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PEACE, TRAUMA, AND RELIGION IN THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

Student experiences from an excursion to Israel and Palestine

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COLOPHON

This report contains the findings and reflections of students participating in the 2017 study trip to Israel–Palestine as part of their education in the master’s specialisation Peace, Trauma, and Religion (VU University, Amsterdam).

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www.religionpeacejustice.com

centre@religionpeacejustice.com

De Boelelaan 1105 HG–2E03
1081HV Amsterdam
The Netherlands

INTRODUCTION



From 2015 on, the VU University offers within the one-year Master of Theology and Religious Studies a specialization named *Peace, Trauma and Religion* (PTR), as an effort to bring together different perspectives, disciplines, and fields of study (theology, political science, psychology, among others) in addressing the complex phenomena of violence, injustice, and trauma we see in the world today. Of special interest is to study the role that religions and different faith perspectives play in the cause and perpetuation of conflicts and their ability to de-escalate and to work in conflict transformation and peace-building initiatives, becoming a source for trauma healing and reconciliation.

Reflecting on Peace, Trauma and Religion implies—as it was identified from the beginning of the program—a constant dialogue between “theory” and “practice,” between scholar research and the experiences of communities within violent and unjust realities. Including one excursion per year is a very valuable part of the educational process. This year (2017), Israel-Palestine was chosen as the study context. Needless to say, the Israel-Palestine situation is one of the most pressing

and complex realities in the world, in which violence, injustice and religious beliefs are intertwined, and in which the local, regional and international levels play substantial roles in creating/developing the conflict and, at the same time, in resisting/assisting in the process of transforming and overcoming this reality.

The student excursion took place from 4-11 of March 2017 and was hosted by the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in Jerusalem. This center, projected in the late 60s and opened in 1972, is an international ecumenical institute for theological research and pastoral studies coordinated by the University of Notre Dame (USA). It serves as a welcoming place of learning, community building, and hospitality amidst the immense geo-political complexity of this part of the world. Our most sincere gratitude to both Karis Ailabouni and Rev. Dr. Robert Smith, who not only hosted the delegation—in practical matters—but also guided us through the complex realities in Israel-Palestine.

As a result of this impressive experience, some of the students of the PTR program—who participated in the delegation and are interns of The Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Peace & Justice Studies—have developed a series of articles focusing on different aspects of the complex reality of Israel-Palestine. These articles are the main content of the present report.

Muhammad Saiful Mujab discusses, in his article called *Religious Hospitality*, the concept of hospitality and tests it with the visit to Israel-Palestine, emphasizing both the “experiences” of hospitality the group had when visiting people and families and also the experiences of “non-hospitality” in some “holy sites.” Carla J.M. Borgers reflects on the Kairos Palestine Document (document written by a group of Palestinian Christians against the injustice and the oppression under the Israeli occupation) and discusses the “holiness” of the land in her article *The Holy Land? - The Kairos Document of Palestinian Christians*. Andrea Roa describes the experiences of grass-roots communities and how they are accompanied by either international or local organizations and the relevance of the work they do in her article *Peace Building: Local Initiatives*. Daniël Sloots explores the Jewish and Israeli perspectives by stressing the polyphony of perspectives on what normally could be thought of as one “Jewish/Israel perspective;” he does so by exploring the dialogues with different people, families and the visit to Yad Vashem in his article

titled *Jewish and Israeli Perspectives*. Finally, Dito Alif Pratama deals, in his article titled *Messages from the Wall*, with the construction of the separation-wall and shares his reflection on life around the wall, with special attention to an initiative of placing messages (posts) in the wall as expressions of resistance and hope in the face of the Israel occupation.

The students of PTR continue to analyse and explore the conflict in the “Holy Land” in their papers and in different fora, such as the Public Lecture Series 2017 of the Amsterdam Centre of Religion and Peace & Justice Studies (see appendix of this report).

As the reader will detect, there is no “final part” or “concluding” article, partially because after such an experience, the reflections, discussions, theoretical work cannot simply be “concluded” in one report; and because the idea of this report is to share some of the reflections, ideas and impressions that resonated within in the delegation.

Andres Pacheco Lozano

Amsterdam, 18 May 2017

RELIGIOUS HOSPITALITY

In ancient times, hospitality was understood as a help for needy sojourners and strangers; not only shelter, food, and protection but also recognition of their worth and a shared humanity was in need. Today, it is sometimes superficially understood as “coffee time after the church service”. Christine Pohl suggests hospitality as ‘a way of life in churches and homes.’ Peter Morales says that hospitality is ‘love in action’: a love that makes a person feel accepted, welcomed, embraced, and affected in a manner that one feels when a family member comes back after having been away for a long time. Hospitality theory can be read in papers, debated in chambers, or proclaimed in speeches, but to practice that theory is really challenging.



Attending an evening service at a liberal synagogue in Jerusalem on Friday. The Sabbath service is about to begin.

