over. Past the main prayer hall at the back of a room marking another gravesite, there is a small window. On the other

¹⁷ See appendix A.4 for a map of Hebron and surrounding areas.

¹⁸ On Jewish holiday of Purim in February 1994, settler and Kiryat Arba resident Baruch Goldstein entered the Ibrahimi Mosque wearing his Israeli army uniform and armed with an assault rifle. He opened fire on Muslim Palestinians praying in the mosque and killed twenty-nine people before he was beaten to death. The massacre occurred during the month of Ramadan six months after the signing of the Oslo Accords. (Michael Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories* (Detroit Wayne State University Press, 2009). 168.).

side of the window, Jewish men dressed in traditional black and white garb can be seen swaying at prayer. The window is the only point of connection between the two sides of the building, and visitors are cautioned not to stand in front of it.

To the right, outside of the Tomb of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs is an entrance to the old souk, the economic center of the old city. At the entrance of the souk is a double checkpoint¹⁹ consisting of a series of revolving gates and metal detectors under a stone overpass. People line up at the checkpoint waiting to be ushered through by the soldiers on the other side. A soldier keeps his gun trained on the people as they move through the revolving gates one at a time. On the other side of the checkpoint, a group of school children stands waiting to be let through. A little boy in a neat school uniform slings his blue and yellow backpack over his stomach and unzips it as he walks up to the soldier motioning him to step forward. The soldier in his dark green uniform, with a hand resting on his assault rifle, waves a metal detector over and inside the boy's backpack. The other school children wear their backpacks in a similar fashion, and the routine is repeated for each schoolchild on a daily basis.

Inside the souk, the shops along the corridor are mostly shuttered, and a tangle of netting hangs across the street between the first and second stories of buildings. Caught in the nets is an array of refuse that has been dumped from the Jewish settlers' apartments up above. The souk is nearly deserted. Most of the shops that are still open are selling

¹⁹ Hebron has been divided into Jewish and Palestinian sectors of control since a set of agreements between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. Under the agreements, Israel has full security control over areas of Jewish settlement in the Old City and surrounding areas deemed necessary for the movement of settlers and Israeli soldiers (known as H1) while the Palestinian Authority has control over the rest of the city (known as H2). The system of checkpoints controls access to and movement within the Israeli controlled section of Hebron where approximately twenty thousand Palestinians live. (Lamis Andoni, "Redefining Oslo: Negotiating the Hebron Protocol," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 26, no. 3 (1997): 18-19.)

keffiyehs,²⁰ Arabic coffee pots, backgammon boards, and other items appealing to tourists. The section of the city past the souk is also nearly deserted. Soldiers are stationed periodically along the tops of buildings in camouflage nests, and the streets are strewn with loose rocks and dust, and cement and barbed wire barricades cut off all of the streets where they intersect with Shuhada Street. Soldiers stand at cement barriers at the entrances to Shuhada Street that have not been entirely blocked off. Once a main thoroughfare, access to Shuhada Street is now restricted for Palestinians. The street itself is lined with shops, all of which are closed, and the windows and front doors of houses and apartments along the street are sealed off. Vines with bright violet flowers grow across the fronts of the buildings lining the street. The men walking along the street wear slacks and yarmulkes,²¹ and the women wear long skirts and keep their hair covered. Most of the men have handguns strapped to their hips and some have assault rifles slung over their shoulders. Occasionally, a heavily armored army vehicle rumbles down the street or a group of soldiers passes by on patrol. The terrain steepens on the far side of the street from the old city, rising toward the more recently constructed buildings of the Jewish settlements.

At one of the barricades blocking access to the street, people gather for a protest. A group of Palestinian youth with drums and bright colored costumes plays a marching tune as soldiers and international observers take their positions. The protesters push against the barricade and some begin to throw rocks. The soldiers fire off a barrage of teargas and the protesters scatter and regroup. The skirmish continues as teenage boys wearing

²⁰ A Keffiyeh is a traditional Arab scarf that has become a symbol of Palestinian nationalism.

²¹ A yarmulke (also known as a kippah) is a small circular cap worn by men in all denominations of Judaism, but less common outside of times of prayer for Conservative and Reform Jews.

keffiyehs make their way down an alley to throw rocks at the soldiers who fire another barrage of teargas as the youth retreat. Later in the day, a group of Orthodox Jewish men and boys led by a community elder wearing a black, wide brimmed hat and a suit stroll assuredly down the same streets where soldiers and Palestinian protesters skirmished earlier. As they walk, the men and boys clap their hands and sing up-beat songs. On either side, soldiers in full combat gear flank the gathering as the men and boys form circles to dance, and the parade continues on down a street in the Old City draped with Israeli flags.

As the Settlers'²² demonstration disperses, a group of boys and girls linger outside of one house on the street and pick up rocks. None of the boys or girls look older than ten. The girls wear long skirts and their arms are covered. The boys wear yarmulkes and the strings from their tzitzit²³ swing as they heave the stones at the only house on the street without a Jewish flag. Girls and boys repeatedly step back to gather more rocks and come back to throw them. One boy, smaller than the rest, trots forward with the unsteady gate of a toddler. One arm is cocked next to his head with a rock clutched in his small fingers. As he reaches the edge of the road, he swings his arm forward and sends the rock toppling against the iron grating surrounding the stairwell, entrance, windows, and balcony of the house. Two Palestinian teenage girls stand in the stairwell behind the metal grating. "You're dogs! Get away from here!" they yell, as a soldier stands behind the children in his green uniform with his hands resting on his rifle watching the scene unfold.

²² The term "the Settlers" is capitalized in places where it signifies the settlers associated with Hebron and other religiously motivated settlements in the Occupied Territories. The capitalization draws a distinction between religiously motivated settlers and economic settlers who have moved to well established settlements around the Jerusalem basin due to economic incentives given by the government.

²³ Tzitzit are knotted fringes worn by religious Jews.

2.3 Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam: An Oasis of Peace:

I would have wanted...

to be a child in another country.

**In a country where there would be no news
about the dead and the wounded and wars.**

**In a country which wouldn't need an army or soldiers;
and where one would not be afraid or worried all the time.**

In a country where there would always be peace.

~ Written by a twelve-year old child living in NSWS²⁴

Without the separation wall between the West Bank and Israel it would take a little over an hour to drive from Hebron to NSWS.²⁵ The road to the village breaks off from a highway about twenty miles northeast of Jerusalem. Green fields spread out on either side of the road before it begins to ascend a hill, and the expansive view that can be seen from below becomes obscured by shrubbery, flowers, and trees. NSWS is situated on top of the hill, and its white houses are tucked into curving streets integrated with an abundance of plant life. Close to the main entrance of the community there are modest administrative office buildings, an indoor and an outdoor community gathering area, a swimming pool, a hotel, and a café. A little further up the road past a garden blooming with vibrant pink flowers is a newly built library, a building that houses the School for Peace, and, underneath a rainbow archway, the community's primary school. Down from the main area of the village, accessible only by a walking path lined with green plants and flowers, sits a white dome in a field of grass. The dome, a pluralistic spiritual center, is located at the edge of the hill and overlooks green and yellow fields dotted with pine groves. Behind the dome,

²⁴ F Grace Feuerverger, *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian Village in Israel* (New York: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001). xv.

²⁵ See appendix A.3 for a map of territory where NSWS is located.

the red roof of a monastery forms a silhouette against the coastal plane, which vanishes into the distance.

Outside the elementary school, a girl in a blue sweatshirt grabs a boy's orange shirt. He playfully begins to run as the girl swings behind him. Other children join in and a game of tag ensues. Inside a school classroom, first or second grade students sit squirming in their seats. Their hair, skin, and eyes span the spectrum from light to dark, and some of the girls wear hijab.²⁶ On the walls of the classroom are brightly colored pictures of animals with their names written underneath in both Arabic and Hebrew. Also, on the chalkboard are notes scrawled in both Arabic and Hebrew. In a common room outside of the classroom there is a Christmas tree decorated in red ribbons and sparkling stars, and a miniature Kaaba²⁷ and Menorah²⁸ sit side by side on a table next to the tree.

Down the path at the School for Peace, a group of adults, mirroring the diversity of the elementary school students, sits around in a small circle. The adults lean in toward each other talking and listening eagerly, and a Palestinian woman and an Israeli woman from the School for Peace staff sit in the circle guiding the conversation. The Palestinian woman speaks first in Arabic followed by the Jewish woman in Hebrew. At the entrance of the school, a group of ninth and tenth graders from a private school in Haifa arrives for an overnight stay at the village. After a brief introduction the students are led down to the holistic spiritual center where they stand outside mingling and taking photographs with each other. Like the children in the primary school at NSWS and the adults at the School for Peace, the students from Haifa represent a cross section of Israeli society. Their teachers,

²⁶ A hijab is a head covering worn by religious Muslim women, and is also a term used to refer to modest dress in general.

²⁷ The Kaaba is the holiest site in Islam, and is located in Mecca, Saudi Arabia.

²⁸ A Menorah is a candelabrum with nine branches used in the celebration of the Jewish holiday of Hanukkah.

with growing agitation in their voices, try to get them to enter the white dome in respectful silence as a community member explains the building's significance.

Inside, periodic snickers echo off the curved walls and whispers carry across the space designed for silence. A teacher angrily instructs a number of students to leave. Gradually, they all filter out and walk back to the School for Peace where they assemble in a circle to talk. Some lean back in a posture of pompous indifference. Others look down, inspecting their hands and shoes. A NSWS resident tries to coax them into conversation, but the students only exchange curt comments that are greeted by a mixture of brief approving nods and looks of exasperation and hurt by their classmates. A frustrated teacher instructs the students that, despite being an integrated Palestinian and Jewish class, their time at NSWS may be the only opportunity they have to address the conflict openly with each other. The students exchange another round of accusations and debasing comments as each group withdraws along the lines of division in the conflict into its separate world.

2.4 Separate Worlds:

Just as the worlds that the high school students from Haifa retreat into when attempting to discuss the conflict are marked by stark dissimilarities, imbalances, and opposing experiences, the physical aspects and public life of Hebron and NSWS constitute similarly incongruous realities. Barriers of physical, social, and emotional division mark the landscape of Hebron, and are rigidly enforced by the omnipresent apparatus of conflict in the form of checkpoints and military patrols as well as through the performative enactment of each community's assertion of belonging in the form of protests and stone throwing. NSWS, on the other hand, appears as an oasis of tranquility, balance, and respite from the

external currents of conflict. The village's situatedness within those currents, however, is constantly reified by the centrality of addressing the conflict in the work and composition of the village and the conflict's constant intrusion into its everyday life. Even so, the fact that NSWS and Hebron exist as such markedly different places, in terms of the relations between Palestinians and Israelis within them, no more than forty-five miles apart and within the same pervasive setting of conflict is striking. Their paradoxical existence raises a number of pressing questions about the history of each place, its position in relation to the broader conflict, and what an understanding of the narratives and activities of the communities inhabiting each offers in terms understanding the demarcation of identity and belonging in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. The following chapter turns to an exploration of the establishment of Jewish settlement in Hebron and NSWS in the environment within Israel following the June 1967 War.

3.0 The June 1967 War:

3.1 Al-Quds²⁹-Jerusalem: June 1967

On June 29th, 1967 crowds of Israelis from the western side of Jerusalem crossed into East Jerusalem and crowds of Palestinians living in East Jerusalem crossed into the western side of the city. The two populations mingled in marketplaces, buying goods from each other. Palestinians went to the cinemas in the Western side of the city. Young Israeli boys ventured into the eastern side of the city to see the Jordanian license plates on Palestinian cars. Some Palestinians went to look at the homes that they were displaced from during the war of 1948, and thousands of Israelis flocked to see the Western Wall and other religious sites on the eastern side of the city. It was the first time that the two populations came in contact with each other since the city was divided in 1948.³⁰

3.2 Lead up to 1967:

The drama of the reunification or occupation of Jerusalem was part of Israel's military victory over the armies of Jordan, Syria, and Egypt in the June 1967 War. According to the common scholarly narrative, the war, known as the Six-Days War in Israel and al-Naksa, "setback" in Arabic, was the culmination of nearly a decade of escalating tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Vitriolic, anti-Israeli rhetoric by Arab leaders, the unwillingness of Arab leaders to engage in serious peace talks, and a Soviet Union supported buildup of Arab militaries convinced Israelis that their young state was in grave danger. It would only be a matter of time, they thought, before the Arab countries attacked

²⁹ Al-Quds is the Arabic name for the city of Jerusalem. The word means "The Holy" in Arabic.

³⁰ Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007). 434-35.

again and tried to push Israel into the sea.³¹ Additionally, a steady number of cross-border raids by Palestinian guerilla groups, largely supported by Syria, added to Israel's sense of endangerment.³²

The Arab countries, on the other hand, were struggling to modernize their economies, provide opportunity for large segments of their populations mired in poverty, and control the upheavals that accompanied the dramatic changes to their traditional social and economic structures. Furthermore, Arab governments sought to preserve their newly gained self-determination from the interventionist policies of Western powers such as Britain and France. Israel's aggressive and militaristic posture and collaboration with Western powers in the region was evidence that the new nation was a bulwark of Western imperialism in the Middle East.³³ Resistance to foreign domination and the popularity of exacting retribution for Israel's displacement of Palestinians in 1948 provided incentive for the Arab governments to militarize and reciprocate Israel's aggressive stance in the region. Exacerbating the situation, the United States and the Soviet Union jostled to turn dynamics within the region in their favor and in so doing subjected regional hostility to the additional tensions between the Cold War superpowers.³⁴

³¹ Add Nasser quote about pushing Israel into the sea in this foot note(?)

³² Richard Bordeaux Parker, "The Six-Day War: a retrospective" (Gainesville, 1996), 1, 6; Michael B. Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). 1, 10; Segev, 1967: *Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 14, 144-45; W. Cleon Skousen, *Fantastic victory; Israel's rendezvous with destiny* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1967). xvi.

³³ In 1956 Israel entered into a secret military compact with Britain and France. According to the compact, Israel would invade the Sinai Peninsula in order to give Britain and France a pretext to reoccupy the Suez Canal for its protection. In return, Israel would receive naval and air support as they attacked Egypt's army and opened the Straits of Tiran. The planned military action, known as the Sinai Campaign, began on 29 October 1956 and bolstered Arab leader's claims that Israel was a colonialist tool in the Middle East. (Segev, 1967: *Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 148-49, 240-41.)

³⁴ Parker, "The Six-Day War: a retrospective," 1-2; Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*: 2, 6.

3.3 Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs:

The common scholarly narrative, summarized above, of the lead up to the June 1967 War places it within the regional and geopolitical setting of the Arab-Israeli conflict. While important, the focus on the political tensions between Israel and its Arab neighbors within the geopolitical setting of the Cold War forms only part of the setting for the June 1967 War and its impact. Importantly, the focus abstracts the discussion of the war from the dynamics at play both within and between Israeli and Palestinian societies. As a result, Israelis and particularly Palestinians become marginal actors within a cast of superstar, international personalities³⁵ despite the fact that the dynamics between the two societies form the center around which the broader conflict pivots. Importantly, the focus on regional and geopolitical analysis obscures the distinct yet interrelated crises taking places in Israeli and Palestinian society in the years leading up to June 1967. The respective crises of Israelis and Palestinians, Jews and Arabs within historic Palestine leading up to the June 1967 war and the impact of the war on their societies constitute the historical setting in which Jewish settlement of Hebron and the establishment of NSWS emerged as viable ideas and actionable projects.

3.4 Jewish Israelis:

For Jewish Israelis, the years leading up the June 1967 war were ones of crippling economic recession and deep personal and societal questioning. In the 1960s Israel had a population of 2.3 million people. The rapid growth enjoyed by Israeli economy during the first decade and a half of the states' existence slowed to around one percent annually in the mid-1960s. With the economic downturn, the number of Jews in the Diaspora seeking to

³⁵ For example, Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser is presented as the most important figure in the Palestinian national movement in the lead up to the June 1967 War, while the experience and organization of Palestinian refugee communities, or Palestinians living in Israel, the West Bank, and the Gaza Strip is largely obscured.

make Israel their home quickly dwindled, and thousands of Israeli Jews emigrated from the seemingly tottering state. Unemployment reached above ten percent and peaked at over twelve percent in the year before the war. With the soaring unemployment, the sense of possibility and national purpose that permeated the early years of the state gave way to despair and questioning of the very core of the State of Israel. Speaking to the crisis of faith in the basic tenets of the state, one newspaper went as far as to declare, "this project has failed."³⁶ Acutely aware of the rhetoric of Arab leaders, the recent history of the Holocaust, the brutal reversal of economic and societal fortunes in the prior decade, and with dwindling faith in their young state, Israelis felt as if they were poised on the precipice of annihilation in the months leading up to the war.³⁷

3.5 Palestinian Dislocation:

While the root of the societal crisis in Israel prior to the war was economic, the crisis for Palestinians was primarily about dislocation stemming from the exodus of Palestinian refugees accompanying Israel's military victory in 1948. Of the roughly 900,000³⁸ Palestinians living in the territory Israel came to control after 1948, eight out of ten fled or were driven out during the course of the war. Put another way, 650,000 to 750,000³⁹ Palestinians became refugees in 1948 as a result of the war. In Gaza, 200,000 refugees joined with a local population of 80,000 Palestinians. In the West Bank, 425,000 refugees

³⁶ Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 14.

³⁷ Parker, "The Six-Day War: a retrospective," 4; Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*: 17, 27; Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 14-15.

³⁸ This number does not include Palestinians living in Gaza and the West Bank prior to 1948.

³⁹ The number of Palestinians displaced and the events surrounding their displacement are highly contested within the historical record. For this paper I used the data that appeared most frequently in my research, which engaged with historiography from both sides. Additionally, Israeli scholar Benny Morris has written extensively on the topic using material from various Israeli archives. (Benny Morris, "The Harvest of 1948 and the Creation of the Palestinian Refugee Problem," *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 4 (1986); Benny Morris, "Refabricating 1948: Fabricating Israeli History: The 'New Historians.'" Efraim Karsh, *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no. 2 (1998); Benny Morris, "Yosef Weitz and the Transfer Committees, 1948-49," *Middle Eastern Studies* 22, no. 4 (1986).)

joined a local population of 360,000. Additionally, 104,000 refugees ended up in camps in Lebanon, 110,000 entered Transjordan⁴⁰, 82,000 entered Syria, and 12,000 others ventured to Iraq, Egypt, Libya, London, and other parts of the world.⁴¹

Instead of constituting the majority in a unified political entity, Palestinian refugees were now dispersed between a number of countries and territories. The majority of Palestinians were uprooted from their villages and towns and entered into entirely new social, economic, and political configurations in refugee camps and new communities. Additionally, the political leadership of the Palestinian national community mirrored the spatial dislocation of Palestinians themselves. National leaders from prior to the war lost much of their legitimacy due to the tragedy of dislocation and could no longer speak on behalf of or mobilize large segments of the population. The annexation of the West Bank by King Abdullah of Jordan and Egypt's extension of control over the Gaza Strip further exacerbated the fact that after 1948 the Palestinians were a people predominantly separated from the territory at the base of their collective sense of national identity and dispersed among no less than five separate political and geographical entities.⁴²

As a consequence of their dislocation, the Palestinian national movement entered a stage of crisis. Instead of self-representation, the leaders of Arab countries in the region became the voices and strategists of the Palestinians and their national movement. In the early 1960s, a number of small and fragmented political and militant organizations emerged primarily from Palestinian refugee populations in various countries. Arab regimes

⁴⁰ These numbers reflect the distribution of Palestinian refugees prior to Jordan's annexation of the West Bank. Therefore, refugees in the West Bank and Transjordan are recorded separately.

⁴¹ Rosemary Sayigh, *Palestinians: from peasants to revolutionaries : a people's history* (London: Zed Press, 1979). 99-100; Segev, 1967: *Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 67; Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*: 7.

⁴² Sayigh, *Palestinians: from peasants to revolutionaries : a people's history*: 98; Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*: 6.

supported the groups as pawns in their regional rivalries with Israel and each other and in order to garner support among Arab populations who felt a deep, emotional connection to the Palestinian cause. The groups launched attacks against strategic targets inside Israel from their strongholds in Palestinian refugee camps or towns in Lebanon, Syria, and the West Bank. In the decade prior to the war, attacks from the militant groups resulted in the deaths of 189 Israeli civilians. In response to the deaths, the Israeli military adopted a policy of retaliating against the border populations where the militants staged their operations from as opposed to the Arab regimes that supported and supplied the militants. Israel's retaliation for the cross border attacks involved the blowing up of houses and often, civilian deaths. Despite the dominance of the pre-war period by Arab leaders, the increasing organization and mobilization of the Palestinian population hinted at a resurgent Palestinian national movement even amidst the trials of dislocation.⁴³

3.6 Palestinian Israelis:

Of the newly fragmented Palestinian population, the segment that found itself in perhaps the most conflicted position after 1948 was the Palestinians who did not flee their homes during the war. Instead of becoming refugees, Palestinians who remained in Israel became residents and citizens of a state, in the words of Israeli journalist and author Tom Segev, "at war with their own people."⁴⁴ The majority of the 55,000 to 95,000⁴⁵ Palestinians remaining in Israel after 1948 lived in the Galilee and other northern regions of the

⁴³ Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*: 1, 17, 29, 32; Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 145-46; Sayigh, *Palestinians: from peasants to revolutionaries : a people's history*: 144-45.

⁴⁴ Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 67.

⁴⁵ The wide range of these statistics results from an Israeli census taken directly after the war in 1948. It reported that 120,000 – 160,000 Arabs remained in Israel after the war. However, 65,000 of the remaining Arabs were Bedouin living in the southern region of the Negev Desert who eschewed national identities. The majority of Bedouin either left or were driven from Israel by government policies in the decades following 1948. (Sayigh, *Palestinians: from peasants to revolutionaries : a people's history*: 93, 137.)

country. By 1967, the population of Palestinian Israelis had expanded to roughly 312,000 people, or twelve percent of the total Israeli population.

Despite being granted equal citizenship rights and guaranteed equality under Israel's founding documents,⁴⁶ Palestinian Israelis faced discrimination in virtually every aspect of their lives in the years between 1948 and 1967. The majority of Palestinian Israelis lived in villages seventy-five percent of which were not connected to the national water system and seventy-four percent of which were not connected to the national electrical grid. Twenty percent of villages had no access roads and none of the villages had paved streets or sewer systems. Additionally, the Israeli state confiscated over half of the land owned by Palestinians living in Israel in the decades after 1948. One half of Palestinian Israelis worked for Jewish bosses. Most lived in poverty, only three out of ten were insured by the national health care system, and despite the fact that fifteen percent of students in Israeli elementary schools were Palestinian Israeli children, the state only spent three percent of its educational budget on Arab education. Few landlords in cities would rent rooms to Palestinian Israelis. Furthermore, the state actively worked to prevent Palestinian Israelis from forming political organizations for self-representation, and in the economic down turn of the 1960s, the unemployment rate for Palestinian Israelis was double the Jewish unemployment rate. The main symbol and tool of the Israeli state's treatment of Palestinian Israelis as second-class citizens was the subjection of Palestinian Israeli communities to rule by martial law following 1948. To cope with the overwhelming feeling of invisibility that accompanied being a Palestinian citizen of Israel, some Palestinian

⁴⁶ See: Provisional Government of Israel, "The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel," (The Knesset, 1948).

Israelis adopted Jewish names in order to find jobs and housing, and to fit into a society that marginalized their existence in virtually every aspect of life.⁴⁷

Prior to the 1960s, the status of Palestinian Israelis within Israeli society did not garner much attention outside of a small circle of academics concerned with coexistence. The small number of people who were concerned with the conditions of Palestinians living in Israeli viewed Palestinian Israelis as a litmus test for the promises contained in Israel's Proclamation of Independence of "equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex."⁴⁸ The majority of the population, however, either did not pay attention to the social, economic, and political marginality of Palestinian Israelis, or thought, as many of Israel's founding political figures did based on the historical experience of Jews, that minorities could not achieve equal rights within in a state. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, articulated the position of many in Israeli society in 1950 by saying, "these Arabs should not be living here, just as American Jews should not be living in America."⁴⁹

However, several newspaper exposés in the mid 1960s brought to light issues of inequality between Israel's Jewish and Palestinian citizens. In the ensuing years an increase in activism inspired by the United States civil rights movement brought attention to and sought to rectify the inferior position of Palestinians in Israeli society. As a result, the liberal left in Israeli made bringing an end to the government of Palestinian Israelis by martial law its main cause. Despite the eventual success of the movement in having martial law repealed, police control replaced military control and little actually changed for

⁴⁷ Segev, 1967: *Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 67-70.

⁴⁸ Israel, "The Declaration of the Establishment of the State of Israel."

⁴⁹ Segev, 1967: *Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 67.

Palestinian Israelis. Instead, the majority of Israeli society continued to fear Palestinian Israelis as potential spies and terrorists, and most of all, as the mothers and fathers of future children whose high birthrate was a looming specter haunting the foundational conception of Israel as both a Jewish and a democratic state. Nevertheless, awareness and debates about the position of Palestinian Israelis in Israeli society entered the public's awareness in the years leading up to 1967.⁵⁰

3.7 The June 1967 War and a New Map:

Despite the expectation by Israel and its Arab neighbors that another confrontation would soon occur, the spiraling events that led to an attack by the Israeli air force on Egypt and Syria on 5 June 1967 took actors in and observers of the Middle East by surprise. Israel's move to war was precipitated by the closing of the Straits of Tiran by the Egyptian military⁵¹ and the removal of the United Nations buffer force stationed in the Sinai peninsula at Egypt's request.⁵² The majority of the fighting took place during the first four days of the war, and by the end of the sixth day Israel had secured a decisive victory. Between 10,000 and 15,000 Egyptian soldiers died in the six days of fighting. Syria lost around 450 soldiers, and Jordan lost around 700 soldiers. Additionally, thousands of other Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian soldiers sustained injuries or were captured by Israel and held as prisoners of war. In comparison, around 800 Israeli soldiers died, over two thousand sustained wounds, and fifteen were taken as prisoners of war. If measuring

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ The Straits of Tiran are Israel's access point by water to the Red Sea. Israel viewed Egypt's blockade of the Straits as an act of aggression warranting military response. (ibid., 238-40.)

⁵² Parker, "The Six-Day War: a retrospective," xv, xviii-xix; Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*: 17. The United Nations force was stationed in the Sinai Peninsula after the 1956 Sinai Campaign. Its mission was to provide a buffer zone between Israel and Egypt in order to dissuade hostilities. The removal of the force represented the game of brinksmanship Egypt was playing with Israel in the lead up to the war. (Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 227-28.)

deaths and injuries from opposing sides of a conflict against each other is of any use in determining the victor of a war, as opposed to its general devastation,⁵³ then the casualty rate of 25 to 1 in favor of Israel speaks to its upper hand in the fighting.⁵⁴

Furthermore, when the rapid movement of the war came to a halt, Israel had conquered 42,000 square miles of territory including the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula.⁵⁵ With the new territory, Israel was three and a half times its original size. Israel's territorial conquest precipitated the movement of between 175,000 and 250,000 Palestinians from the West Bank into the surrounding Arab countries. Some of the Palestinians who fled had already been displaced once in 1948 and found themselves as refugees for a second time. However, unlike in 1948 the overwhelming majority of majority of Palestinians did not leave the West Bank and Gaza despite provisions made by Israel during the war to facilitate the flight of refugees from the territories. Even with some fleeing 1.2 million Palestinians remained within the newly conquered territories.⁵⁶

3.8 The Ambiguities of Victory and Defeat:

The societal and geographical impact of Israel's victory synthesized with pre-war dynamics both within and between Israeli, Palestinian, Jewish, and Arab societies to create a new range of potentialities characterized by significant ambiguity and ambivalence. The intermixing of previously separate populations in Jerusalem took place in the setting of

⁵³ When writing about his experiences as a foreign correspondent on the frontlines covering virtually every conflict in the Middle East from the mid 1970s through the 2003 American invasion and occupation of Iraq, Robert Fisk said, "Governments... want their people to see war as a drama of opposites, good and evil, 'them' and 'us,' victory or defeat. But war is primarily not about victory or defeat but about death and the infliction of death. It represents the total failure of the human spirit" (Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation: The conquest of the Middle East* (New York: Vintage Books, 2007). xviii.).

⁵⁴ Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*: 304.

⁵⁵ See appendix A.2 for a map of Israel after 1967.

⁵⁶ Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*: 306-07; Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 404, 29.

uncertainty following the war as an unavoidable consequence of the de facto decision made by Israel's political leadership to annex the city in the days after it was conquered. The phenomenon of crossing previously impassable borders was not restricted to Jerusalem, but rather took place throughout the territories newly occupied by Israel. As the victors, however, Jewish Israelis enjoyed the privilege of greater mobility than the defeated and occupied Palestinians living in the conquered territories.

Indeed, tens of thousands of Israelis ventured into the West Bank in the weeks and months after the war. On one day alone, more than seventy thousand Israelis visited Hebron, and civilian visas to visit the West Bank were the most highly sought after documents in post-war Israel. Drawn on by a mixture of secular and religious motivations, Israelis ventured into the West Bank to see territory and sites deeply connected to Jewish history. From the Western Wall to the Cave of Mechpelah, Rachel's Tomb, and Nebi Samuel, the physical and symbolic topography of the West Bank was ripe with meanings and memories that could easily be incorporated into existing narratives. In addition to the religious significance, the West Bank entered into the lore of secular Zionism through the nationalization of Jewish history and the memorializing of events such as the stand of settlers at Gush Etzion against Jordanian soldiers in 1948.⁵⁷ For some in Israeli society, memories from the West Bank only nineteen years earlier still loomed large in their consciousness, not as an abstract territory, but as the environment of their younger years

⁵⁷ The Gush Etzion settlements were established several years prior to the establishment of the State of Israel. The settlements were located at a strategic point on the route to Jerusalem. During the 1948 war, the Arab armies attacked the settlements, and an entire Israeli military platoon was defeated on its way to try to assist the isolated settlers. The Gush Etzion settlements were forced to surrender to the Arab armies one day before the end of the war. In one of the settlements, Kfar Etzion, only four settlers survived while 127 died in the fighting. The story of the settlers' stand against the Arab forces entered Israeli national lore as one of the foundational lessons and sacrifices of the state. (Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 170-73.)

or childhood. Furthermore, in the interceding decades between 1948 and 1967 sites in the West Bank became an occasional focus of public education, government and military propaganda, and various other forms of media. The history and memories of the West Bank provided the raw material for Israelis to connect with and be drawn to the territory in the aftermath of 1967.⁵⁸

While visiting the West Bank, some Israelis looked for old acquaintances from before 1948, but the vast majority went to see the historically important sites and shop in the Arab souks. Many Israelis adopted a gloating attitude of superiority to the Palestinians who their army had just defeated in the war and whose living conditions they considered to be primitive and backward. Additionally, despite the fact that the populations were coming into contact with each other for the first time in nearly twenty years, many Israelis simply overlooked the Palestinians living in the West Bank. The landscape they gazed upon was not the material one before their eyes, inhabited by Palestinians, but a tapestry of national and biblical narrative woven from contact with the West Bank's ancient sites.⁵⁹ For instance, when Moshe Dayan visited Jericho after Israel's victory he wrote in his journal, "It is a wonderful city. To really see it, you have to close your eyes. Everything around the city is dry, desolate, white as chalk, but the city is rich with gardens, stories, and legends – from Rahab the prostitute in her window, to the Chariot of Israel and its horsemen rising up to the heavens."⁶⁰ Instead of the actual city before his eyes, Dayan saw biblical characters and

⁵⁸ Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 179-80, 424-26.

⁵⁹ Dayan's statement echoes the sentiment and follows the narrative outlines of the nineteenth century travel writers referred to in earlier. In fact, Bashara Doumani argues that the "amazing ability [of nineteenth century Europeans] to discover the land without discovering the people dovetailed neatly with early Zionist visions" (Doumani, "Rediscovering Ottoman Palestine: Writing Palestinians into History," 8.). Dayan's statement, then, is evidence of the persistent weight of the early narrative understanding of the land of Palestine on the discourse of the conflict.

⁶⁰ Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 425.

scenes of national significance imprinted in his mind's eye. He was not alone. Visiting the sites of the West Bank for most Israelis was a profoundly emotional religious and nationalist experience, and not an encounter with the Palestinians living there.⁶¹

The strong emotions stemming from re-connection with the historically significant sites in the West Bank intertwined with mourning for Israel's 800 war-dead. However, Israel's rapid military victory pulled society from the depths of self-doubt, fear, and stagnation preceding the war and brought it to the heights of rejuvenation and self-confidence in its aftermath. The sense of euphoria and possibility following their military victory was reflected in the name Israel's political leadership chose for the war, "the Six-Days War," meant to invoke the days of creation. Significantly, the name of the war reflected the ambiguity between the secular and religious in the weeks and months following the war. Radio broadcaster Rafi Amir captured the ambiguity in broadcast to the Israeli public as he approached the Western Wall after Israeli troop captured Jerusalem, "I'm not religious and never have been, but this is the Wall and I am touching the stones of the Western Wall!"⁶² The Wall held no religious significance for Amir, but he was elated by and in awe of it as a symbol of Jewish history that defied classification as either secular or religious.⁶³

In the environment of national and religious rejuvenation and euphoria following the war, there was a palpable desire to hold onto the newly conquered territories. Moshe Dayan captured the public's sentiment when he declared, "we have returned to our holiest

⁶¹ Ibid., 429.

⁶² Jerold S. Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel* (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009). 81.

⁶³ Segev, 1967: *Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 14-16; Oren, *Six days of war: June 1967 and the making of the modern Middle East*: 309.

of places in order to never part with them again.”⁶⁴ However, the question of what to do with the territories remained open ended in the upper echelons of the Israeli government. In the meantime, the West Bank and Gaze Strip entered Israeli parlance as the “liberated territories.” Both secular and religious Zionists viewed the moment after the war as an opportunity to make whole the Jewish state by incorporating territory with tremendous symbolic value that was at the center of the original vision of the state. Israel’s political leadership began talking about what to do with the newly conquered territories directly after the war ended. Israeli leaders were acutely aware of the fact that they now composed less than a two-thirds majority in the territory under Israel’s control. With the Palestinian birthrate, Israelis would soon find themselves a minority in a state whose central conception was to be Jewish and democratic. Therefore, full annexation was not an option.

However, the political leadership quickly decided that Jerusalem must be strategically annexed into Israeli territory, and set about creating facts on the ground to facilitate its incorporation. Also, the political leadership began weighing plans to create settlements to annex historically significant and strategically important areas, such as the Gush Etzion settlements evacuated in 1948, into Israeli territory. Others in the leadership talked about holding onto the territories to use them as bartering chips in future peace negotiations with their Arab neighbors based on pre-1967 borders with slight territorial adjustments. At the same time, others in the leadership thought Israel should hold onto the territories as a source of natural resources, cheap Arab labor, and valuable real estate for the Israeli economy. The indecision of the political leadership suspended the territories in a state of political limbo. By essentially deciding not to adopt an official policy, the Israeli

⁶⁴ Gadi Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010). 29.

government created a situation of ambiguity around the Occupied Territories that opened up the possibility for independently motivated groups to act on the ideological attraction of the territories in order to create their own facts on the ground.⁶⁵

Meanwhile, instead of experiencing further dislocation, the war had an unforeseen unifying effect on Palestinians. The large-scale flight of Palestinians Israel anticipated during the war never materialized, and for the first time in nineteen years, the majority of Palestinians were living under the same governing entity, albeit with greatly different statuses. Furthermore, the dislocation of more refugees and the further expansion of Israel's borders was another historic injustice for the Palestinians. Geographically and emotionally unified as they had not been since the British Mandate, Palestinians turned away from the regional Arab leaders who had twice drastically failed to deliver them from Israeli usurpation. In place of the regional Arab powers, the pre-war militant and political leaders emerged as the new cadre of national leadership. Instead of the suits and tarboushes⁶⁶ of the past, the new national leadership dressed in military fatigues and kuffiyehs. The style and actions of the new leadership symbolized a resurgent Palestinian nationalist movement that, if nothing else, demanded Israel's awareness of the Palestinian people after 1967.⁶⁷

The geographic and social environment after the war opened up a new array of potential actions and a series of conflicts that have come to define the Palestinian/Israel conflict. First, the settlement of the occupied territories by Israelis only became viable after

⁶⁵ Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 21-22; Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*: 85; Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 424, 29.