The excursion to Israel-Palestine taught me valuable lessons on respecting others, ways to make others feel truly welcomed, demolishing the wall separating you and me, and just accepting others as they are. The excursion left us with a feeling of true hospitality - provided by our hosts.

The religious communities and people we met in Israel and Palestine practiced hospitality. The host families and religious communities warmly received us as if we were old family separated. Laughter, care, friendly conversation, and telling stories flew from their gestures as from a mother, a father, a brother who has not seen this member of his family for a long time. Being among them made us forget the terrible situation outside. Parts of the excursion program were visits to places of worship, experiencing a religious ceremony; Sabbath in a family house and intense interaction in a house of a Palestinian woman, and a cooking class in one of the refugee camps. They, all of them, were open to share.

On Friday evening, a Sabbath dinner. The father and the sons of the family picked us up at the synagogue, where we joined evening service (*Kabbalat Shabbat* and *Ma'ariv*). We walked to their house for roughly two kilometres since it is not allowed to use vehicles during Sabbath, from the sunset of Friday till the sunset of Saturday. The mother welcomed us in front of the door, intentionally tried to remember each of our names by asking the meaning of a name and whether it is name common or not in our society. The fact that she updated political situations in many countries created a friendly atmosphere. After enough conversation, she began to explain what the Sabbath means, the do's and don'ts, and the sequences of the ritual. They performed the rituals as usual and we observed them. We do what we can do and they respect us if we cannot do it, such as I - being a Muslim - cannot drink wine, so they provided grape juice instead. Sitting around the table, we had warm discussion about ourselves, religion, the conflict, current world politics, etc. They explain everything including religious reasons as to why they

have two separated kitchen sets.



Our hostess in Hebron, Leila, cooked us a meal, typical Palestinian and made when a large number of guests is expected.

Actually, some other people we met also showed their hospitality such as Leila, an impressingly powerful woman in Hebron, and the women movement in a refugee camp which was established by women who had

been driven out of their houses. They have established special education for *difable* (different ability) children. I see in their eyes strength, hope, affection, attention - as if the catastrophic recurring conflict did not break them.

We did interreligious “pilgrimages” to churches, synagogues, and mosques. On Sunday morning, we opted to join either an Arabic service or an English service church. I was interested in the Arabic speaking church since in my country, everything related to Arab is sensitively related to Islam. Often debates in social

media are heating only because of Arabic letters. Arab people call their God *Allah*, whatever their religions are. Even in the Church of the Redeemer in Jerusalem, the pastor began his sermon almost the same as I, a Muslim, start reading Qur'an and prayers, namely '*bismillahil malikil quddus,*' which translates as "the name of God, the owner and the holy." In the closing of Sabbath evening service in the



Muhammad Saiful Mujab in the Ibrahimi Mosque, visiting Abraham's Tomb.

synagogue, together with the rabbi, the congregation said '*Allahumma antassalam waminkassalam*' which translates "O Allah, You are peace, peace comes from You", the same prayer I utter after five obligatory prayers.

Worship places offered different ways of welcoming others in their religious places (religious hospitality). The church provided coffee time as a chance for conversation. In the Ibrahimi mosque, we could explore the mosque freely. We had a small interaction with kindergarten children. It touched my heart when I saw the smile of future Palestinians. To respect the holy place, the Abraham Mosque in Hebron, all the ladies were required to wear a long loose dress. Interestingly, the tomb of Abraham, the father of the three monotheistic religions, is shared. Muslims can access the tomb from the mosque, and Jews can reach it from the synagogue. There also some other prophet tombs - or, from a Jewish perspective, the tombs of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs - which are located both in the synagogue and the mosque. All in all, in every place of worship we were led by a person who was part of that respective religion of that place and who guided us and explained everything.

All the worship places are open to share everything except two sites. The first is one of four mosques in al-Aqsha, namely the Dome of the Rock, the mosque with the golden dome. Non-Muslims are not allowed to get in to the mosque due to security reasons. And the second site is the cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, the Jewish side of the tomb of the prophets. Bloody history bases the prohibition of



Adjacent to the Ibrahimi Mosque is the Cave of the Patriarchs, a Jewish synagogue. It is heavily guarded.

entry to both sites. It is important to note that the prohibition of entry for non-Muslim tourists to mosques has no religious base. According to Syafiith *madhhab* (a school of Islamic jurisprudence), the entry of non-Muslims is limited to only one mosque, that is Masjid al-Haram in Mecca.

To me, sharing the visit to Abraham's tomb symbolizes that something sacred by some religions may unify

those religions, instead of triggering conflicts by means of self-claiming. It can be a starting point for peace since to religious believers, worship places are regarded as central. This is a view from an hour visitor to the sites. Like a tip of an iceberg, there must be huge story and history below the surface.

As for my own reflection, it is too quick to conclude that people's hospitality we received in houses is influenced by their churches, synagogue, or mosques. This kind of hospitality may be shaped by the culture. On the other hand, we cannot deny that religious teachings inspire them to open their houses for sojourners.

One of the ways religions use to deliver their messages is through stories. The three Abrahamic religions narrate in their respective sacred texts the well-known story of Abraham's generous hospitality towards strangers. The story is mentioned in Gen. 18:1-5, Gen. 24:28-32, and al-Dzariyat 24-30 in which Abraham served the sojourners his best. Of course, the three texts tell the story from different perspectives and highlight different aspects, but the similarity of the three versions of the story is its teaching to do our best in serving guests. Many other verses talk about meticulous details on hospitality but it is not the ambition of this report to

extend the discussion to religious text. What needs to be highlighted is that all the three religions suggest their believers to do their best to their guests.

Religious hospitality is another kind of interreligious dialogue. Often we see and watch very formal discussion on religions. Some people even find it interesting to watch interreligious debate to know this religion is way the truest and others are wrong. Whereas what we need today is to create harmony. People have been sick of cruelty, hostility, and conflicts in the name of religion.

The discipline of 'grass-roots' interreligious dialogue (religious hospitality) is a way to understand each other. This kind of dialogue does not only benefit in intellectually enriching but also in building our emotional bond. Those deep hurts which are historically sustained or individually absorbed may become clearer when this kind of honest dialogue is conducted.

Besides, as we know what other religious believers do, understand and practice, we may also find similarities, positive values, and many other sides that we do not know if we are not experiencing their living religion. Understanding others may evoke our respect. Respecting others may form or tighten friendships or even brother-/sisterhood with people of other religions. Who can relentlessly hurt his or her brother? Jan Vanier (quoted by Christine D. Pohl) said:

Welcome is one of the signs that a community is still alive. To invite others to live with us is a sign that we are not afraid, that we have a treasure of truth and of peace to share". And the other way around, he states that a community which refuses to welcome -whether through fear, weariness, insecurity, a desire to cling to comfort, or just because it is fed up with visitors- is dying spiritually.

From the places we visited, I can roughly conclude that hospitality is living in a community whose religiosity is healthy. Those who suffer from wounds in their history will hide something, remain rather closed and are not welcome strangers. There are lessons we received from those visits. Although we live modern values and are overwhelmed with our busyness, we can still do hospitality in our ways. To make people feel accepted we must not always receive them in our houses. Truly welcoming people we meet in offices and classes with cheerful face, expressing longing, and feeling grateful for meeting them is one of the ways.

From the religious point of view, beside many differences that cannot be simulated, we actually share many similarities, which make me more sure that we had one father, Abraham. We are part of this greater unity.

I would like to close this self-reflection with a poem from Rumi.

One song

*Every war and every conflict between human being
has happened because of some disagreement about names.*

*It is such an unnecessary foolishness,
because just beyond the arguing
there is a long table of companionship
set and waiting for us to sit down.*

*What is praised is one, so the praise is one too,
many jugs being poured into a huge basin.*

*All religions, all this singing, one song.
The differences are just illusion and vanity.*

*Sunlight looks a little different on this wall
than it does on that wall
and a lot different on this other one,
but it is still one light.*

*We have borrowed these clothes,
these time-and-space personalities,
from a light, and when we praise,
we are pouring them back in.*

THE HOLY LAND? THE KAIROS DOCUMENT OF PALESTINIAN CHRISTIANS

Israel is a state like other states in the world. But Israel is also called “The Holy Land” by religious Jews, Christians and Muslims because this country is the “place of birth” of two religions, and the city of Jerusalem, with its holy sites, is important for all three Abrahamic religions. In the Bible, the people of this land are called a ‘holy people’ (Exodus 19:6, Leviticus 11:45 and 19:2), and ‘a blessing to all the nations on earth’ (Genesis 12:3).

However, according to the biblical stories this holiness is not simply a gift from God but also a mandate. It is a way of being and a way of living. The people of the land are called to live according to high ethical standards. These ethical standards concern religion, economy, social justice, politics, and living with the environment. During our study trip all these ethics were in some way addressed.

NORA KARMI AND KAIROS PALESTINE

One of the speakers we met during our study trip to Israel and Palestine was Nora Carmi, a Palestinian Christian with Armenian roots. She belongs to the Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Church. Nora Carmi was born in Jerusalem just a few months before the establishment of the state of Israel. This event made her and her family refugees in their own city. They were dispossessed of their house and had to move



to the eastern part of the city.

Carmi is involved in the *Kairos Palestine Movement*. She travels around the world, speaking out on behalf of the Palestinian people. She is also a member of *Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center* in Jerusalem. *Sabeel* is Arabic for “way” but it also means “source of life-giving water.” On its

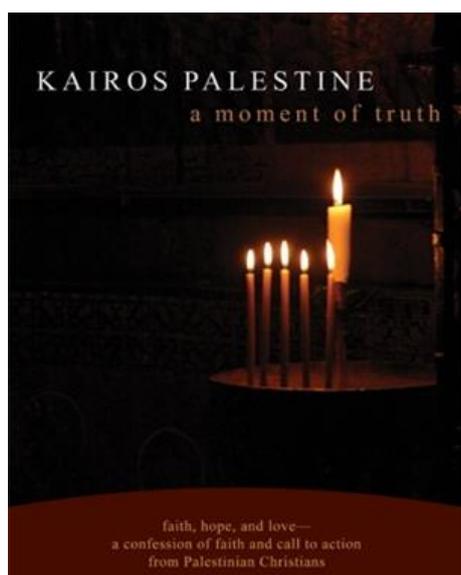
website *Sabeel* describes itself as...