⁶⁶ A tarboush is a circular red hat worn by educated and elite members of Arab society in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

⁶⁷ Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*: 81; Matar, *What it means to be Palestinian: Stories of Palestinian Peoplehood*: 89-92.

the victory of 1967. Additionally, the blurring of religious and nationalist narrative following the war created the social space in which the settlement enterprises could take root. At the same time, however, the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza strip confronted Israeli society with the fact that the majority status of Jews in Israeli controlled territory could no longer be taken for granted. Simultaneously, Palestinians experienced a new potential for self-assertion and action, but at the very moment that the Palestinian living in the Occupied Territories were subjected to military occupation by the Israeli state. Consequently, Israelis and Palestinians found themselves inhabiting contradictory realities surrounded by major, answer-defying questions: Jewish and democratic? Two states for two people? One land for two people? One land for one people and not the other? The Jewish settlement of Hebron and the establishment of NSWS took place within, and in response to, the contradictory and ambiguous realities characterizing Israeli society following the June 1967 War.

3.9 “Will we forget them?”: The Jewish Settlement of Hebron:

Several weeks before the June 1967 War began, Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook stood before a gathering of former students from the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva. On the verge of tears, Rabbi Kook addressed the audience, “They have divided my land. Where is our Hebron? Have we forgotten it? And where is our Shechem (Nablus)? And our Jericho – will we forget them?”⁶⁸ Central to Rabbi Tzvi Kook’s lament was a desire to reestablish Jewish control over biblically significant areas of the West Bank. At the time, the sentiment of Rabbi Tzvi Kook’s speech was far from mainstream prior to the June 1967 War. Despite the cultivation of the West Bank as a place of longing in the collective memory of Israeli society,

⁶⁸ Auerbach p. 80

the vast majority of Israelis, prior to June 1967, had accepted the existing borders of their state as the boundaries of the Jewish State.⁶⁹

Rabbi Tzvi Kook, however, helped develop a theology outside the dominant discourse of secular Zionism, yet one that would prove to be incredibly influential after the June 1967 War. As the chief rabbi of the Jewish community in Mandate Palestine, Kook's father, Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak Kook, labored to reconcile the aims of the largely secular Zionist movement with traditional biblical and Talmudic teachings. In order to do so, Rabbi Abraham Kook argued that although the Zionist movement was not religiously motivated, secular Zionists were participating in a divine plan to reestablish the biblical kingdom of Israel even though they themselves did not recognize their position in that plan. Rabbi Abraham Kook's interpretation opened up a space where the pioneering spirit of Zionism and the traditional belief that the redemption of the people of Israel to the Holy Land would only come through an act of God could coexist. As such, according to the theology of Rabbi Abraham Kook, the establishment of the State of Israel was a stepping-stone toward an ideal, biblical state that would fulfill Jewish prophecy.⁷⁰

Importantly, Rabbi Abraham Kook's theology introduced human agency into the traditional picture of redemption, and it was in this spirit that his son was speaking in the weeks prior to the June 1967 War. However, Rabbi Tzvi Kook's speech also illuminates a key point of departure between his theology and that of his father. For Rabbi Tzvi Kook, the historical land of Israel, not the establishment of a politically independent state, comprised

⁶⁹ Israel's first Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, captured the predominant public opinion in Israel about the borders of the state in the early months of 1967. "The borders of your homeland are the borders of Israel as they are now. That is all," Ben-Gurion said. (Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 21.)

⁷⁰ Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism*: 38-45; Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 26-31.

the focus of redemption. Despite their intentions, the efforts of both rabbis to merge biblical prophecy with the activities of Zionism largely failed to gain traction among Zionists or religious Jews prior to the June 1967 War, and only really flourished among the small number of students studying at the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva.⁷¹

As a result, the students of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva, who comprised the audience of Rabbi Tzvi Kook's speech, occupied a peculiar place in Israeli society between traditional Orthodox sects whose attitude toward the State of Israel was indifferent at best and the enterprise of Zionism that had claimed parts of the historic homeland of the Jewish people and succeeded in establishing Israel as a modern state. On the one hand, the students of the yeshiva accepted that their actions could aid in the implementation of God's plan, which was not accepted among the traditional Orthodox, and on the other they felt as though they had missed their opportunity to participate in the building of the Jewish state, which had primarily been accomplished by the settlement activities of secular Zionist pioneers. For the students of the Mercaz HaRav yeshiva, Rabbi Tzvi Kook's speech was a call to action, but one that only became realistic in the social and political climate after Israel's victory in the June 1967 War.⁷²

One of the audience members listening to Rabbi Tzvi Kook's speech was another rabbi named Moshe Levinger. For Levinger, as well as others in the audience,⁷³ the June 1967 War represented the convergence of politics and theology and an opening to play their part in God's plan for the redemption of the Jewish people in the land of Israel by

⁷¹ Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*: 80; Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism*: 55.

⁷² Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 29; Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*: 80-81.

⁷³ Hanan Porat, one of the leading figures in the religious settlement movement over the forty years since 1967, was also in the audience when Rabbi Tzvi Kook gave his speech. (Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*: 81.)

settling the biblical heartland. The religiously motivated desire of Rabbi Levinger and others to settle the Occupied Territories blended with the post-war euphoria experienced across Israeli society, and the widespread desire to hold onto at least some of the conquered territory.⁷⁴

Moreover, Hebron was one of the areas suspended between the euphoria of victory and the climate of indecision about what to do with the Occupied Territories after June 1967. As the place where Abraham first purchased land when he entered Canaan, the location of the tombs of the patriarchs and matriarchs, and King David's first capital, Hebron occupies an important position in both secular and religious memory. In many ways, the history of Hebron is the foundation from which Jewish claims to a right of return to their ancient homeland originated. Additionally, a community of religious Jews had been living in Hebron since the fifteenth century, and the massacre of sixty-seven Jewish residents of Hebron in 1929 by Arab residents of the city and surrounding area entered Jewish memory alongside the Eastern European pogroms of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷⁵

The history and historical sites of Hebron, mainly the tombs of the patriarchs and the matriarchs, drew tens of thousands of visitors to the city after Israel's victory in the June 1967 War. However, the fact that Hebron was the largest population center in the southern West Bank with thirty eight thousand Palestinian residents severely complicated any plans for actual annexation. Yet, while the demographics of the city dissuaded the government from making any clear decisions about Hebron's fate, Rabbi Moshe Levinger

⁷⁴ Ibid., 81, 86; Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism*: 48-49.

⁷⁵ Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*: 2, 81, 86, 89; Segev, *1967: Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 578.

and a group of predominantly religiously motivated settlers set about creating facts on the ground in order to bring about their own vision for Hebron's future; a vision that was deeply intertwined with biblical prophecy and Rabbi Tzvi Kook's theology.⁷⁶

In the spring of 1968, Rabbi Levinger, along with a group of around sixty Israelis, obtained a permit from the Israeli military authority governing the West Bank to celebrate Passover in Hebron. Posing as Swiss tourists, the group rented rooms at the Park Hotel in Hebron for the week of Passover. However, when the group arrived they brought washing machines and refrigerators with them and nailed mezuzahs to the doors of their rooms in anticipation of the long duration of their stay. The morning after the group's arrival, Levinger and the others took to the streets dancing, singing, and carrying Torah scrolls. After the holiday, the group refused to leave the Park Hotel asserting that Jews had a right to settle in the ancient, holy city.⁷⁷

Six weeks after they first arrived, the Israeli army removed the group of settlers from the Park Hotel and brought them to an army barracks overlooking the city. In the barracks, families shared two room apartments and young men and women each slept in separate crowded dormitories. Despite the trying conditions, the group persisted and the military gradually constructed more permanent dwellings for the Settlers at the barracks. The Israeli military and government reacted to the Settlers with marked ambivalence. On the one hand, they did not want to allow the Settlers to occupy a position in the center of a Palestinian city, but on the other Israeli military and government action allowed the Settlers to remain in the West Bank.

⁷⁶ Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*.

⁷⁷ Segev, 1967: *Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 578; Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 145; Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*: 90-91.

Eventually, the government developed a compromise proposal. Instead of settling in the heart of a Palestinian city, the government offered to construct a community for the Settlers on a hill overlooking Hebron.⁷⁸ The Settlers accepted the proposal as a temporary measure in order to ensure their continued presence in the West Bank and their proximity to Hebron and its holy sites. The Israeli government constructed the community, named Kiryat Arba after the name of biblical Hebron, using money from their public works budget. Upon its completion, around one hundred and fifty settlers moved into the new settlement. However, many of the Settlers continued to hold aspirations of establishing a Jewish presence in the center of Hebron. In 1979, Miriam Levinger, Rabbi Levinger's wife, led a group of women from Kiryat Arba into Hebron and occupied the historically significant Hadassah House. The actions of Miriam Levinger and the other women succeeded in establishing a Jewish presence in the midst of a densely populated Palestinian city and creating the contours of the current conflict in Hebron. The establishment of both Kiryat Arba and Jewish settlement within the city of Hebron resulted from a conscientious effort by the Hebron settlers to transform the landscape of the West Bank in order to bring about the biblically inspired reality they desired in the aftermath of the June 1967 War. Importantly, in order to achieve their objectives the Settlers played on the blending of nationalist and religious narrative in the post-war environment and the accompanying political ambiguity that surrounded the future of the Occupied Territories.⁷⁹ Paradoxically, at the same time as Rabbi Levinger and the Jewish settlers of Hebron were working to

⁷⁸ The community on the hills overlooking Hebron was not the only settlement being built with support from the Israeli government and military at the time. Construction at Kfar Etzion began less than six months after the end of the June 1967 War. (Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 170-73.)

⁷⁹ Segev, 1967: *Israel, the war, and the year that transformed the Middle East*: 579; Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 146; Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*: 90-95.

secure a foothold in Hebron, another group of pioneers was attempting to establish a project with a much different vision and purpose.

3.10 The Sons of Abraham: Establishing Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam:

Like Hebron, the idea for NSWS emerged from the events defining the post-war environment within Israel. However, instead of emanating from the socially pervasive sense of euphoria, NSWS was a response to the conflicts resulting from the monumental geographic and demographic shifts following the June 1967 War. Prior to the war, Bruno Hassar, the visionary behind the founding of the village, hoped to start an interfaith community primarily for Jews and Christians living in Israel. After June 1967, however, it became impossible for Hussar to imagine a village built on the ideals of peace and co-existence between Christians and Jews within Israel “without taking into account those other sons of Abraham, the Arabs, both Muslim and Christian.”⁸⁰

Hussar’s involvement in interfaith and intergroup peace and co-existence work stemmed from his own cosmopolitan and culturally mixed background. Born in Egypt in 1911 to Jewish parents, Hussar also held Hungarian and Italian citizenship. As a young man, he moved to France where he converted to Catholicism in the 1930s. During World War Two, Hussar fled to the Free Zone in France where he witnessed anti-Semitism first hand, which sensitized him to his own Jewish roots. After the war, he studied theology and philosophy and was ordained as a priest in 1950. With encouragement from his mentor, Hussar moved to Israel in the 1950s in order to help the Catholic Church establish a center for Jewish studies in Jerusalem. Hussar’s activities in Israel were part of an effort to reconcile Christians and Jews in light of the historic role Christian theology played in

⁸⁰ Feuerverger, *Oasis of Dreams: Teaching and Learning Peace in a Jewish-Palestinian Village in Israel*: 122.

paving the way to the Holocaust.⁸¹ It was in the setting of post-holocaust reconciliation efforts between Christians and Jews within Israel that Hussar developed the initial vision for an interfaith village where people could, according to Hussar, come to “break down the barriers of fear, mistrust, ignorance, [and] preconceived ideas... and build bridges of trust, respect, mutual understanding, and, if possible, friendship.”⁸²

However, the June 1967 War fundamentally altered the setting in which Hussar was living and working. According to Hussar, with the unification of Jerusalem, “suddenly the Arab world busts into the city’s everyday life.”⁸³ While the majority of Israeli society relished the rejuvenation that followed victory, the geographic and demographic shifts resulting from the war, for Hussar, brought the previously nearly invisible position of Palestinians living in Israel into sharp focus, as well as the broader conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. As a result, it became impossible for Hussar to imagine a village working for peace and co-existence within Israel without the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis being its central focus. As such, after June 1967, Hussar’s vision shifted to the establishment of a village where Israelis and Palestinians of all faiths could live together equally while working through the conflicts between them and teaching their societies about peace.⁸⁴

Once the vision for the village crystallized, the major question that remained was how Hussar and others working on the project could obtain land so that the dream for the village could be turned into a reality. The question of land was answered in 1972 when the

⁸¹ Ibid., 120-23.

⁸² Ibid., 119-20.

⁸³ Ibid., 121.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 121-22.

Trappist monastery at Latrun⁸⁵ offered to lease a hilltop to the project at a nominal price for a one hundred year period. The hill had been part of the demilitarized zone between Jordan and Israel prior to the June 1967 War.⁸⁶ Shortly after obtaining the hilltop, the group held its first meeting on the future site of NSWS. The meeting took place, according to Hussar, “in an atmosphere of simple friendship... We were joined by Bedouin encamped around us, and by Arabs and Jews from surrounding villages and kibbutzim.”⁸⁷

Initially, however, conditions on the hilltop were difficult. Bramble covered the land, which had not been cultivated for centuries. Also, the hill did not have running water, bathrooms, or a shower. The early devotees to the project who lived on the hill had to dig holes in the ground for toilets and piled into cars once a week to drive to a nearby kibbutz to shower. Additionally, at first the project attracted young people from around the world who were looking for better societies than the ones they left, but who were not particularly interested in the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. For the village to be successful, Hussar reasoned, it would have to attract Palestinians and Israelis to come live there.

Living in a tent in the trying conditions on the hilltop, Hussar began to doubt whether the project could succeed. However, in a major breakthrough for the village, a Swiss family who had heard about the NSWS on the nightly news donated money for bathrooms and sent an architect to help build them. Soon after a group of Germans started an association to raise money for the project and helped connect the village to the natural

⁸⁵ Established in the late 19th century, the Trappist Monastery in Latrun, Israel is home to French monks whose order is founded on the “principle of working for peace in God’s name.” (ibid., 141.)

⁸⁶ Ibid., 122-23.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 123.

water supply on the hill. However, the vision truly began to become a reality in 1978 when the first family moved to the hilltop, initiating a new era in NSWS's development.⁸⁸

3.11 Contrasting legacies:

The early pioneers of NSWS succeeded in carving out a niche on a hill located in the ambiguous territory of the pre-1967 border between the West Bank and Israel. There they built a village whose purpose is to work to transform the landscape of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis. Importantly, the project took shape within the setting of, and in response to, the seismic territorial and demographic transformations following the June 1967 War, which brought the conflict and inequalities between Israelis and Palestinians into sharp focus for individuals, like Bruno Hussar, who were interested in issues of peace and co-existence. At the same time, the Jewish settlement of Hebron took root in the post-war environment, though appealing to very different trends. The actions of a group of religiously motivated settlers succeed in establishing a small Jewish presence among a much larger Palestinian population. In order to do so, the Settlers took advantage of popular and political sentiment following the June 1967 War to advance their aim of establishing Jewish control over what they considered the biblical and historical heartland of the Jewish people.

As seen in chapter one, the legacy of the Hebron settlers and NSWS pioneers is vastly different in terms of the characteristics of space and relations between peoples that developed as a result of their actions. In order to explore the differences between the effect of each community on its setting, the following three sections focus on the ways the respective communities narrate belonging and identity, its implications for relations

⁸⁸ Ibid., 2, 124-27.

between Palestinians and Israelis within each setting, and the position of each approach within the broader context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

4.0 Narratives of Hebron's Jewish Settlers:

4.1 Hebron: A Space of Conflict:

Hebron is a space of conflict. Daily dramas that range from the now banal humiliations of checkpoints to protests, violent confrontations, imprisonments, and even deaths play out between Palestinians and Jewish settlers, Palestinians and the Israeli military, and even between Jewish settlers and the Israeli military. Undergirding the tensions and hostilities in Hebron are a series of assertions about belonging made by the Jewish settlers that constitute the heart of a contest over Israel's identity as a state and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict since June 1967. Moreover, the consequences of the assertions and actions of Jewish settlers in Hebron illuminate the challenges brought about by the construction of monolithic ethno-religious national identities in the heterogeneous space of Israel/Palestine. Specifically, through their narratives, the Hebron settlers attempt to impose static and homogeneous understandings of history, belonging, memory, and 'the other' on a fundamentally dynamic and plural space. As such, the Settlers' narrative identity is constructed in opposition to Palestinian residents of the city. This construction precludes any basis for interaction between Palestinian residents and Jewish settlers other than antagonism and the recapitulation of structures of dispossession, exploitation, and oppression that characterize the conflict overall.

4.2 History, Belonging, Memory, and the Other in Jewish Hebron:

Since the beginning of the settlement movement, the Jewish settlers of Hebron have undertaken to define their community identity as well as its position in relation to Israeli

society as a whole, the Palestinian people amongst whom they live, and the broader geopolitical environment that constitutes the macro setting of their activities. For the Settlers, the narration of identity is a highly political endeavor. They are simultaneously arguing for the continuity of their actions with the history of Zionist settlement in Israel, the illegitimacy of the Palestinian people, and the settlement's location as a vanguard of the Western world against the rising tide of political Islam in the East. In order to make their claims, the Jews of Hebron recently issued two commemorative texts. The first, *Hebron: 4000 Years & 40* by Noam Arnon, a settler in the old city of Hebron, was published in 2008 to mark the fortieth anniversary of Jewish return to Hebron, and the second, *Hebron: Rebirth from Ruin*, is a collection of essays by settlers and their supporters published in 2009 to mark the eightieth anniversary of the 1929 massacre. Both books are co-published by the Jewish Community of Hebron and an outside supporting institution. Additionally, both books are available on the Jewish community of Hebron's website⁸⁹ and translated into English from their original Hebrew. Together, the texts provide a narrative of the Settlers' conceptions of history, belonging, memory, and the 'other' around which the identity of the settlement community is formed.

To begin with, the Settlers' narrative roots the history of Hebron in two foundational events that divide the city between its pre-modern and modern periods. The first event is God's promise to Abraham in Genesis that "unto your children shall I give this land,"⁹⁰ and Abraham's subsequent purchase of a field as a burial site for his wife Sarah, which now holds the building covering the tomb of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs. According to the narrative, God's promise and Abraham's land purchase form the "root and precedent of all

⁸⁹ "Hebron, City of Patriarchs: The Jewish Community of Hebron," <http://www.hebron.com/english/>.