[...] an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians. Inspired by the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, this liberation theology seeks to deepen the faith of Palestinian Christians, to promote unity among them and lead them to act for justice and peace.

In his book *A Wall in Jerusalem*, the Jewish author Mark Braverman asks Nora Carmi how she deals with the experienced dispossession and having to live in a situation of occupation. Her answer: ‘We follow Jesus. Empires come and empires go. We are here.’ She calls the Israeli occupation ‘a sin.’ In her opinion, the main theological issue that needs to be discussed is the issue of land. The land does not belong to just one group of people. During our encounter, one particular statement of Nora Carmi struck me: “I do not call the situation between Israel and Palestine a ‘conflict’, because a conflict is between two equals. I do not call it a ‘problem’. We are not ‘a problem!’ I would call it a ‘cause’.”

THE KAIROS PALESTINE DOCUMENT

In December 2009 the *Kairos Palestine* document was published. The authors of this document were inspired by the *Kairos* document from South-Africa, launched by a number of black South African theologians in the year 1985 against the apartheid system in that country. *Kairos Palestine* is written by a group of Palestinian



Christians against the injustice and the oppression under the Israeli occupation. It aims to address the causes of injustice.

The word *kairos* is Greek and means ‘time’. But that word has nothing to do with our clock time. The word *kairos* means a “moment of opportunity,” a “moment of grace,” but also a “moment of truth.” The subtitle of the *Kairos Palestine* document reads: *A moment of truth; a word of faith, hope and love from the heart of Palestinian suffering*. It is written against the

hopelessness of the situation the Palestinian people have to live in. The people felt abandoned by the political (world) leaders and by the churches worldwide.

The first chapter of the document is probably the most important one, called 'The reality on the ground'. It is intended to draw the attention of the reader to the unjust situation in Palestine and to the suffering of the Palestinian people. The hope of the Christian Palestinians has been that the world would wake up and would finally pay attention to the people in this part of the world.



The remnants of a gas grenade. Produced in the USA and used by the Israeli Defence Forces.

Especially Europe has a problem in siding with the Palestinians because of the past, the *Shoah*. There is a deep feeling of guilt in the churches that causes a strong sentiment in favour of the Jewish people living in Israel, which is seen as “God’s chosen people.” In addition the United States and Europe have a lot of political and economic interests, not only in Israel, but throughout the Middle East. And there is a strong pro-Israel lobby, especially in the United States, Christian Zionist movements supporting the land claim of Israel, and very effective propaganda from the Israeli government.

The first aim for writing this *Kairos Palestine* document was to give hope to the local population. The second aim was reaching out to Jewish and Muslim leaders, to the churches, to governments, to the United Nations and to the world community. Reactions came from churches, positive as well as negative. For example, the Presbyterian Church of the United States issued a study guide for its members

which they could use while examining the full *Kairos* document. Mark Braverman mentioned the second anniversary of the document in Bethlehem in 2011 where delegations of twenty six countries were present, among them a group from the USA. Six months later this group brought out a *Call to Action: a US Response to the Kairos Palestine Document, a Word of Confession and Faith from Christians in the United States*. Negative reactions came for example from groups like *United with Israel*, *Christians United For Israel* (CUFI) and from *David Horowitz Freedom Centre* (www.jihadwatch.org), from the *Simon Wiesenthal Centre*, the *Gatstone Institute*, and the *International Policy Council*. Eileen F. Toplansky wrote in an article on the website www.americanthinker.com dated October 24, 2010:

The World Council of Churches has enthusiastically embraced The Kairos Palestine Document. It is a diatribe replete with Israel-bashing, false accusations, and misleading information which actually legitimizes Palestinian terrorism against Israel. As stated by Nora Carmi, of the Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre in Jerusalem, the message is simple: "Israel's unending occupancy is a sin against God." Terms such as "apartheid" and "war crimes" are carelessly bandied about in order to demonize and delegitimize the Middle East's only democracy, with no condemnation of terrorism against the State of Israel.

KAIROS AND FAITH

The second chapter is called *A word of faith*, and its first statement is: “We believe in one God, a good and just God.”

In this chapter we find some reflections about God, who created humanity in his image and by doing so giving all people dignity. The authors say about Jesus that “he came with a new teaching, casting a new light on the Old Testament, on the themes that relate to our Christian faith and our daily lives, themes such as the promises, the election, the people of God and the land.”

For the authors it is not acceptable that some groups of religious people “transform the Word of God into letters of stone that pervert the love of God and His providence in the life of both peoples and individuals.”