⁹⁰ Hebron: Rebirth from Ruins, (Jewish Community of Hebron, 2009). 108.

subsequent Jewish purchases and reclamations of land in Eretz Israel.”⁹¹ In other words, all claims for the Jewish peoples right to return to their historic homeland emanate from this foundation. Consequently, the fact that Hebron was the first Jewish possession in the Land of Israel positions the city, according to the Settlers, as “the nation’s cradle,”⁹² and therefore central to the nation’s past, present, and future. Moreover, the centrality of Hebron has been reinforced over time by the fact that the city was King David’s first capital, and continued to be a place of longing, pilgrimage, and residence for Jews in the millennia of Diaspora spanning between the destruction of the Second Temple and the present.

The continuity of Jewish presence in Hebron, the narrative continues, was only disrupted in 1929 by the massacre of the Jewish community at the hands of their Arab neighbors. The Settlers, and Israeli society-at-large, understand the massacre to have been a “European-style pogrom,”⁹³ and thereby connect the violence to the trajectory of European anti-Semitism that led to the Holocaust. In the parlance of the Settlers, the massacre rendered Hebron “judenrein”⁹⁴ until its liberation in 1967.”⁹⁵ After the massacre, according to community member Rehavan Zeevi, the city of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs was left in the hands of “Jew-murderers who could now pillage the houses and homes of those they had slaughtered and killed.”⁹⁶ The slaughter inaugurated the modern history of the city, which consists of the Settlers’ struggle to reestablish and maintain the historical continuity of Jewish presence in Hebron in the face of forces bent on their annihilation. Consequently, the Settlers view themselves as having God-given, legal, and

⁹¹ Noam Arnon, *Hebron: 4000 Years and 40* (The Jewish Community of Hebron, 2008). 11.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ *Hebron: Rebirth from Ruins*. 6.

⁹⁴ “Judenrein” is the term used by Nazis to indicate areas cleansed of Jews during World War Two.

⁹⁵ *Hebron: Rebirth from Ruins*. 63.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 55.

moral mandates to resurrect a Jewish community whose continuity throughout history, only broken by an act of anti-Semitic slaughter, forms the basis of Jewish claims of belonging in the Holy Land.

In order to bolster their claims of belonging in Hebron, the Settlers emphasize the presence of the tombs of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs, and depict Jewish presence as the constant throughout the city's history. To abandon the city, David Wilder argues in one essay, "would be tantamount to abandoning the founders of our people," and analogous to giving up "Philadelphia or Boston or Mt. Vernon to the Taliban or al Qaeda."⁹⁷ As the ancestral home of their forefathers, the logic maintains, Hebron is a, if not the, natural place for Jews to live and control. Moreover, the Settlers are only following in the millennia old tradition of Jews who have made Hebron their home in order to live close to and be able to pray by the graves of the ancestors of their people. Indeed, Jewish presence in the city has remained constant throughout the ages, according to the narrative, while the presence of others has been transient. As Kiryat Arba resident and history teacher Eliaou Attlan writes, the walls of the building above the graves of the Patriarchs and the Matriarchs, built by Herod around 150 B.C.E, have been a "silent witness to many great conquerors... If the stones could speak, they would testify to how the conquerors disappeared, while the people of Israel outlived them all."⁹⁸ The Jewish communities claims of belonging in Hebron, then, are reaffirmed in the Settlers' narrative as natural, constant, and beyond question.

Additionally, the Settlers' community is constructed as a community of memory living in the light of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs and the shadows of 1929 and the

⁹⁷ Ibid., 115.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 16.

Holocaust. The shared memories of these events constitute the locus around which the community coalesces. While moving about the city the Settlers are not only coming into contact with their immediate physical environs, but also, according to community member Yeonatan Freide, “walking along the same paths that the Matriarchs and Patriarchs... walked along in their day.”⁹⁹ Freide continues, “this knowledge is the driving force in our lives in Hebron.”¹⁰⁰ The community, following the narrative, is constituted as a kind of wrinkle in time. Accordingly, the biblical and the present exist side by side, along with every interstitial generation of Jews who have lived in the city, and the living in simultaneity with past forms the common fabric of life for the Settlers.

Additionally, the memories of the 1929 massacre and the Holocaust form both a cautionary tale and a call to action for the community. Rachel Suissa writes, “the memory of the pogrom martyrs should forever be with us, and remembering them will contribute to a better future.”¹⁰¹ Remembering the victims becomes increasingly important for the Settlers over time because the fate of the martyrs, the Settlers believe, will become their fate if they are not successful in establishing the permanence and security of their community. Moreover, Suissa continues, the actions of the Settlers are “a dignified and appropriate step towards laying to rest the memory of the barbaric European and Arab pogroms culminating in the Holocaust.”¹⁰² Evidently, the Settlers view themselves to be the heirs of the victims of the most severe crime of the twentieth century, and their right to be in Hebron is restitution for the suffering and slaughter of their forbearers. As such, the shared

⁹⁹ Ibid., 120.; Also, note the resonance of Friede’s statement with Dayan’s description of Jericho and the writings of nineteenth century Europeans about their encounters with the Holy Land.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 8.

¹⁰² Ibid., 98.

memory of suffering and injustice defines the moral location of the Settlers' endeavors and constitutes a common reference point around which their identity is formed in relation to the outside world.

The Settlers' right to be in Hebron, according to the narrative, is under assault by the Palestinians who threaten to push them from their historic place in the city. Indeed, the Palestinians are depicted as an illegitimate people heir to the legacy of violence and anti-Semitism that plagued the Jews in the twentieth century and before. The word 'Palestinian' is conspicuously absent from the Settlers' texts except in reference to the Palestinian Authority. In all other instances, the Palestinian residents of Hebron are referred to as Arabs, indistinguishable from those living in neighboring countries. In essence, for the Settlers the Palestinians are an "invented" people belonging to a "false creation called a 'palestinian nation [sic].'"¹⁰³ Palestinians are folded by the Settlers' narrative into the ranks of usurpers who have tried, and failed, to displace the Jews from Hebron and erase the Jewish character of the city over the ages. Palestinians are not a real people, the narrative contends, and therefore cannot have a real claim to the city. Arabs, however, should be allowed to live in the city provided they recognize that it is the God-given property of the Jews. Therefore, any belonging Palestinians may claim to Hebron is illegitimate compared to the divine, moral, and historic sanctioning of Jewish presence.

On top of their illegitimacy, the Palestinian population of Hebron is construed as an existential threat to the Settlers, as well as to Israel and the Western world, by connecting it to the legacy of the 1929 massacre. As Noam Arnon writes, the Palestinians currently living

¹⁰³ Ibid., 12.

in Hebron are the “Arab offspring of the perpetrators of the 1929 massacre.”¹⁰⁴ The good action of a few Arabs, who “it must be admitted... from among a murderous population of many thousands, did conceal and rescue some Jews,”¹⁰⁵ are subsumed in the much greater memory of violence that marks the massacre.¹⁰⁶ Following in the footsteps of their predecessors, according to the Settlers, the contemporary Palestinian community is capable of visiting extreme violence on the Jews living in Hebron without provocation or warning. Indeed, the slew of terrorist attacks and persistent violence suffered by the Settlers testifies to the continued wish of the Arabs of Hebron to “make Hebron judenrein”¹⁰⁷ once again. Furthermore, according to the narrative, the current terrorist activities of Palestinians are not just a threat to Jewish settlers in Hebron, or Israel at large, but are also part of the wave of Islamic terror directed against the Western World. As such, Arnon states, “the miraculous rebirth of the Jewish community of Hebron... is the single greatest triumph of the West over Islamic Jihad and terror.”¹⁰⁸

The depiction of barbarous Palestinians in the Settlers’ narrative exists rather disjointedly with the memory of good relations between Arabs and Jews and the Settlers’ wishes for future peace. Arnon recalls, “Jews and Arabs had inhabited the town for many generations, at times in peaceful coexistence and as good neighbors.”¹⁰⁹ The past existence

¹⁰⁴ Arnon, *Hebron: 4000 Years and 40*: 33.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁰⁶ In his book *One Country: A bold proposal to end the Israeli-Palestinian impasse*, Ali Abunimah offers an alternative narrative to the 1929 massacre. Abunimah notes that the memory of the massacre is one of Israel’s foundational myths, and is often used by supporters of the settlement movement to argue for the aggressive expansion of settlements in Hebron and the imposition of military control. However, Abunimah states that most members of the Jewish community of Hebron, as survivors of the massacre testified, were saved because their Muslim neighbors sheltered them and cared for the wounded. “How would history look today,” Abunimah asks, “had that been the signal lesson of the event?” (Ali Abunimah, *One country: a bold proposal to end the Israeli-Palestinian impasse* (New York: Metropolitan, 2006). 7.)

¹⁰⁷ *Hebron: Rebirth from Ruins*. 8.

¹⁰⁸ Arnon, *Hebron: 4000 Years and 40*: 2.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

of peaceful relations sets a possible precedent for future coexistence. However, the memory of neighborly relations also mixes with that of the 1929 massacre to form a specter of violence and ill-intent lurking just below the surface of cordiality. Additionally, the Settlers' prayer that "the children of Abraham will one day be able to live in Hebron in peace, side by side, in serenity and harmony,"¹¹⁰ sits awkwardly with the depiction of Palestinian terrorists emboldened by every concession for peace. The Settlers' narrative concludes that strengthening the ability of the Jewish community in Hebron, and Israel as a whole, to protect itself, instead of emboldening the enemy by giving away God-given Jewish territory, is the necessary strategy for preventing Hebron from becoming "judenrein" once again. Moreover, the Settlers' maintain that there is an intrinsic link between the reinforcement of Jewish control over Hebron and the protection of Israel from the omnipresent threat of annihilation.

Therefore, through their narration of history, memory, belonging, and the other, the Jewish settlers of Hebron constitute their identity as a community exercising its God-given, legal, and moral right to live in the city of its forefathers while communing between the material present and the omnipresent past. The formation of the Settlers' identity around collective memories of the biblical past establishes the community as a pillar of stasis in a constantly reconfiguring world. However, the outpost of stasis, that is the continuation of Jewish presence in the city through the Settlers' community, is being encroached upon by illegitimate claims of belonging made by an invented people. Consequently, while praying for peace, the Settlers' must form an ever-vigilant bulwark, living in the shadow of the 1929

¹¹⁰ *Hebron: Rebirth from Ruins*. 9.

massacre and the Holocaust, against the omnipresent threat of annihilation faced by the Jewish people.

4.3 The Hebron Settlers in Israeli Society:

In the view of many in Israeli society, the Hebron settlers' formulation of identity and belonging places them considerably outside the mainstream. The Settlers' actions and assertions following June 1967 War, according to this view, form one extreme in an internal conflict over Israel's identity as a state. The main thrust of political Zionism, according Attalia Omer, "rejected traditional Jewish notions of messianic redemption and insisted on the physical human-initiated redemption or act of return to the land."¹¹¹ As such, the dominant Zionist culture in Israel adheres to Anthony Smith's characterization of nationalism as a "distinctly this-worldly movement and culture."¹¹² It was precisely in response to the "this-worldliness" of political Zionism that Rabbi Abraham Kook developed his theology in order to enable religious participation in the physical act of land redemption as a stepping-stone towards divine redemption. The point of departure pertaining to the significance of land, noted in chapter two, between father and son's theology forms the point of contention between the religious Zionist settlers and the secular Zionist mainstream.

By insisting on their right to settle the entire God-given land of Israel, the Settlers have forced a confrontation between the twin foundational conceptions of Israel as a Jewish and as a democratic state. The June 1967 War, according to Israeli scholar Gadi Taub, "presented Israel with two possible interpretation of Zionism: Zionism as the

¹¹¹ Atalia Omer, "The Hermeneutics of Citizenship as a Peacebuilding Process: A Multiperspectival Approach to Justice," *Political Theology* 11, no. 5 (2010): 661.

¹¹² Ibid.

liberation of people and Zionism as the redemption of land.”¹¹³ Siding with the Settlers, Taub continues, “would force Israel to make a choice between two options, both of which will be an end to Zionism: a Jewish apartheid, where the Arab majority is barred from voting, and a democracy where the Jewish character of the state would be voted down by the Arab majority.”¹¹⁴ The Settlers, however, do not view their actions as problematic. Again, influenced by Rabbi Abraham Kook’s theology, the Settlers believe that the coming redemption, which their actions are helping to facilitate, will “solve the dilemma of the occupation at a metaphysical level.”¹¹⁵ Since the religious narrative of redemption put forward by the Settlers is rejected by the mainstream of Israeli society and the Jewish and democratic nature of the state are valued as essential, the Settlers are demonized and ostracized as a fringe group, in the words of Israeli academic Michael Feige, “deeply entangled in... processes undermining the unique Jewish character of the state.”¹¹⁶

However, the characterization of Hebron’s settlers as on the ideological fringe of Israel society is made problematic when juxtaposed with the relative success of their movement in the four decades since 1967. The small group of settlers who celebrated Passover in the Park Hotel in 1968 has now become, according to Feige, “200,000 settlers in 145 settlements, whose representation by ministers and members of the Knesset far surpassed their percentage in the Israeli population.”¹¹⁷ Moreover, the settlement enterprise in Hebron, and elsewhere, has survived because the Israeli state “enabled them, backed them, partly financed them, and took international responsibility for their

¹¹³ Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism*: 3.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁶ Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 7.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

actions.”¹¹⁸ By monopolizing on the ambivalent social and political attitudes toward the Occupied Territories after 1967, the Settlers have been largely able to determine Israeli policy towards the West Bank over the past four decades, and have exerted a degree of influence over the debates and actions of society as whole uncharacteristic of a groups at its margins.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, Taub’s clear distinction between a Zionism focused on land and a Zionism focused on political emancipation is challenged by a critical consideration of ethno-religious nationalism and the history of Zionism. Omer argues that nationalist symbols and myths are often continuations of religious motifs transmitted to a secular setting.¹²⁰ However, placing these myths and symbols in the secular setting of nationalism does not sever them from their religious roots, as much as secular nationalist would like to suppress their origins. Instead, nationalist symbols and narratives exist as a hybrid “political theology.” As a result, according to Omer, “Jewish ‘return’ is interpreted as historical rather than religious metahistorical entitlement and the Jewish character of the state of Israel as a ‘cultural’ attribute and imperative.”¹²¹ Even in its secular form, the political theology of mainstream Zionism pulls on the same shared sense of history, belonging, memory, and the other as the Hebron settlers’ ideology, but places them in the context of redemption in this world rather than the divine. The reliance of secular Zionism on the religious resources of Judaism is clearly demonstrated throughout the history of the Zionist movement and the State of Israel, as evidenced by the blending of nationalist and

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 12.

¹¹⁹ Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism*: 15.

¹²⁰ Omer, "The Hermenuetics of Citizenship as a Peacebuilding Process: A Multiperspectival Approach to Justice," 661-62.

¹²¹ Ibid., 665.

religious symbolism and myth in the aftermath of June 1967 War.¹²² Even when it has tried, such as during the Sixth Zionist World Congress,¹²³ political Zionism has not been able to “ignore the centrality of the Land of Israel for Jewish identity.”¹²⁴ However, due to its “this-world” orientation, since it has already achieved its goal of national self-determination, political Zionism is able to make political calculations about the material consequences of annexation that do not factor into the worldview of the Settlers.

Therefore, the Settlers are marginal in Israeli society due to their divine, rather than worldly, orientation towards redemption which leads them to value land reclamation above the Jewish or democratic nature of the state. The different orientations towards redemption between secular Zionism and the religious Zionism of the Settlers have formed a major point of contention in Israeli society since June 1967. During the same time, the Settlers have been able to exert disproportionate influence over Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories, strongly influencing the contours of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Additionally, despite the differences between religious and secular Zionism, both sides in the debate draw on a shared heritage of symbols and narratives, albeit in different contexts, to constitute their collective identities around senses of history, belonging,

¹²² Recall Israeli radio broadcaster Rafi Amir’s elation on approaching the Western Wall after Israel occupied the Old City of Jerusalem in 1967. “I am not religious and never have been,” Amir said, “but this is the Wall and I am touching the stones of the Western Wall!” (Auerbach, *Hebron Jews: memory and conflict in the land of Israel*: 81.).

¹²³ During the Sixth World Zionist Congress in 1903, Theodore Herzl introduced a proposal to send a committee to British controlled Uganda in East Africa to explore the possibility of establishing Jewish settlements in the territory. The proposal stemmed from a letter written by Sir Clement Hill, the chief of the Protectorate Department of the British Colonial Office, suggesting that the British government would support Jewish national settlement in Uganda. Although Herzl made clear that Uganda was a political consideration and not a substitute for Palestine, the proposal was met with strong resistance because settlement in Uganda appeared to forfeit what members of the congress viewed as the intrinsic link between the Jewish people and the Land of Israel. Disagreement over the proposal almost caused a split in the movement, and the idea of establishing a Jewish national settlement in Uganda was rejected by the Seventh World Zionist Congress in 1904. (Walter Laqueur, *A history of Zionism* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1972). 127-31.)

¹²⁴ Taub, *The Settlers and the Struggle over the Meaning of Zionism*: 31.

memory, and the other. As a result, in regards to the position of the 'other', the Settlers and Israeli society in general share a great deal in terms of their formulation of and adherence to exclusionary narratives of identity and belonging.

4.4 Narratives of Irreconcilable Difference:

As a result of their exclusivist narration of history, belonging, and memory, the Settlers' form their identity around, in the words of Couze Venn, "an intransigent history of difference dividing communities into apparently irreconcilable ethnic and religious, or 'civilizational' camps."¹²⁵ Consequently, the difference between the Settlers and Palestinians is considered to be "originary and irreconcilable."¹²⁶ Furthermore, the recapitulation of monolithic stereotypes contained in the Settlers' discourse develops the Palestinians as an imaginary, or a comprehensive and representative mental image. The Settlers' mental image of Palestinians essentializes them as an 'evil' foil for the Settlers' 'good' community. Additionally, the totalized construction of the Palestinians as an existential threat to the Settlers' community is internalized by the Settlers and "performatively enacted and embodied in face to face situations."¹²⁷ The essentialist formulation of the Settlers' narrative shuts down the inherent openness of social actions to the introduction of newness that could challenge or enrich existing frameworks of understanding, and blocks any knowledge of the Palestinians outside of the Settlers' developed imaginary. As a result, the Palestinians are relegated to "the incomprehension of an alien lifeworld, in spite of the common world often shared."¹²⁸

¹²⁵ Couze Venn, "The Repetition of Violence: Dialogue, the Exchange of Memory, and the Question of Convivial Socialities," *Social Identities* 11, no. 3 (2005): 283.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 284.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 287.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 286.

The essentialization of Palestinians in the Settlers' narratives reinforces the homogenizing imperative underlying the current status quo and leaves no room for what cultural theorist Homi Bhabha refers to as the "fluidity, elasticity, and historicity of identities."¹²⁹ In other words, the Settlers' narrative flattens what Venn refers to as the historically and contemporary "heterogeneous, hyphenated culture space... of Palestine/Israel"¹³⁰ into an "immutable identity, untranslatable to the 'other', who is positioned as the outsider."¹³¹ By flattening the historically pluralistic space of Israel/Palestinian into an unprecedented stasis, the Settlers' narrative eliminates the common ground necessary for translating experiences between the two communities in Hebron. Furthermore, the essentializing narrative serves to perpetuate the conflict by adhering to the ideological needs of the Settlers, and obscuring the experiences of dispossession, exploitation, and oppression underlying the conflict. As a consequence, the communities become locked in a cycle of violence construed as a civilizational conflict with no way to attend to the actually root causes of the violence.¹³²

Importantly, however, the Settlers' construction of identity and belonging illuminates only one half of the conflict in Hebron. The voices and experiences of Palestinians living in the city, which aim at defining their own position, form a necessary companion to the Settlers' narratives. The perspectives of Palestinians in Hebron, though, are much more difficult to uncover than their Jewish counterparts. The following section

¹²⁹ Omer, "The Hermeneutics of Citizenship as a Peacebuilding Process: A Multiperspectival Approach to Justice," 663.

¹³⁰ Venn, "The Repetition of Violence: Dialogue, the Exchange of Memory, and the Question of Convivial Socialities," 295.

¹³¹ Ibid., 291.

¹³² Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*; Venn, "The Repetition of Violence: Dialogue, the Exchange of Memory, and the Question of Convivial Socialities."; Omer, "The Hermeneutics of Citizenship as a Peacebuilding Process: A Multiperspectival Approach to Justice."

investigates the historically constructed difficulties surrounding Palestinian self-presentation and engages with the experiences and voices that end up being heard.

5.0 The Problematic of Palestinian Self-Presentation:

5.1 Who will speak for the Palestinians?

Unlike the Jewish settlers of Hebron, there are no self-published memorial or history books available in English representing the outlook and experiences of Palestinian residents of the city. Instead, the narratives of Hebron's Palestinian residents are largely available to those outside the Arabic language community, if they are to be heard at all, through the mediation of Western or Israeli researchers, filmmakers, and human rights organizations. The reliance of Palestinians living in Hebron on outsiders to translate or deliver their stories to the outside world is a result of the historical and persistent representation of Palestinians as an illegitimate people. In the dominant discourse of the West, according to Edward Said, "there is the entrenched *cultural* attitude toward Palestinians deriving from age-old Western prejudices about Islam, the Arabs, and the Orient. This attitude... dehumanized us, reduced us to the barely tolerated status of a nuisance."¹³³ In other words, the dominant Western cultural narrative of Palestinians has evolved from, and follows the basic outlines of, nineteenth century European writings about the Holy Land, addressed above in chapter one. As a result, Palestinians living today inherit the sense of illegitimacy constructed around their ancestors, and continue to be understood according to modernized renditions of the same discourse.

Furthermore, for the majority of the twentieth century, outsiders who acted as self-appointed spokespeople for the Palestinians developed the image of Palestinians as an

¹³³ Edward W. Said, *The question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992). xl.

illegitimate people in the eyes of the western world. Importantly, the self-appointed spokespeople filtered the knowledge they relayed through cultural perspectives and political agendas external to those of Palestinians. Most of the time, moreover, Zionists and Westerners aligned with the Zionist cause assumed the role of speaking for the Palestinians. Since the interests of Zionism ran directly contrary to Palestinian interest, according to Said, “this has always meant a blocking operation, by which the Palestinian cannot be heard from (or represent himself) directly on the world stage.”¹³⁴ As a result, according to Dina Matar, “the story of the Palestinians, as ordinary human beings subjected to violent forms of power, remains a largely hidden one.”¹³⁵ Put another way, Palestinians have not been heard from directly for much of the history of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict because their identity and experiences are delegitimized and obscured in the process of justifying their dispossession, domination, and control.¹³⁶

5.2 Recovering Palestinian Voices:

Far from being greeted with acquiescence, the historically imposed muteness of Palestinians in Western discourse inspired a counter literature that sought to enable Palestinian voices to speak to their own experiences for broader audiences. Specifically, the literature endeavored to expand Western understandings of Palestinians beyond the delegitimizing claims that characterized the pervasively available narratives. To this extent, Rosemary Sayigh’s *Palestinians: From Peasants to Revolutionaries: A Peoples History*, published in 1979, is a landmark text that uses oral history techniques to present a peoples

¹³⁴ Ibid., 39.

¹³⁵ Matar, *What it means to be Palestinian: Stories of Palestinian Peoplehood*: xi.

¹³⁶ Said, *The question of Palestine*: 29, 37-39.; Matar, *What it means to be Palestinian: Stories of Palestinian Peoplehood*: xi.

perspective of Palestinian history through the voices of refugees living in Lebanon.¹³⁷

According to Matar, whose *What it Means to Be Palestinian: Stories of Palestinian Peoplehood* follows in the tradition of Sayigh's work, the purpose of Palestinian people's histories is to "ascribe agency to the Palestinians, not as helpless victims of forces beyond their control, as they have often been portrayed, but as *actors* at the centre of critical phases of their modern history."¹³⁸ However, while Palestinian voices, experiences, and agency take a central position in works by authors such as Sayigh and Matar, the central problematic of Palestinian self-presentation remains: Palestinians, historically and contemporarily, are so marginalized a people that their stories must be related to outsiders by third parties who hold the credibility Palestinians lack.

As such, the narratives of Palestinian experience and outlook in Hebron available to outsiders are filtered through the legitimizing frameworks of Western,¹³⁹ or Western trained, academics, filmmakers, institutions, and human rights organizations. Despite presenting Palestinian voices and experiences that would otherwise be unheard, the available narratives are not immune to manipulation by the perspectives and political agendas of the individuals and organizations undertaking to broadcast Palestinian voices to a larger audience. For instance, Israeli human rights group B'tselem started a video project in 2007 to document harassment of Palestinians by Israeli settlers in the West Bank. One of the places the project focuses on is Hebron's Old City center. According to B'tselem, "the project is unique in that it enables Palestinians themselves to document the infringement of

¹³⁷ Sayigh, *Palestinians: from peasants to revolutionaries : a people's history*.

¹³⁸ Matar, *What it means to be Palestinian: Stories of Palestinian Peoplehood*: xi.

¹³⁹ In this case, Western refers both to European, North American, and Israeli academics, filmmakers, and organizations, as, despite its location in the Middle East, Israel is closely associated with the West.

their rights and to present their daily lives, their anger, pain, joy, and hope to Israelis.”¹⁴⁰

However, the videos that end up on B’tselem’s website are presented to bolster B’Tselem’s goal of raising awareness about human rights violations against Palestinians in the Occupied Territories in order to change Israeli policy.¹⁴¹

For example, one video from the project shows a number of shops along a crowded street. The video then cuts to a group of Israeli soldiers in combat gear filtering into the street and disrupting the commercial activities taking place. The soldiers drag a number of Palestinians away from the shops pushing them to the ground and subduing them when they resist. One man is carried out from a shop by four soldiers and placed on the ground, apparently unconscious. As the press gathers around to take pictures, the soldiers cordon off the area and begin to weld the doors of the shops along the street closed. The caption accompanying the video informs the viewer, “The action was part of the Israeli authorities’ separation policy in the center of Hebron, which is aimed at protecting settlements erected there. This policy entails physical and legal segregation between the Israeli settlers and the Palestinian majority.”¹⁴² The video clearly depicts the disregard for Palestinian rights by Israeli authorities. However, the video is presented primarily to persuade Israeli and Western audiences that Israel needs to change its policies in the Occupied Territories. The viewer does not know what Palestinians experiencing the situation in Hebron think about the Settlers and the military, or what actions are being taken or policies enacted in order to change the situation from the side of the Palestinians. Therefore, despite capturing the

¹⁴⁰ "B'Tselem's Camera Project," http://www.btselem.org/video/cdp_background.

¹⁴¹ According to their website, B’tselem “acts primarily to change Israeli policy in the Occupied Territories and ensure that its government, which rules the Occupied Territories, protects the human rights of residents there and complies with its obligations under international law.” (“About B’Tselem,” http://www.btselem.org/about_btselem).

¹⁴² "Army Seals Palestinian Shops in Hebron, 2010," <http://www.btselem.org/video/2010/08/army-seals-palestinian-shops-hebron>.

perpetration of an injustice from the perspective of a Palestinian cameraperson, the video, and videos from other such organizations,¹⁴³ conforms to the tendency for Palestinians to be portrayed as “helpless victims of forces beyond their control” rather than as “*actors* at the centre of critical phases of their modern history.”¹⁴⁴

In addition to videos on the websites of human rights organizations, Palestinian experiences in Hebron are presented in the form of personal narratives in books such as Wendy Pearlman’s *Occupied Voices: Stories of Everyday Life from the Second Intafada*. Pearlman, an American-Jewish woman from the Mid-West studying the Middle East, set out to “bring Palestinian voices to audiences that have had little opportunity to hear Palestinians speak for themselves.”¹⁴⁵ Importantly, the narratives presented in Pearlman’s book offer a more nuanced continuum of experience and emotion than the videos discussed above, which primarily capture the trauma of confrontation without its contextualization within a broader stream of human experience.

For example, Pearlman transcribes the narrative of a young woman from Hebron named Iman who is a senior at Birzeit University. Iman’s family, like all families living in Hebron, is caught up in the events that have shaped the current situation in the city. During Ramadan in 1994, her father decided to take a day off from work in order to bring his children to the Ibrahimi Mosque to pray. Iman and her oldest brother did not go because they were not feeling well, Iman says, “so my Dad went with my two other brothers. And he came back home with only one of them.”¹⁴⁶ Iman’s thirteen year-old brother had been

¹⁴³ See the Christian Peacemaker Teams’ video page for further examples. (“Christian Peacemaker Teams,” <http://www.youtube.com/user/CPTHebron#p/>).

¹⁴⁴ Matar, *What it means to be Palestinian: Stories of Palestinian Peoplehood*: xi.

¹⁴⁵ Pearlman, *Occupied voices: stories of everyday life from the second Intifada*: xxvii.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

killed by Baruch Goldstein in the massacre at the Ibrahimi Mosque. “He was one year younger than I was,” Iman says, “and we were practically twins.”¹⁴⁷ Since the massacre, according to Iman, each member of her family has been impacted by, internalized, and tried to cope with the killing of her brother, and it has strained the relationships between surviving members of the family. “Our relationships with each other should be warm and positive,” Iman says, “but instead there are so many problems separating us.”¹⁴⁸

On top of the tragedy of her brother’s death, Iman’s narrative recounts daily harassments at the hands of soldiers and settlers in Hebron. “We try to avoid getting involved with the settlers,” Iman says, “but we always find ourselves in one bad situation after another.”¹⁴⁹ Iman details the experiences of her family from being spit on by settlers and harassed in the street by their children, to imprisoned family members being tortured in Israeli jails and the suppression and criminalization of any reaction on the part of Palestinians to the situation in the city. However, Iman’s narrative does not paint a monolithic picture of her experiences or of those on the other side. “I don’t believe all Jews are bad...” Iman says, “One of the soldiers wanted to hit me. Another one... tried to calm me down. He even gave me tissues to wipe my tears.”¹⁵⁰ Yet, despite the occasional moments of empathy shown by the soldiers, Iman is skeptical, even pessimistic, about the ability of Israelis and Palestinians to live together. “In the past I wouldn’t have minded if Jews lived here with us in peace...” Iman says, “[but] I just don’t want to have to deal with the Israelis

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 171.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 170.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 173-74.

anymore. After all the killing that has taken place, it is going to be impossible for us to live side by side with them.”¹⁵¹ Even so, Iman says, “my ultimate goal is peace.”¹⁵²

Iman’s narrative does not communicate a passive acquiescence to oppression and the status quo of the conflict. Instead, Iman has adopted an attitude of steadfast resolve and purpose in the face of potentially crushing life experiences. “I tell myself I can’t surrender,” she says, “I have to cope with the situation and give my support to those who have lost loved ones and homes.”¹⁵³ In response to her family’s own tragedy, Iman is studying Psychology in order to put herself in a position where she can help others who are suffering in ways similar to how her family has suffered. Moreover, Iman does not understand her aspiration to be able to help others cope with the psychological impacts of occupation, dispossession, and tragedy strictly in terms of helping individuals. “I need to graduate so I can be of service to my people...” she says, “there is a cause that is more important: Palestine.”¹⁵⁴ While acting individually in order to cope with her own family history and help others cope with similar experiences, Iman sees her actions as contributing to the recognition of a larger purpose intimately intertwined with her own life experiences: the realization of self-determination for the Palestinian people.

Iman’s narrative delves into aspects of the experiences of Palestinians living in Hebron that are not accessible through the video clips posted on the websites of human rights organizations. By operating in a different orientation toward time from the videos, Iman’s narrative does not solely document the moment of experiencing a trauma or injustice, but reflects on a continuum of life experiences that includes experiences of

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 174.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 176.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

injustice, or tragedy in Iman's case, as well as coping, reflection, personal and social aspirations, and resistance. As a result, the expanded time orientation of personal narratives, such as the ones recorded by Pearlman, succeeds in capturing the role of Palestinians as agents at the center of shaping their individual and collective life experiences. The conveyance of individual and group agency as well as a complexity of experience depicted, in such narratives, challenges the persistent notions of illegitimacy surrounding Palestinian identity. However, personal narratives recorded by outsiders are not free from the politics of presentation, as the dynamics of interaction between interviewer and interviewee shape the nature of the narratives told.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, researchers ultimately exercise editorial control over the context of presentation and the conclusions drawn from the narratives.

5.3 Discerning Palestinian Perspectives:

The narratives and videos captured by researchers and human rights activists are not discredited by their reliance on third party translation and validation, but they also cannot be said to represent a collective articulation of group history and identity in the same way as the books produced by the Jewish settlers of Hebron. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions about the construction of belonging and identity that informs the Palestinian community of Hebron's posture in the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. At the same time, however, the videos and narratives captured and relayed by human rights activists and academic researchers provide insight into a realm of experiences that has historically been blocked to Western audiences due to a monopolization of the role of explaining

¹⁵⁵ In her article on approaches generating and analyzing narrative data, Lena Wiklund-Gustin states, "we are not authors of existence, but co-authors of its meaning... in research... we become part of other peoples worlds... which must be accounted for in our search for narrative data." (Lena Wiklund-Gustin, "Narrative hermeneutics: in search of narrative data," *Scandinavian Journal of Caring Sciences* 24, no. Journal Article (2010): 33.)

Palestinian experiences by forces hostile to Palestinian interests. As a result, while not offering an officially compiled narrative, the material relayed by third parties provides insight into the events, experiences, and perspectives shaping notions of Palestinian identity and belonging in Hebron.

Specifically, and perhaps expectedly, the central presence of harassment by soldiers and settlers in the videos and narratives suggests that the conflict between Palestinians and the Jewish settlers, backed by the Israeli military, forms a major focal point for the experiences of the Palestinian community in Hebron. Additionally, Iman's distinction between Jews and Israelis in her narrative provides a window into the construction of Palestinian identity in relation to the 'other' in Hebron. Iman states that she would not have minded if Jews had lived in Hebron in Peace, but does not know if she can tolerate the presence of Israelis after everything that has happened in the conflict. From one perspective, Iman's statement reads as a nuanced distinction between all Jews and Israelis who seek to expand settlements in the West Bank and impose military rule on Palestinians. However, from another perspective, Iman's distinction between Jews and Israelis reads similarly to the Settlers' refusal to acknowledge the national ambitions of the Palestinian people. In Iman's narrative, as long as the Jews in Hebron do not have national ambitions it is possible for them to coexist peacefully with Palestinians. However, once the Jews are understood to have national ambitions they become Israelis, conflict defines relations between the two groups, and the possibility for coexistence fades away.

Iman's distinction suggests that Palestinians in Hebron, like the Settlers, define identity and belonging in the city in exclusionary, national terms. Both groups would tolerate the presence of the other as long as the other did not have its own national

ambitions. Furthermore, since each group defines its identity in nationally exclusive terms, assertions of belonging made by one group threaten to erase the identity of the other. However, unlike the Settlers, the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, according to Iman's narrative, does not stem from originary and irreconcilable differences. Instead, the inability of the two sides to live together stems from the experiences of dispossession, dominance, and control that underlie the conflict for Palestinians. Consequently, Iman's narrative suggests that reconciliation is a possibility provided that the two national groups can adequately address the issues of injury, inequality, and injustice underlying the conflict. However, the fact that the underlying issues in the conflict for Palestinians stem from the enactment of exclusionary nationalist claims by Israelis severely complicates the possibility for reconciliation as long as the assertions of the two groups remain mutually exclusive.

Importantly, though, while the videos and narratives relayed to the outside world by third parties provide glimpses into the Palestinian community of Hebron's construction of identity and belonging, they do not represent a collective articulation in the same way as the texts published by the Jewish settlers of Hebron. Even so, the voices and experiences that are relayed speak clearly to the agency of Palestinians in negotiating the defining experiences of harassment by settlers and the constant presence and intrusion of soldiers into everyday life. However, the Palestinian community of Hebron remains dependent on outside actors imbued with the credibility Palestinians lack in order to translate their experiences, voices, and perspectives to the outside world. As a result, a thorough understanding of the Palestinian community of Hebron's definition of identity and belonging, as well as its relation to the conflict, remains elusive due to the persistent difficulties surrounding Palestinian self-presentation. Turning from the problematics of

Palestinian self-presentation and exclusionary definitions of identity and belonging in Hebron, the following section explores the ideology, construction of space, and activities of NSWS as an intentionally bi-national and bilingual village in Israel and the village's relation to the overarching setting of conflict between Palestinians and Israelis.