KAIROS AND HOPE

Although the situation, in which many Palestinians have to live, seems hopeless, many of them remain full of hope. Despite the words spoken at conferences, meetings, negotiations, despite all kinds of initiatives, the situation on the ground does not improve. Yet the Palestinian people keep their hope, because 'hope is from God,' they say.

Hope is important for the people. It is not hoping against their better judgment. These people are realistic enough to know that a quick solution is not possible. Still they trust that a better future will become a reality, maybe not for themselves, but for their children. Hope means for them 'not giving in to evil but rather standing up to it and continuing to resist it.'

In the Palestinian churches the people and their leaders see signs of hope. Many young people follow Jesus in their struggle for justice and peace. There are a lot of active and lively congregations, which provide social services to the people in their neighbourhoods.

There is an on-going dialogue between Christians and Muslims including not only the religious leaders but also lay people. Another sign of hope is that churches worldwide become aware of the injustice that is going on and their willingness to know the truth about what happens in Palestine. There is also a growing awareness among Israelis and a readiness to join the Palestinian people in their struggle for justice and peace.

KAIROS AND LOVE AND RESISTANCE

The authors quote Jesus: 'Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another' (John 13:34) and 'You have heard that it was said: "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy." But I say to you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.' (Matthew 5:43-45)

The *Kairos Palestine* document speaks of (peaceful) resistance in relation to the command Jesus gave to his disciples on loving the enemy (Matthew 5:45) and according to the apostle Paul, who wrote: 'Do not repay anyone evil for evil'

(Romans 12:17). It is about resistance against the evil and the sin of the Israeli occupation. The first responsibility of this resistance lies with the Palestinians themselves. The second responsibility lies with the international community, because today, the relations between people are regulated by international law. And of course the final responsibility to end the oppression and occupation is with the Israeli government. The document states: '[...] they must liberate themselves from the evil that is in them and the injustice they have imposed on others.'

Palestinian Christians want to resist the evil of occupation by means of love. In that way they try to refuse evil and to correct it 'with methods that enter into the logic of love and draw all energies to make peace.'

ISRAEL – A HOLY LAND?

In my opinion the claim of being 'The Holy Land' is a misconception of the biblical term 'holy'. I think the term 'holy' in the biblical sense can only be used for people. Land and stones cannot be holy. People can live a holy life, in the way the Bible shows. In the Bible God calls (a) people to live according to his commandments that regulate society and the way in which people can live a good life together. Jesus again affirmed these commandments clearly to his disciples and his audience: Love God and love your neighbour; and he interpreted them in this way: love your enemies and pray for them.

Israel is called to be a holy people and it can be that holy people, if it lives up to those commandments of the God of all people.

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PEACE BUILDING: LOCAL INITIATIVES

With the arrival in Israel/Palestine, ideas become blurred, and it is almost impossible to maintain a neutral position in the presence of so much injustice; however, the pain and the aftermath of the conflict is alive and is felt on both sides of the wall. The only certainty on every step we took during this visit was the importance to understand the history of the region, to grasp the current situation of the conflict, the strategies employed, and to estimate what the future scenarios might be. It is necessary to analyse how the Palestinian and Israeli people have progressed through history; what circumstances have interfered with their developments? Some examples include the psychosocial, political, economic situation and the current impact of the religious discourses derived from the conflict.



'Stand up to be checked!' Thus translates the text written on the road, intended for school children. Their school is located in the Palestinian territory, yet near the border of an Israeli settlement. Every time they want to go to school, they have to queue up to be checked by soldiers.

During the journey of seven days, I perceived how the grassroots movements and the various actors of the confrontation respond to the development of the historic process of Palestinian society - a situation of non-recognition of the Otherness by parts of Israeli society. Each encounter with the different movements highlighted

the importance of language and terms used to describe the situation in Israel/Palestine, especially after getting to know the great wall and the existing segregation (e.g. check-points); as a professional it was difficult for me not to be impacted by this very discouraging reality. In summary, in their struggle these grassroots movements seek to change the public opinion about Palestinians at the regional, national, and international levels.

In this line, I will reflect on how community initiatives influence the peace building process and the transformation of the conflict, and how in such a disheartening scenario it is possible to see “a light of hope” in community work. The small acts of humanity of the mothers in the *Aida Refugee Camp*, the Jewish family with whom we shared the tables, the open doors of female entrepreneurs like Leila in Hebron, the Israeli NGOs working for the protection of human rights, and the other people that somehow show the importance of looking beyond the walls that divide these two peoples and that show the different faces of the resistance.



SUPPORT FROM THE OUTSIDE: THE ACCOMPANIMENT APPROACH

In the case of Israel/Palestine, the central question that arises around the community initiatives is: “what is the actual capacity of the grassroots groups for

peace building from the local level?” I consider the context of violence is an “engine” for local initiatives to the extent that they add “value and a response to the weakening of the Central State.” Then, the various local initiatives, in the midst of the violence performed by the Israeli government and the context in which they live, calls for actions around new projects for peace and non-violence, to counteract the reality in which they are immersed.