6.0 Narratives of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam:

6.1 Understanding the Oasis:

Starkly dissimilar to the omnipresence of conflict in Hebron, a sense of tranquility and harmony pervades the physical environment and daily interactions at NSWS. Indeed, the village, as its history suggests, is an attempt to construct a space of equality shared between Palestinians and Israelis in an otherwise asymmetrical and unequally shared reality. As such, NSWS offers a radically different response than either mainstream Zionism or religious Zionism to the questions raised about the nature of Israel as a state following the June 1967 War. Instead of focusing on claims of ethno-national or divine hegemony, the creation of NSWS embodies an attempt to grapple with the existence of two national communities within Israel and the questions of history, identity, and justice that their presence raises.

Furthermore, the narratives of NSWS depict an inescapable awareness that the village exists within the unequal relationships of power characterizing the Palestinian/Israeli conflict as a whole. The recognition of NSWS as situated within the conflict motivates and informs the activities of the village which seek to create spaces for Israelis and Palestinians, as individuals and as groups, to understand and engage with their positions in the overarching conflict. However, the narratives also illuminate a tension between the effectiveness of the attitudinal changes facilitated by the activities of the village and the need for structural change in order to transform the material reality of the conflict. In addition to engaging critically with the dominant constructions of identity and

belonging in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, NSWS's work intersects critically with the broader field of encounter and coexistence work in Israel that has attempted, through various paradigms, to facilitate better relations between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis. As a reflection of NSWS's approach, the narratives produced by the community challenge the development, imposition, and recapitulation of essentialized categories of belonging and identity in Israeli society and the presumptions informing the work of the coexistence industry that has sought to mediate and improve relations between the two communities.

6.2 NSWS's Self-Presentation:

The ideologies and actions of NSWS and the Jewish settlers of Hebron are so dramatically different that it seems strange to talk of there being similarities between the two narratives. However, like the Hebron settlers, the community of NSWS has undertaken to explain its existence as well as its relation to Israeli society as a whole. Additionally, the narrative seeks to prove the community's merits by laying out its arguments in texts available to a broader public. Unsurprisingly the similarities are limited to the motivations behind the production of the communities' narratives and do not extend into actual content. While the narratives of the Jewish settlers focus on a selective telling of community history oriented according to a biblical time scale in order to constitute a sense of identity and belonging in Hebron and with the Israeli mainstream, the narratives produced by NSWS engage in an explanation and academic exploration of the activities of the village as well as the telling of personal narratives that aim to illuminate the impact of the village's activities on the contemporary reality of conflict in which it exists.

Two texts produced by NSWS, *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue: The School for Peace Approach* edited by Rabah Halabi and *Growing up Together: Becoming*

what we Believe published by American Friends of Neve Shalom/ Wahat al-Salam, illuminate the various facets of the community's activities for an external audience. The first text is a collection of essays written by staff at the School for Peace at NSWS and academics from various Israeli universities. Its aim, in the words of Halabi, "is the integration of academic knowledge with personal experience."¹⁵⁶ To this end, the book contains ten essays that seek to illuminate both the practice and pedagogy of the encounter programs run by the School for Peace and their relation to and impact on Israeli society. The book, originally published in Hebrew in 2000, was published in English in 2004 and is geared toward an academic audience interested in intergroup encounter work and individuals interested in the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.

The second text contains a series of interviews conducted by staff at the primary school at NSWS with both Jewish and Palestinian graduates from the school. It is a much more personal and informal text that aims to create an impression of the experience of attending the NSWS primary school as well as its lasting and diverse impacts on the lives of graduates through their own words. Both texts focus on the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis living within Israel, as opposed to between Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and Israelis, and seek to analyze and demonstrate the relevance of the NSWS approach to the reality of conflict in Israeli society. Together, the two texts illuminate the foundational ideology, construction of space, and processes that inform and result from the activities of the NSWS as well as explore their impact on and intercession into the surrounding structures of the conflict.

¹⁵⁶ Rabah Halabi and Deb Reich, *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: the school for peace approach* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004). 14.

6.3 The work of the village:

The activities of NSWS form the platforms through which the ideologies of the village are enacted and by which the village engages with the surrounding conflict. In accordance with the vision of Bruno Hussar, the actual act of Palestinians and Israelis living together in the village is the most basic and foundational activity of NSWS. Now, more than fifty families, both Palestinian and Israeli, live together at NSWS. Growing naturally from the fact that families began moving to the village with their children, and continued to have more, the village opened a primary school in 1984 to provide education for the children of NSWS. After initially only serving the children of families living in NSWS, the primary school is now open to children from surrounding villages, and ninety percent of pupils enrolled come from outside of NSWS. Since 1984, over 300 children have graduated from the primary school.

The village is also home to the School for Peace, which was part of Hussar's original vision for NSWS. Founded in 1976, the School for Peace has hosted more than 45,000 youth and adults in their encounter programs. The School for Peace runs encounters for eleventh grade students as well as for professionals, academics, and others interested in "meeting the other side." In addition, since 1990 the School for Peace has partnered with the Department of Psychology at Tel-Aviv University to run a yearlong encounter course for university students. The encounter course is now also offered at Ben-Gurion University, Hebrew University, and the University of Haifa, and the school started a facilitator training

course in 1991 to train interested individuals in the School for Peace's approach to coexistence work in Israel.¹⁵⁷

While the intentional sharing of a community between Palestinians and Israelis within Israel is unique, the educational activities of NSWS fall within a broader field of coexistence and encounter work. The field of encounter work emerged after the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, while the Palestinian community in Israel was governed by military rule, as an attempt to mediate relations between the Jewish majority and Palestinian minority in the newly formed country and lasted through the 1960s. The first phase of encounter work, according to Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "employed a domination approach to coexistence."¹⁵⁸ Israeli security services and labor unions planned the first encounters in order to coerce Palestinian Israelis into symbolic displays of loyalty to the state of Israel in order to legitimize the status quo. However, in the 1970s and 1980s organizations running the encounters turned to a cultural exchange model that aimed at acquainting Jewish Israelis with Palestinian cultural traditions. Palestinian Israelis encouraged participation in the second phase of encounter programs as a way of exploring the possibility of integrating into the mainstream Israeli society.

The encounter industry grew rapidly in the 1980s and changed its approaches and objectives in response to the expanding popularity of the racist ideology of the Kach Party¹⁵⁹ in Israel. The traction of the Kach party in Israeli society was reflected by a number

¹⁵⁷ Ahmad Hijazi, ed. *Growing up Together: Becoming what we believe* (Sherman Oaks, CA: American Friends of Neve Shalom/Wahat al-Salam, 2008), 4-5, 61-63; Halabi and Reich, *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: the school for peace approach*: 8, 59-60, 79, 97-99.

¹⁵⁸ Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Education for Coexistence and Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel: Potential and Challenges," *Journal of Social Issues* 60, no. 2 (2004): 408.

¹⁵⁹ The Kach party, now outlawed in Israel, advocated for the expulsion of Palestinians from Israel. Many of the religious settlers in the West Bank supported the movement. (Feige, *Settling in the Hearts: Jewish Fundamentalism in the Occupied Territories*: 35.)

of public opinion surveys conducted in the 1980s that, according to Ifat Maoz, “indicated growing right-wing extremism and increased anti-democratic and anti-Arab tendencies among Israeli Jews.”¹⁶⁰ The growth of racist and anti-Arab sentiment within Israeli society prompted educators and others to mobilize coexistence programs as a means of reducing stereotypes and increasing cross-cultural understanding and harmony. However, shortcomings of the cross-cultural model prompted some Palestinian Israeli facilitators and participants in encounter work to develop an alternative approach. The approach, known either as the conflict or confrontation model, recognized and sought to address the conflict in Israeli society stemming from political and social inequalities between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis. The ideology informing NSWS’s approach to encounter work stems from and seeks to address the challenges of the conflict approach to encounters between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis.¹⁶¹

6.4 NSWS’s Foundational ideology:

Starting from Bruno Hussar’s original vision for the village, the ideology guiding NSWS’s activities has evolved in response to the experiences of the village since its founding and the changing contours and challenges of the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. Initially, according to Rabah Halabi, head of the School for Peace Research Center at NSWS, the village sought to unite people around commonalities and eschewed delving into potentially divisive political issues. NSWS’s approach early on followed the cultural

¹⁶⁰ I. Maoz, "Does contact work in protracted asymmetrical conflict? Appraising 20 years of reconciliation-aimed encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians," *JOURNAL OF PEACE RESEARCH* 48, no. 1 (2011): 116.

¹⁶¹ Abu-Nimer, "Education for Coexistence and Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel: Potential and Challenges," 406-08; Maoz, "Does contact work in protracted asymmetrical conflict? Appraising 20 years of reconciliation-aimed encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians," 119-20; Zvi Bekerman, "Rethinking Intergroup Encounters: Rescuing Praxis from Theory, Activity from Education, and Peace/Co-Existence from Identity and Culture," *Journal of Peace Education* 4, no. 1 (2007): 23.

encounter model of coexistence work that emerged in 1970s and remained uncontested through the 1980s. Even today, the majority of the nearly three hundred organizations in Israel active in the field of encounter work use the cultural encounter model as the basis for their meetings between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis. As a result, the majority of the approximately one in six Jewish Israelis who have participated in a planned encounter between Palestinians and Israelis have taken part in a program focused on inter-cultural exchange.¹⁶²

Over time, however, the School for Peace realized that interactions limited to cordial contact, such as eating humus together, “may provide a good feeling for the moment but solves nothing; rather it helps preserve the status quo and even fortifies it.”¹⁶³ Instead of continuing to pursue the cordial coexistence route, the activities of the village now proceed from the premise that, in Halabi’s words, a sizeable Palestinian minority within Israel challenges “the very structure of the Jewish state, which was unable to make space for the figure of a proud Palestinian with civic and national aspirations.”¹⁶⁴ As such, the ideology informing the activities of the village acknowledges the structural marginality of Palestinians living in Israel at its foundation. The importance of the recognition of asymmetry in the conflict manifests itself in the work of the School for Peace, which, as Tel-Aviv University professor Arie Nadler writes, “aims to lead Arabs and Jews to genuinely and openly address the inequality and the power differences that exist between them.”¹⁶⁵ Consequently, NSWS is one of a few organizations that addresses the structural inequalities

¹⁶² Abu-Nimer, “Education for Coexistence and Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel: Potential and Challenges,” 406; Maoz, “Does contact work in protracted asymmetrical conflict? Appraising 20 years of reconciliation-aimed encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians,” 116.

¹⁶³ Halabi and Reich, *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: the school for peace approach*: 8.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 28.

of the conflict, and the only organization in the field of encounter work that questions the underlying assumption that Israel is a Jewish state, as opposed to a state for all its citizens, in its encounter process.¹⁶⁶

The School for Peace's approach focuses on group level dynamics rather than interactions between individuals. The elevation of group dynamics follows from the assertion that cordial contact, or the cultural encounter approach, does not have an impact on the actual conflict, and instead actually serves to preserve the status quo. Cordial contact, according to the School for Peace approach, assuages the consciences of Jewish participants who are looking to validate their liberal self-conceptions while blocking Palestinians from being able to assert their collective political identity. The assertion of Palestinian identity, the approach maintains, is necessary if the discriminatory status quo in Israel is going to be challenged. The rationale of the School for Peace approach are validated by Abu-Nimer, Maoz, and Bekerman who agree that the widely practiced cultural encounter model privileges the needs of Jewish Israelis as the dominant and powerful group in the conflict and provides little of value to Palestinian Israeli participants.¹⁶⁷ Two premises, one following from the other, form the School for Peace's point of departure from the dominant model of encounter work. The first, as Nadler puts it, is that "our sense of who we are is embedded in the groups to which we belong."¹⁶⁸ Since the conflict in Israel is between national groups, the logic continues, "a significant dialogue between Jews and

¹⁶⁶ Abu-Nimer, "Education for Coexistence and Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel: Potential and Challenges," 411.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.; Maoz, "Does contact work in protracted asymmetrical conflict? Appraising 20 years of reconciliation-aimed encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians."; Bekerman, "Rethinking Intergroup Encounters: Rescuing Praxis from Theory, Activity from Education, and Peace/Co-Existence from Identity and Culture."

¹⁶⁸ Halabi and Reich, *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: the school for peace approach*: 25.

Arabs is one that occurs between two adversarial groups and not simply between individuals who come from the two groups.”¹⁶⁹

The School for Peace’s approach enforces and fortifies national group identities instead of aiming to create bonds beyond national affiliation. By doing so, the approach maintains, it is possible to have a dialogue that alters the unequal structures of power between Palestinians and Israelis that would otherwise go unchallenged. Thereby, each group in a dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis can act as a mirror for the other in order to reveal the groups’ collective assumptions about each other and build increased awareness about their positions in the conflict. Furthermore, by preserving the group character, the School for Peace staff argues, the dynamics that unfold between Palestinians and Israelis in the context of NSWS’s activities can serve as analogies for and provide insight into the conflict as a whole. The fact that the School for Peace views its activities as interacting with and shedding light on the dynamics of the conflict as a whole reflects the recognition that NSWS cannot be an isolated oasis, but instead must deal with and attempt to transform the setting of conflict in which it is situated.¹⁷⁰ However, the elevation of group level dynamics risks reinforcing the exclusionary categories of Palestinian and Jewish Israeli identity, and, according to Bekerman, “neglect[s] to account for the tight relationship between this essentialist perspective of identity and the larger sociopolitical context”¹⁷¹ – in this case, the context of conflict between mutually exclusive national groups.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 28.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 28-29, 51, 186.

¹⁷¹ Bekerman, "Rethinking Intergroup Encounters: Rescuing Praxis from Theory, Activity from Education, and Peace/Co-Existence from Identity and Culture," 61.

The philosophy guiding the practices of the School for Peace also underlies the other activities of the village. Instead of simply being conceived of as a space for individuals to live in harmony with one another, the village of NSWS, according to its mission, aspires “to demonstrate that Jews and Palestinians can live and educate their children together as equals, respecting one another’s language and culture.”¹⁷² Similarly, the mission of the primary school states, “children are encouraged to strengthen their individual cultural identities while they learn about and celebrate the history, culture, and language of the other side.”¹⁷³ Overall, the educational system at NSWS, according to primary school principal Anwar Dawood, “fosters true democracy, promoting the attainment of individual rights for each person, and collective rights for each group.”¹⁷⁴ Therefore, the ideological basis of the NSWS’s is critically departure from the dominant cultural understanding approach to encounter work. Instead of trying to build bridges beyond differences, NSW’s approach recognizes the asymmetrical power relations between Palestinians and Israelis and focuses on altering dynamics between groups in order to provide lessons in and a model for peace that is relevant to the encompassing reality of the conflict.

6.5 Construction of Space at NSWS:

Space is constructed at NSWS in an attempt to embody the ideology of the village both materially and socially. Most fundamentally, NSWS is conceived of and exists to be a setting for educational endeavors that seek to intervene in and hopefully transform the injustices and inequalities inherent in the conflict between Palestinians Israelis and Jewish Israelis. Central to the village’s intervention is a self-conscious manipulation of the existing

¹⁷² Hijazi, *Growing up Together: Becoming what we believe*, 61.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 63.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 1.

power hierarchy within Israeli society. In order to facilitate the alteration of the existing structure of dominance, NSWS strives to maintain numerical parity between Palestinians and Israelis within the village and in its activities. The maintenance of numerical parity extends into all levels of organization. For example, each class in the primary school is led by both a Palestinian and an Israeli teacher and a Palestinian and an Israeli facilitator work together to guide School for Peace encounters. Additionally, Palestinians and Israelis serve together in the upper levels of municipal and government structures in the village, and in the organizational hierarchies of the School for Peace and primary school. The presence of Palestinian Israelis in the upper echelons of NSWS's civic and organizational structures is a rarity even within the field of encounter work.¹⁷⁵ As a result of maintaining numerical parity between Palestinians and Israelis and enabling both Palestinians and Israelis to serve in positions of authority, NSWS is self-consciously constructing the social, public, educational, and organizational spaces of the village in order to alter the asymmetrical power dynamics of the conflict. In doing so, the village presents itself as a model of what peace might look like.

Also, both Arabic and Hebrew are official languages in the village, teachers in the primary school instruct in their native language, and Arab participants in encounter programs are encouraged to speak in Arabic even though Hebrew, for the most part, is the common language between participants. Both languages are given equal weight in an attempt to redress the supremacy of Hebrew in Israeli society and in recognition of the important role language plays in the formation, expression, and maintenance of group

¹⁷⁵ Abu-Nimer, "Education for Coexistence and Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel: Potential and Challenges," 406.

identity and culture.¹⁷⁶ The construction of the spaces of the village and its activities as bi-national and bilingual enforces the group focus of NSWS's philosophy and the view that interactions within those spaces are, according to Halabi and School for Peace staff member Nava Sonnenschein, "between two groups, two peoples, two identities."¹⁷⁷

6.6 The Encounter Process:

In addition to the guiding ideology and construction of space at NSWS, the texts produced by the village focus extensively on the educational process developed in the primary school and, in particular, in the encounter programs run by the School for Peace. The encounter programs are given the most weight because they are the primary way NSWS interacts with the reality outside of the village, and hence are the most far-reaching application of the village's ideology. In particular, *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue* provides a comprehensive explanation of the various stages of the encounter process developed by the School for Peace. The discussion of the various stages of the encounters facilitated by the School for Peace moves away from the academic and theoretical nature of much of the text and provides a coherent narrative of the experience of the encounters from the perspective of the school's administrators. Additionally, the narrative that the text develops illustrates the ideology of NSWS in application, and provides the basis for a self-reflective and self-critical engagement, on the part of the School for Peace staff, with the impact of the village's activities.

According to administrators of the School for Peace, the typical encounter process begins with a phase of initial exploration and declarations of intent. During the initial

¹⁷⁶ Halabi and Reich, *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: the school for peace approach*: 7, 26, 40, 126; Hijazi, *Growing up Together: Becoming what we believe*, 63.

¹⁷⁷ Halabi and Reich, *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: the school for peace approach*: 63.

phase, the two groups taking part in the encounter meet each other for the first time and interact with caution and politeness. Each side tries to get an idea of the expectations and intentions of the other group, and the external power dynamics of the conflict remain intact with the Jewish group occupying a position of dominance and control. After the initial stage, the Palestinian group begins to coalesce around a few strong leaders who do most of the talking on the group's behalf. As the group grows in strength through the assertion that its needs be met in the encounter, the leadership expands and more individuals take part in articulating the group's position. With the growth of its self-confidence, the Palestinian group brings up issues such as the definition of Israel as a Jewish state and the plight of Palestinians in the Occupied Territories and in the diaspora. At this point the power dynamics in the encounter begin to feel as if the Palestinian group is becoming dominant, or reversing the relations that exist in Israeli society at large. The Palestinian group is taken aback by its strength, which does not exist in the reality outside of the encounter, and wonders if it has gone too far.¹⁷⁸

After initially accepting the assertions of the Palestinians, the narrative continues, the Jewish group begins to push back because they experience the "loss of being on the side of justice and the loss of their power as an erasure of their identity."¹⁷⁹ The claims of the Palestinian group force the Jewish group to struggle with the gap between their liberal self-conception and the Palestinians' perception of them as oppressors and occupiers. In response to their feelings of depression and despair, the Jewish group attempts to regain their position of authority by verbally attacking the Palestinian group. The Jewish group

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 61-68. The claim by the School for Peace staff that the Jewish Israeli group experiences the Palestinian group's self-assertion as an erasure of identity supports the analysis of Palestinian and Israeli identities as being mutually exclusive.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 67.

attempts to delegitimize the Palestinians as a group by associating them with backwards, un-enlightened, and inhumane values, and justifies their own supremacy by associating themselves with liberal and humanitarian values.¹⁸⁰ The delegitimizing of the Palestinian group takes place as an attack on Palestinian culture, which greatly distresses the Palestinian group, and enables the Jewish group to feel it has regained control. The dialogue enters an impasse with feelings of frustration and exhaustion on both sides. Both groups question whether continuing the encounter is worthwhile, and a sense develops that there are only two options. The groups can either accept the inevitability of conflict and continued suffering on both sides, or they can do something to alter the status quo.¹⁸¹

From the despair and desperation experienced during the impasse, a more egalitarian dialogue emerges. Both groups, according to the School for Peace administrators, proceed from a “sincere desire to try to figure out how to live together in equality and mutual respect.”¹⁸² The Jewish group acknowledges the asymmetry of the reality of the conflict and their position as oppressors, and accepts responsibility for both. The acknowledgement and willingness of the Jewish group to talk about the asymmetry of the conflict builds trust between the two groups and enables the Palestinians to be an equal partner in the dialogue. Tension still exists between the two groups, but it is no longer the defining characteristic of their interaction. The groups begin to negotiate over the nature of the state. The Palestinian group demands that Israel be a state for all citizens, not just a Jewish state. When met with resistance from the Jewish group, the Palestinian group demands autonomy from Jewish control. Ultimately, according to the School for Peace

¹⁸⁰ The conceptions used by Jewish Israelis to delegitimize the Palestinian group are an articulation of the dominant Western discourse on Palestinians discussed above in chapters one and four.

¹⁸¹ Halabi and Reich, *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: the school for peace approach*: 68-72.

¹⁸² Ibid., 74.

administrators, the two groups in the encounter fail to agree on solutions to structural inequalities of the conflict.¹⁸³

The general phases of the encounter are essentially the same in all of the programs run by the School for Peace whether they are for adults, university students, or secondary school students. For university students, the phases extend over the course of two semesters, which is the duration of the class. For secondary school students, the encounter is more structured and involves a greater period of time spent pre-planning on the part of the School for Peace staff. The Palestinian and Jewish groups meet separately with School for Peace staff ahead of time, and the encounter involves more time for the students to become acquainted with one another. The facilitators use a series of activities in order to spur relevant conversation, but the conversation proceeds according the phases of the general model. At the end, instead of having an open ended conversation about future possibilities the students engage in a simulation where they assume roles as government officials and community leaders. The goal presented to the students for the encounter is for them to come up with agreements on topics such as symbols of the state, governmental representation, the future of education, and so forth. The secondary school encounter ends with a concluding dialogue reflecting on the experience of the encounter and what the two groups accomplished together.¹⁸⁴

6.7 Reflection, Self-Criticism, and Applicability:

NSWS's success presents a major, open-ended question that both texts produced by the village aim to address. In the view of the narratives, NSWS has been successful in responding to its ideological imperative to intercede in the conflict through the creation of

¹⁸³ Ibid., 71-76.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 98-117.

institutions that both model and educate for peace, but are ambivalent about the question of the impact of modeling and educating for peace have on the material reality of the conflict. The texts produced by NSWS engage the question in very different ways. *Growing up Together* utilizes interviews with former NSWS primary school students to communicate an impression of the lasting impact of the primary school on their lives while *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue* presents a self-critical reflection on the impact and applicability of the School for Peace's activities. On the one hand, *Growing up Together* eschews the question of societal impact in favor of demonstrating the empowering role of the primary school in the lives of individual graduates. On the other hand, *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue* conveys a sense of pessimism about the societal impact of NSWS's activities, but maintains the experience of the encounters can be allegorically generalized to the setting of the conflict. Together, the texts offer a dim prognosis for the possibility of educational activities altering reality by themselves, but they hold out hope that they may take part in facilitating a broader social transformation toward peace. The prognosis contained in the texts produced by NSWS mirrors the concerns and analysis of scholars studying the encounter process in Israel who often cite the School for Peace as an exemplary model compared to the more problematic, even regressive, practices of most encounter organizations.¹⁸⁵

The interviews in *Growing up Together* depict a wide array of interests and activities held by NSWS primary school graduates, but the diversity is united by a sense of confidence

¹⁸⁵ Abu-Nimer, "Education for Coexistence and Arab-Jewish Encounters in Israel: Potential and Challenges," 410-11, 17; Maoz, "Does contact work in protracted asymmetrical conflict? Appraising 20 years of reconciliation-aimed encounters between Israeli Jews and Palestinians," 122; Bekerman, "Rethinking Intergroup Encounters: Rescuing Praxis from Theory, Activity from Education, and Peace/Co-Existence from Identity and Culture," 21.

and empowerment, public engagement, and the knowledge that the injustices and inequalities of the conflict are not inevitable. Louie, a Palestinian graduate of the primary school, said, "What I took from the NS/WAS [sic] School is not to be embarrassed to give my opinion."¹⁸⁶ A sense that graduates of the primary school are not afraid to express themselves or challenge other's preconceived beliefs pervades the interviews. Additionally, many of the graduates reported being active in the Israeli peace movement and other social justice movements. For all, according to the interviews, the primary school has had a lasting impact on how they view the other side. Inbar, a Jewish graduate who refused army service, echoed the sentiment of many graduates when she said, "I am not capable of making broad statements about Arabs... At a young age I got to see them as individuals."¹⁸⁷ Perhaps most importantly, from the perspective of NSWS, the students emerged from the primary school with the knowledge that a world other than one defined by division and conflict is possible. As Abdullah, a Palestinian graduate, said, "We were together all the time, we really loved each other. The dream of Neve Shalom, we were living it. It can be a reality."¹⁸⁸ The primary school staff who conducted the interviews did not draw a casual relationship between the attitudes and activities of the graduates and their time at NSWS, but they did conclude that the "school has played a formative and positive role in each of their biographies."¹⁸⁹

The effects of the encounter programs reported by the School for Peace staff are generally less optimistic and more ambiguous than those presented by the primary school. Jewish participants in the School for Peace's encounters are generally proud of the changes

¹⁸⁶ Hijazi, *Growing up Together: Becoming what we believe*, 28.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 23.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 8.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 26.

they undergo and view the confrontation with their privilege as courageous and deserving of recognition. However, from the perspective of Arab participants changing the power dynamics within the encounter is not sufficient. As Halabi and Sonneschein write, “what truly cries out for change is the oppressive and discriminatory reality in which they live day after day.”¹⁹⁰ After taking part in an encounter, School for Peace staff hope, “participants can better chart their course”¹⁹¹ because of their newly gained insight and awareness about the conflict and their positions in it. The staff is aware that the impact of the experience on participants is mixed. After the encounter, Halabi states, some participants “put the encounter behind them and make no meaningful changes; others try to act on the experience, each in his or her own fashion.”¹⁹² According to Halabi, many graduates of the encounter programs have become activists in peace advocacy and social change organizations “where they attempt to integrate our philosophy into their work.”¹⁹³ Additionally, most of the facilitators working in the field of intergroup encounter work in Israel graduated from the School for Peace’s facilitator training course.

The hope behind the activities of both the primary school and School for Peace, and indeed of NSWS as a whole, according to Halabi and Sonnenschein, is that “awareness gives people the option to choose their path according to their understanding and consciousness.”¹⁹⁴ However, the authors maintain, “the most effective path to changing reality is social and political action,”¹⁹⁵ and NSWS is constructed as a space for educational activities. Educational activities can bring people greater awareness of their surrounding

¹⁹⁰ Halabi and Reich, *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: the school for peace approach*: 54.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 186.

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 49.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 55.

reality as well as their position in it, but do not alter the structures of the conflict. Heightened awareness of the conflict and individual's position in it can often bring participants in NSWS's educational activities into a "far-from-easy confrontation with themselves and with the larger situation."¹⁹⁶ Palestinian students and encounter participants often come away from encounters with a heightened consciousness of their belonging to a systematically oppressed minority, which brings the manifestations of their oppression in their day to day lives into sharp focus. Additionally, Jewish students and participants often develop an understanding of the conflict and knowledge of Palestinians outside the dominant view held in Israeli society, which creates a feeling of disjuncture between themselves and their immediate social environments and society. The pain and disjunction often experienced by participants in NSWS's educational program is worth it, according to the School for Peace staff, because "in awareness, however painful, is embodied one of the most important human values: the right to have the choice and the option to change and to be changed."¹⁹⁷ Interestingly, for programs designed to highlight the group level dynamics, the hope that their organizers hold out for a more peaceful future is the individual's ability to act to alter the deterministic structures of the conflict through self-awareness.

However, the view that the educational activities of NSWS have little impact, in and of themselves, on changing the reality of the conflict is a pessimistic corollary to the School for Peace's vision of heightening awareness of individual agency in order to make change. Although the educational activities of NSWS have little direct effect on the material reality of the conflict, the assumption on the part of the School for Peace staff that the encounter

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

group is a microcosm of reality enables the staff to imbue the encounter process with representative significance to the dynamics of the conflict overall. As a microcosm of reality, Halabi argues, the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis can be read according to the phases of the encounter program. The initial, exploratory phase of the encounter, according to Halabi, correlates to the period from 1948 to 1967 when the Palestinians and Israelis were getting acquainted with each other and trying to figure each other out in the Israeli state. After 1967, Palestinians in Israel developed a stronger and more unified sense of identity and attempted to assert themselves as a group in order to demand total equality within the state. The violent suppression of Palestinians demonstrating within Israeli at the outset of the Second Intifada marked the Jewish push back against Palestinian self-assertion.¹⁹⁸ Today, according to Halabi, “we seem to be mired down somewhere in the fourth stage: the Jews are... refusing to accept any change in the balance of power between them and the Palestinians.”¹⁹⁹ The current impasse, marked by uncertainty and hostility between the two groups is the final phase before the commencement of a more egalitarian dialogue or relationship, which if Palestinians and Israelis weather the trials ahead, Halabi says, “awaits us, around the next bend in the road.”²⁰⁰

6.8 NSWS and Israeli Society:

NSWS’s existence and activities are a challenge to the dominant construction of identity and belonging in Israeli society. According to Couze Venn, the “formation of the state of Israel as intrinsically Jewish” has an marginalizing effect for Palestinians living in Israel. Atalia Omer adds, “Zionist ethnonational commitment delimits the extent of Israeli

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 51-52, 188-89.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 189.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

liberalism as well as its modes of envisioning a just peace to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.” Both Venn and Omer’s analysis support the view of Israeli identity being constructed around exclusionary conceptions of identity and belonging. The systemic marginalization of Palestinians living in Israel and the Israeli state’s limited ability to imagine and enact a just and sustainable peace with Palestinians is clearly demonstrated by the history of exclusion, oppression, violence, and ambiguity. Additionally, the exclusionary relationship between Israeli identity and Palestinian identity shapes the nature of interactions between the Israeli state and Palestinians living within its borders, and between Israel and Palestinians in the Occupied Territories. Additionally, the asymmetrical and exploitative status quo is supported and recapitulated by the dominant narratives of belonging and identity in Israeli society, which adhere to the ethnonational commitment accompanying the definition of Israel as an intrinsically Jewish state.

The texts of NSWS, however, depict a strong awareness of the institutionalization of asymmetry in the dominant Israeli narrative and social structure, and present the activities of NSWS as striving to create a basis for interaction and existence between Palestinians and Israelis other than the current inequalities. In the narrative of the encounter process presented in *Israeli and Palestinian Identities in Dialogue*, the ideal outcome of the encounter is for the two groups to recognize each other as equals and to treat each other with mutual respect in the process of addressing the status quo, which is seen as intolerable and necessary to change. Similarly, the graduates of the NSWS primary school interviewed in *Growing up Together* articulate an attitude of equality, acceptance, and friendship with the other incongruous with society at large. Furthermore, the School for Peace staff’s reading of the conflict through the lens of the encounter process leads them to

conclude, “the asymmetrical relations on the outside will be prone to change only if and when the Arabs in Israel become stronger and force these changes to take place.” Finally, the construction of space, both physically and socially, at NSWS aims to redress the existing power inequalities between Palestinians and Israelis by breaking out of the mutually exclusive paradigm of the conflict and demarcating the village and its activities as bi-national and bilingual spaces.

However, NSWS’s bases its attempt to create conditions for two nations, two languages, and two cultures to exist within the same space without negating each other on a reinforcement of essentialized categories of identity. Paradoxically, the identities NSWS reinforces also contribute to the intractability of the conflict outside the village. The difficulty in demonstrating the effectiveness of NSWS’s model of encounter work, and the field of coexistence work in general, may stem from an intrinsic connection between the essentialist paradigm of identity and the exclusivist project of the nation state. The questions that remain are what changes can be made to current approaches to encounter work that will address the asymmetrical and exploitative relations between Palestinians and Israelis both within Israel and in the Occupied Territories, and the essentialist construction of identity underlying and fueling the Palestinian/Israeli conflict within the exclusivist setting of the nation state paradigm.

7.0 Conclusion:

The claim that the Palestinian/Israeli conflict is embedded in the exclusivist setting of the nation state paradigm, and that it is this setting that perpetuates the conflict due to the inability of either side, thus far, to imagine viable alternatives to the current impasse warrants a more in depth explanation. According to Omer, "the nation is by definition an exclusionary political entity."²⁰¹ In order for the nation to be "imagined in its national oneness,"²⁰² the state has to enact a social and physical process of transformation. The process includes demarcating and solidifying borders while weaving diverse populations into a unitary national fabric by superseding existing affiliations through the dissemination of a grand narrative of national becoming that concurs with the national territory.²⁰³ Furthermore, the formulation of national narratives of becoming is an ontological process that privileges a certain identity in order to demarcate the boundaries of the national group through an exclusivist system of power.²⁰⁴ Therefore, the nation state and national identity are inherently exclusionary due to their positioning of the national individual, national community, and national territory in opposition to an excluded other or others.²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ Omer, "The Hermeneutics of Citizenship as a Peacebuilding Process: A Multiperspectival Approach to Justice," 658.

²⁰² E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of tradition* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Benedict R. Anderson, *Imagined communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991).

²⁰³ Bekerman, "Rethinking Intergroup Encounters: Rescuing Praxis from Theory, Activity from Education, and Peace/Co-Existence from Identity and Culture," 26.; Bekerman focuses particularly on the institutionalization of education as a tool for the creation of national citizens.

²⁰⁴ i.e. identity X is national and therefore is afforded rights associated with belonging to a nation. Whereas identity Y is not part of the nation and therefore is not guaranteed rights and may likely be perceived as threatening to the national community.

²⁰⁵ Homi K. Bhabha, *The location of culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004). 57-64.

In the context of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, for example, the definition of the State of Israel as intrinsically Jewish makes full belonging to the Israeli national community contingent on the possession of Jewish identity.²⁰⁶ As a result, individuals whose identities are explicitly defined as other than “the Jewish People,” such as the Palestinians, are excluded from full belonging within the state. Conflict arises from the fact that the national territory is not composed of a unitary population, and indeed is inhabited by a large group of people who do not fit within the national identity. Omer points out that the further a state “moves away from ethnoreligio-centric conceptions of citizenship, the greater it demonstrates more liberal and inclusive policies toward minorities.”²⁰⁷ However, as is clearly illuminated by the tension between the religious settlers of Hebron and the mainstream of secular Zionism, the connection between religion as a lived category and identity is a point of contest within Israel while the ethno-national definition of the State is accepted as axiomatic.

Despite the tension, which in the case of the Settlers focuses on divine versus worldly interpretations of redemption, the political theology of secular Zionism pulls from the same religious resources as the Zionism of the Settlers in the process of defining identity and belonging within the State of Israel. The difference between the two stems from mainstream Zionism’s interpretation of these resources through the lens of secular nationalism. The framework of nationalism conflates territory, identity, and belonging through the authority of a secularized reading of Jewish history into an exclusivist and exclusionary definition of identity and belonging within the State of Israel. As testament to

²⁰⁶ Venn, “The Repetition of Violence: Dialogue, the Exchange of Memory, and the Question of Convivial Socialities,” 285.

²⁰⁷ Omer, “The Hermeneutics of Citizenship as a Peacebuilding Process: A Multiperspectival Approach to Justice,” 658.

the strength of the exclusionary setting of the nation state paradigm on the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, Omer observes, the majority of Jewish Israelis who participate in peace activities “accept a definition of Israel as necessitating the cultivation and maintenance of Jewish majoritarianism.”²⁰⁸ Therefore, attempts to mediate the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis, both within Israel and between Israel and the Occupied Territories, remain fully embedded in the exclusivist setting of the nation state paradigm. As a result, relations between Israelis and Palestinians are stuck between the perceived impossibility of coexistence within the same territory and the, apparently, equally difficult task of separating and homogenizing a historically integrated and heterogeneous geographic area in order to realize the ideal of exclusivist sovereignty within two separate nation states.