However, local initiatives, such as Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) or the Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel “are not the miracle remedy to all the evils generated.” They are only an alternative way of resistance and transformation from local levels. To understand this, it is necessary to go deeper into what these two initiatives shared with our group.

Christian Peacemaker Teams

As we arrived in the commercial area of Hebron, we entered a small street closed off by one of the many walls that divide the city and right there was the CPT house. These internationals work hand in hand with the Palestinians and see themselves as companions; they believe that the to get involved must come from the context, and they work to support their local partners in any way that can contribute to the protection of human rights.

Also, the core objective of CPT is to raise awareness at an international level in order to empower the local initiatives in the West Bank. It is clear that, although this organization will not solve the conflict itself, it strengthens local dynamics through community network. The visit not only allowed us to have a greater understanding of the violations of human rights, but deepened the idea that change and transformation must come from the grassroots, since it is they who really know what type of accompaniment is needed to resist the realities .

The Ecumenical Accompaniment Program in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI)

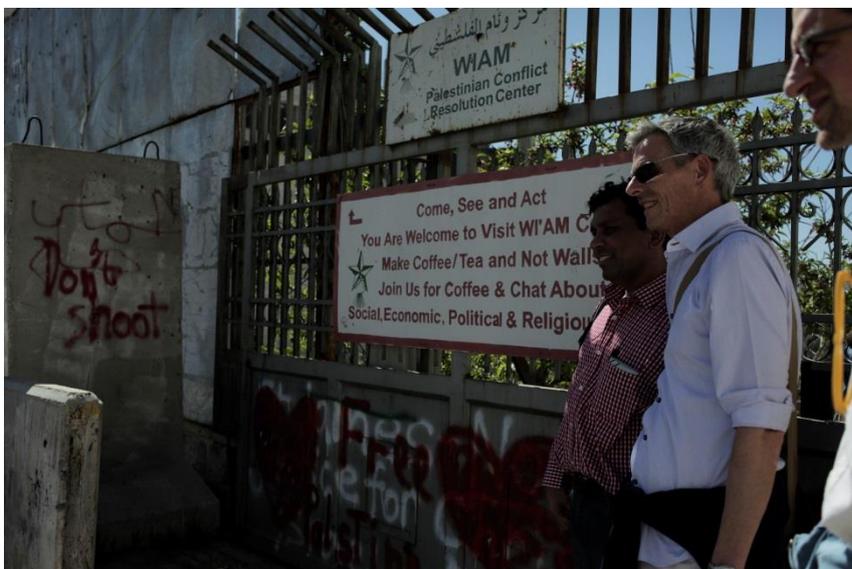
An initiative of the World Council of Churches, this organisation strives to show how religion can help to bring peace and justice. In a conflict such as the Israeli/Palestinian, it is important to show that religions have the potential not supporting violence and that they stand for human rights. The first time that we arrived at the check-point, we walked with two members of an EAPPI-team who

explained how hard the situation is for Palestinians and how important it is to have some accompaniment. In addition, EAPPI tries to join efforts with local initiatives working for peace and justice and at the international level to make the conflict visible through testimonies. The idea is to live as equals in order to understand and respond to the immediate needs.

Both of the above mentioned initiatives represent actors to boost collective projects, because they work together with the communities to find a non-violent response to the socio-political crisis.

SUPPORT FROM THE INSIDE: THE COMMUNITY-CENTER APPROACH

The transformation of the conflict invites construction of peace from a visionary



perspective. This means that it reveals elements to understand in a more comprehensive manner the decisions of certain actors in a society in conflict. It also demonstrates how the context in itself is a determinant factor

for innovative new models of identity building as well as the implementation of new political regimes. To understand the purpose of the transformation, you have to think of constructive changes; that is, in changes that seek to build peace from the very capacities derived from human relationships and dynamics of conflict. A clear example of this is the work of the *Wi'am Palestinian Conflict Transformation Center*, which invited us to redefine the traditional concepts of peace and conflict. In addition Wi'am creates spaces where fundamentalist religious discourses are deconstructed allowing the creation of ecumenical dialogues.

The center has different ways of working. For us, their work with Palestinian youth was amazing. They believe that this new generation has the potential to bring about change; to achieve this, the center creates different spaces for discussion

and dialogue where they train Palestinians in conflict transformation and non-violence resistance. During our talks, we realized how these young people are aware of the situation and their role as active actors in their community.

In addition, *Wi'am* approaches the conflict from a Middle Eastern tradition in order to broaden their understanding of transforming the conflict. An example of this is *Sulha*, meaning “to make peace” or “reconciliation” in Arabic. It is a method that reaffirms the importance of “common principles and collective wisdom typical of pluralistic communities”. In other words, this grassroots center works deeply in the pursuit of justice and peace through contextual social transformation.