The intentionally bi-national and bilingual construction of NSWS, then, is a critical response to the limitations of the current paradigm of the conflict. Yet, despite providing an alternative to the mutually exclusive constructions of Palestinian and Israeli identity and belonging within Israel, NSWS is not a panacea. First of all, NSWS’s activities are educational, and as the School for Peace staff points out, “any encounter, does not in and of itself change reality.”²⁰⁹ While NSWS’s activities seek to enhance people’s awareness of their position within the conflict, they do not offer a framework for engaging in action aimed at altering the status quo. Additionally, the activities of the village are largely limited to addressing the conflict between Palestinians and Jews within Israel. As such, the activities fail to comprehensively and directly address the underlying issues of displacement, dispossession, and occupation that resulted in, and continue, the historic

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 668.

²⁰⁹ Halabi and Reich, *Israeli and Palestinian identities in dialogue: the school for peace approach*: 55.

fracturing of the Palestinian people among various entities. In other words, by primarily focusing on issues of inequality between Palestinians and Jews within Israel, NSWS fails to adequately address the intimate connections between the position of Palestinians within Israel and the history and treatment of Palestinians as a group subjected to various regimes of control by the State of Israel.

Furthermore, NSWS's focus on group level dynamics paradoxically reinforces the essentialized categories of identity that underlie the central contentions of the conflict. By treating each group as a totalizing whole, encounters based on the inter-group confrontation model risk reinforcing the homogenized approach to culture and identity that informs the exclusivist assertions of the nation state paradigm. However, as Bekerman points out, simply moving beyond the essentialist approach to identity in the conflict neglects the reality of the political situation between Israelis and Palestinians. A supra-national approach predicated on the assertion of mutual humanity, in fact, serves the interests of the dominant group in society in much the same way as the cultural exchange model of encounter work. Instead of addressing the issues of the conflict, the mutual humanity approach in an encounter, according to Bekerman, is "fully abstracted from the outside reality... and could only be interpreted as a new turn of Jewish denial of the Palestinian cause."²¹⁰ Tellingly, Palestinian participants experience this approach as an erasure of identity.²¹¹ As a result, the Palestinian/Israeli conflict presents the predicament of needing to move beyond exclusivist constructions of identity while not being able to ignore the salience of those identities for the individuals and groups in the conflict.

²¹⁰ Bekerman, "Rethinking Intergroup Encounters: Rescuing Praxis from Theory, Activity from Education, and Peace/Co-Existence from Identity and Culture," 32.

²¹¹ Ibid.

The dearth of alternatives to the dichotomous logic of identity and its accompanying exclusivist claims of belonging points to the importance of developing and cultivating third spaces²¹² within the conflict. Such third spaces operate on two levels within the context of Palestine/Israel. The first is as a space of translation between essentialized conceptions of identity, as a first space, and the abstracted and unobtainable second space of universalism.²¹³ In this sense, a third space is connected to the salience of identity, enforced by lived experience, for groups within the conflict and at the same time attentive to the acts of transference that constitute human cultures and characterize geographic spaces as inherently heterogeneous.²¹⁴ Instead of striving for an empty universalism based on the eschewal of differences,²¹⁵ such a space enables a reading of the creolized nature of human existence in the process of constructing identity and belonging. Importantly, third spaces offer an alternative to the enforcement of homogenized identities in the inter-group confrontation approach to encounter work and the empty universalism of models based on the mutual humanity perspective.

Additionally, third spaces operate on a second level between the exclusionary identities of Palestinians and Israelis, operating as the first space, and the geographic

²¹² Bhabha, *The location of culture*: 52-56.

²¹³ Adam Seligman explains what I refer to as empty universalism in terms of “‘thick’ moral communities” and a “‘thinly’ defined public sphere.” “Thick’ moral communities such as religious communities, or the tightly defined Israeli and Palestinian ethno-national communities, for an “intimate and manageable sphere... where we grant one another a certain degree of moral credit, predicated on our shared communal, religious, ethnic, or racial pasts.” The ‘thinly defined public sphere, however, only enables interaction “according to abstract and increasingly impersonal rules of justice.” In this case, appeals to common humanity in the universalist approach are predicted on the ‘thinly’ defined public sphere abstracted from the shared foundation necessary for meaningful interaction. (Adam B. Seligman, "Living together differently. (Constitutionalism and Secularism in an Age of Religious Revival: The Challenge of Global and Local Fundamentalisms)," *Cardozo Law Review* 30, no. 6 (2009).)

²¹⁴ According to Bhabha, “cultures are never unitary in themselves, not simply dualistic in the relation of Self and Other.” (Bhabha, *The location of culture*: 52.)

²¹⁵ David W. Montgomery, "Otherness and the Experience of Difference: From Encountering and Evaluating to Eschewing or Enduring," *International Summer School on Religion and Public Life* 2(2009).

territory contested by each group's exclusivist claims of belonging as the second space. On this level, third spaces provide a forum for direct engagement with the underlying issues in the conflict. By foregrounding the central contention of the conflict—i.e. two national communities claiming exclusive belonging to the same territory—third spaces connect the series of displacements, disposessions, and mutual threats that characterize the conflict to the roots of the hostilities. Third spaces at this level, then, are forums of negotiation between the mutually exclusive identities of the conflict and the fact of their existence within the same territory. On both levels, third spaces enable Palestinians and Israelis to discuss, debate, imagine, and attempt to develop and enact alternatives to the current impasse of the conflict.

Despite its limitations, NSWS's bi-national and bilingual construction of space and activities in the field of encounter work provide for a study and theorization of third spaces within the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Additionally, the study of NSWS opens the way for an engagement with other such spaces both intentionally and unintentionally constructed. However, the political realities represented by the intractability of the Hebron settlers' construction of identity and belonging offers a less than optimistic corollary to the possibilities presented by third spaces. Importantly, third spaces form at the nexus of intractable realities, and offer the opportunity to develop alternatives to the status quo. The process of inter-group negotiation facilitated by third spaces is an important step away from the current attempts to resolve the conflict that remain wedded to the exclusivist setting of the nation state paradigm. Indeed, in a setting where what is considered to be practical offers a recapitulation of the underlying causes of conflict and is also proving to be impracticable, what options exist other than beginning to re-imagine the possibilities for

existence between peoples while simultaneously working to realize their practical application? Third spaces provide a foundation from which to begin this process.

APPENDIX A:

MAPS

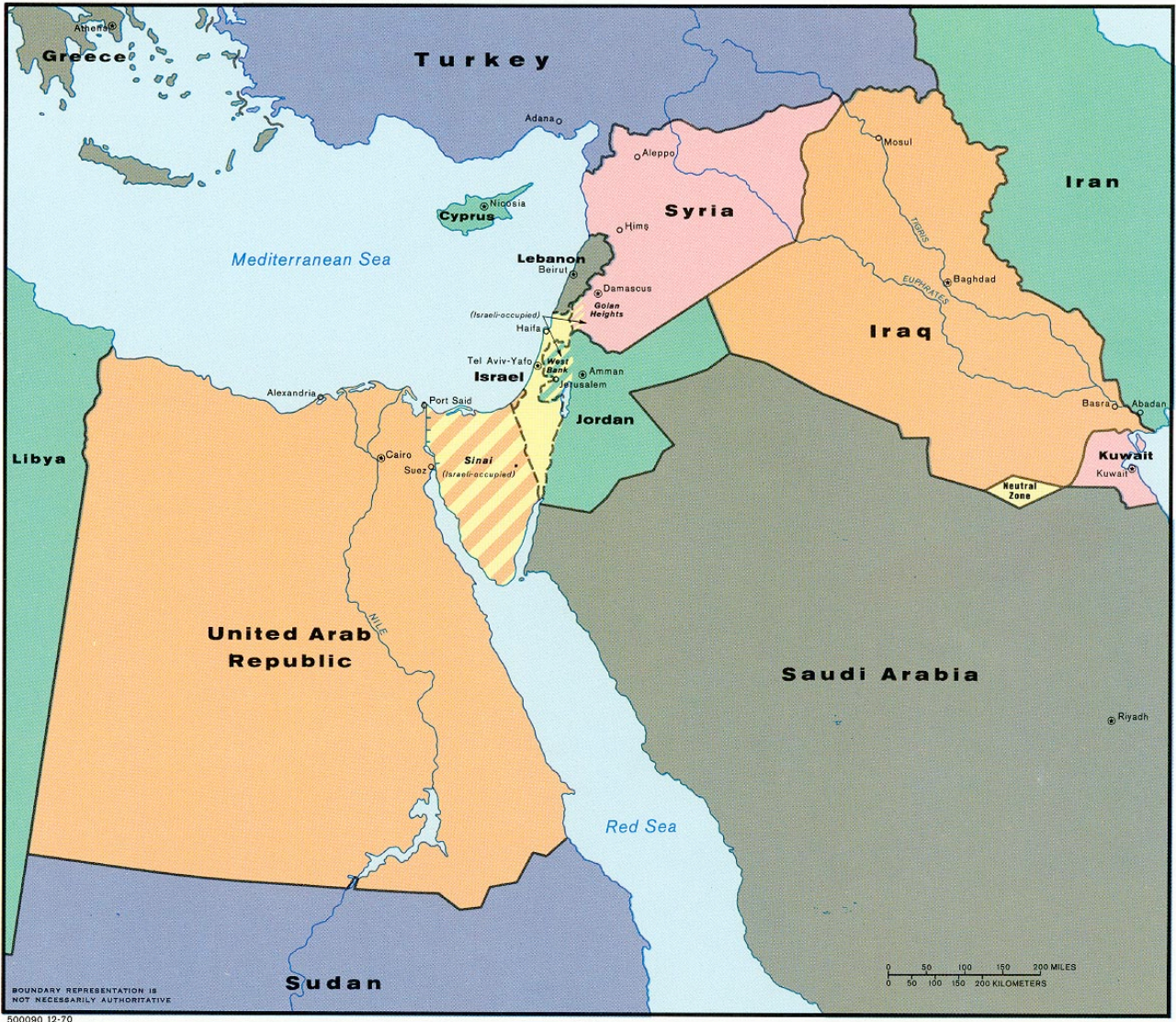
A.1 Map of Israel/Palestine²¹⁶



²¹⁶ Used by permission of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin.
"Israel," University of Texas at Austin, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/cia11/israel_sm_2011.gif.

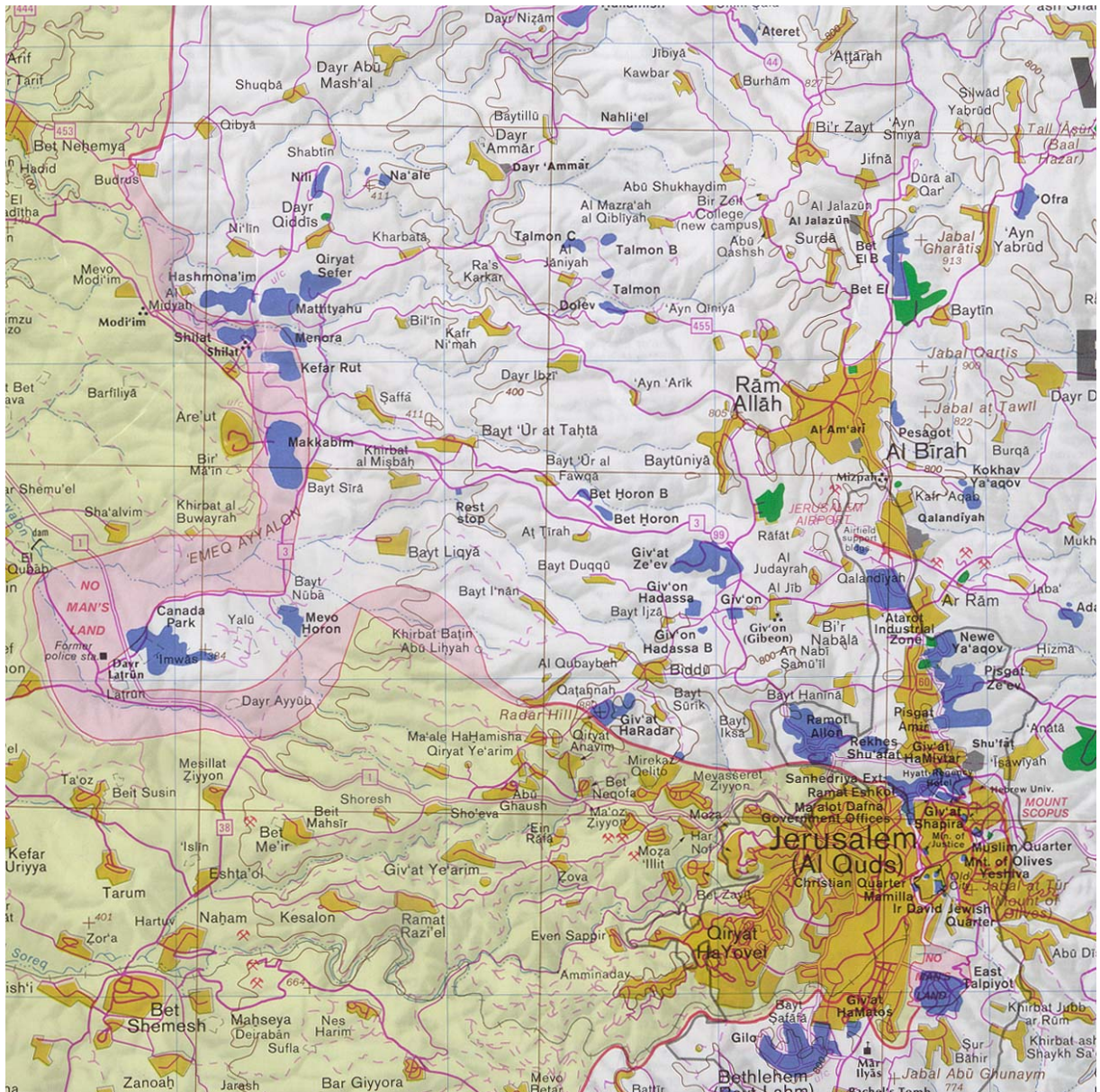
A.2 Israel and surrounding States after June 1967 War²¹⁷

ISRAEL AND BORDERING STATES



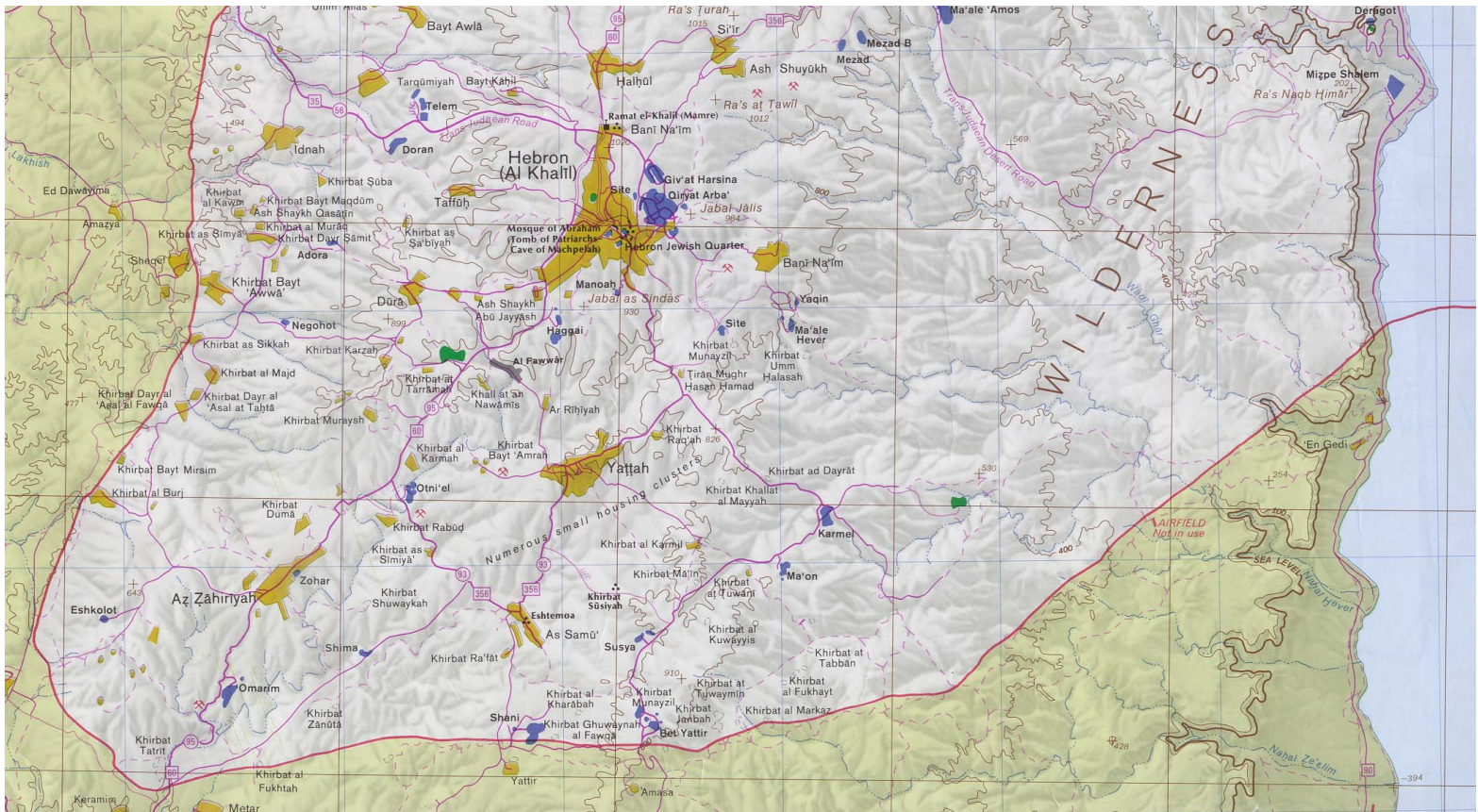
²¹⁷ Used by permission of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin. "Israel and Bordering States," University of Texas at Austin, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/israel_bordering_states_pol_1970.jpg.

A.3 Territory Near NSWS²¹⁸



²¹⁸ NSWS is located in the pink section of the map titled "No Man's Land." It is not far from Dayt Ayyub on the Map. Used by permission of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin. "West Bank - Jerusalem and West," University of Texas at Austin, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/westbank_central92.jpg.

A.4 Hebron and Surrounding Areas²¹⁹



²¹⁹ Used by permission of the University of Texas Libraries, The University of Texas at Austin. "West Bank - Far South Including Hebron," University of Texas at Austin, http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/middle_east_and_asia/westbank_south92.jpg.

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