Although the topic of conflict transformation is becoming more prevalent, and its relation to conflict resolution is imminent, John Paul Lederach is one of the few scholars that have built a complete theoretical framework on this issue. For this author, transformation of a conflict goes beyond the analysis of the context and he challenges the actors to see the full map, which means that you must take into account the following three elements:

- The immediate situation of the conflict;
- The current problems from the interactions between actors and the manifestation of these in the context;

The two previous points, i.e. taking into account the characteristics of the conflict and the relationships and interactions of the same.

But what is the transformation of conflicts? It is, according to Lederach, to ‘anticipate and respond to the ebbs and flows of the social conflicts as the opportunities that give life to the creation of constructive change processes that reduce violence; increase the justice in the direct interaction and social structures and respond to real-life problems in human relations.’ In this measure, the transformation seeks to enhance the capacity for change, from the understanding of the reality in order to discover these elements in the community experiences of local action, which were evident in all of our encounters.

The actors, therefore, seek to take into account the type of interactions they have with their antagonists in order to find new dynamics of relationships. In addition, local actors must have the ability to build new alternatives to break the patterns of violence and to advance in the construction of new identities focused on peace and

non-violence. Therefore, to think transformation is also thinking about actions, responses and decisions that will enable the community to develop strategies for change. The transformation makes visible the possibility to change the mental schemes which continue to fuel the conflict.

In line with this, Lederach raises the objectives of transformation: *From a relational database*: changes in the relationships face to face; *from a structural¹ change* in the socio-political and economic realities; *from a cultural look*: changes in the community; and *from a personal look*: changes within the person. This approach reinforces the idea that conflicts should be addressed not only from the resolution of conflicts, but understanding the different networks that are created by the actors to respond to the conflict and the needs deriving from it.

This conceptual approach shows that the construction of peace requires thinking about transformation in both the short and long term process, while trying to change the dynamics of violence, social interactions, and the mental structures from a future vision, maximizing the capabilities of the different actors and the context.

Built near the Wall, the Wi'am Center is under constant monitoring of the Israeli guards. Nearby is a graveyard.



CONCLUSIONS

The analysis above is intended to highlight the possibility of creating spaces for the construction of peace from local initiatives. The different meetings revealed the

¹When referring to structural changes, we talk about the causes of inequalities, injustices, asymmetry of powers and lack of equity, expressed by social, cultural and economic structures that rival.

strong work on non-violent resistance and reconfiguration of the spaces for local participation. It is at the same time shocking and encouraging to see how, despite the hostile context of violence, segregation and intolerance, the local dynamics are the ones that allow the community to move towards transformation. Finally, the challenge is to understand the processes of peace building as a process of change from the community and not only as a process that forms part of the structures of power.

Personally, the only hope I see for peace and justice in Israel/Palestine is the will of the different grassroots groups. Part of the transformation of the conflict requires the will to change, which is present in each of the groups and initiatives we visited. Local spaces can make a difference. It is from these spaces that it is possible to envision a work focused on peace, where the imaginations are transformed and where the responses to the conflict come from the communities, in cultural, political, social and religious forms.

Sources

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JEWISH AND ISRAELI PERSPECTIVES

Both Israeli and Palestinian narratives are contesting, partial, and selective. In essence, these constructed narratives are framed in order to bolster the perception and opinion that people have in both societies. In this, it is to be said that people filter every saying and event through the lens of their own narrative, reaffirming one's religious, political or ideological conviction. During our study trip to Israel and the Palestinian territories, hosted by the Tantur Ecumenical Institute in South Jerusalem, we all experienced that these narratives, indeed, are contesting, opposing, and validating convictions and military actions. In this chapter I will discuss the experiences we faced about the Jewish perspective on this conflict.

A VIEW FROM WITHIN A SETTLEMENT



Bob Lang, born in the United States, migrated to Israel over three decades ago and now lives in a Jewish settlement—such settlements are also known as Jewish neighborhoods.

Our first meeting in which we had the opportunity to speak with an Israeli Jew was in a settlement, called Efrat, located between Bethlehem and Hebron. Bob Lang, born in the United States of America and having moved to the state of Israel as a young adult, he intentionally chose to live in the “Holy Land.” Being a former spokesman for the Israeli government and having been involved in the Oslo negotiations, Lang was advocating for living in a so-called “settlement” in the West Bank.

For me, it was a great privilege to speak with him, trying to understand his motives, arguments, and beliefs. As we travelled as

researchers, it is not always about positioning yourself in the on-going conflict, nor about truth claims. Instead, for us as students of the *Peace, Trauma and Religion-*

master's specialisation, it is about listening and doing our very best to understand the people involved.

Bob Lang started the conversation by showing the geographical borders of the land of Palestine before the year 1949. The regions of the land of Palestine were named according to the Biblical terms, such as Samaria and Judea. Based on ideological motives the Jordanian authorities changed these names into "West Bank", which would not refer to any legitimate rights on geographical territories. Another map that was exemplified pointed to the one of the United Nations after the declaration of the state of Israel on 14 May, 1948. However, the surrounding countries did not agree to this plan and started a war, fighting all together against the Israelis. Within a year the Israeli army occupied parts of Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and the whole Palestinian territories. In the year of 1949 Israel gave some land back to Egypt, Lebanon, and Jordan and these governments looked after the Palestinian territories. The geographical borders of the land of Palestine were demarcated by these countries.

While sharing his insights about the legitimate presence of the settlements in West Bank, Bob Lang spoke about his feelings concerning this land, which was to be understood as the "Holy Land." It is the place where Abraham moved to Hebron, where David was crowned king, and where the temple of Yahweh was instituted. It is the land that God entrusted to the people of Israel. And it was king David who walked in Lang's "back yard."

For me, it is hard and even impossible to understand how that must feel. Obviously, it is clear that the religious discourse of this conflict is deeply intertwined with the political one. In fact, here the religious discourse seems to determine everything and functions as a hermeneutical lens through which everything is interpreted. The heritage rooted in Jewish beliefs is an important motive for building the settlements in the Palestinian territories. For religious people this is to be understood as their primary reason. Others would use a rationale based on, for instance, security or economy.

VIEWS FROM ISRAELI ACTIVISTS

If you write about "the Israeli perspective", it is almost impossible to speak about *one* perspective. Within the state of Israel many different opinions and insights on

the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are represented. During our trip this variety was tangible too. For instance, we listened to a lecture by Hagai El-Ad, executive director of *B'Tselem*, the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories. He advocated for the moral responsibility of people to find non-violent ways to change a violent environment. According to El-Ad, Israel presents itself as a first class democracy, yet it treats the Palestinian people as third class citizens. It is the Israeli government that finds ways to legalize their policy by shaping their juridical regulations accordingly. The information center El-Ad aims to release information about human right violations, political parties, and the current situation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this, correct documentation is essential.

An Israeli activist, Aviv from the organization *Ir-Amim* (“*For an Equitable and Stable Jerusalem with an Agreed Political Future*”) gave us a geo-political tour in the city of Jerusalem. He described why Jewish people move to Palestinian neighbourhoods, claiming ground for Israeli purposes. The whole topic of settlements has become very stressful among the inhabitants of East Jerusalem. Housing is not the only problem in this area. Only 64% of the teenagers of East Jerusalem graduate from high school. Here, the crime rate is higher and more people suffer from poverty compared to other regions in Israel and the Palestinian territories, Aviv reported. The Israeli settlements are a form of controlling the Palestinian territories. The *Jabor Mukkabber* settlement is an example that illustrates this notion in terms of making a ring of settlements around the old city of Jerusalem.

While the Palestinian capital must not be located in East Jerusalem, Israel presents Jerusalem as an Israeli city. From the central park to archaeological excavations, it all serves one main purpose: the legitimization of the Israeli presence in the “Holy Land.”

It is underestimated to state that this conflict is complex. And although a solution seems to be far away, Aviv presented three different options. The first option is a result of a changed political morality, which would lead to a political solution. Consequently, Jerusalem would be divided, such as the Old Wall, and it would be the capital of the Israeli state. The second option proposes a two-state solution in

which Jerusalem will also be divided, functioning as the capital of both peoples. In this case, Israel has to give up its historical legitimization of the whole of Jerusalem and Palestinian refugees have to give up some of their land, based on the map in 1948. The third option prescribes that the present situation will continue, which in fact implies that “it will (not) be the same as now”, but will lead to new conflicts.

CELEBRATING SHABBAT

On Friday we attended a liberal reformed synagogue in which the evening of Shabbat was introduced by singing songs; some Tenakh verses from the Psalms and other Jewish books. Other verses sung derived from a later rabbinic tradition. It was a joyful celebration at the beginning of the weekend of Purim. Later that evening, we joined a family in celebrating Shabbat at their home. It was a great experience to join them in their ways of honouring the life Yahweh has given. From breaking the bread to the blessing of the children, it was a special moment for me in which the Jewish faith became contagious and personal. At this moment, it was no longer about the Wailing Wall and the synagogue, but religion became a lived religion. In the conversations I had with our host, Dr. Ophir, he shared his insights about the conflict and I asked him: Do you have hope for a peaceful solution? And he replied:

I have no option, but hoping. There is no other possibility. No choice. We chose to bring our children to a so-called mixed school in which both Jewish and Palestinian children are grouped together in the same classes, because we believe in peace and a life together. If I attend an ecumenical meeting or a peace negotiation and a bomb is placed, all these meetings will be delayed, but we have no choice. Because it concerns the future of our children, we will be at the school quarter at eight o'clock the next morning. This is our life and we live for it.

REMEMBERING THE SHOA

During the morning of that same day we had visited the Yad Vashem Remembrance Center, the place where the Holocaust is remembered collectively. The name is derived from the book of Isaiah, speaking about *yad va-shem*, which is translated as ‘remember the name.’ Entering a recently renovated building, the architecture



Our guide in Yad Vashem.

itself tells a story of light and darkness in which light overcomes the darkness. The museum painfully describes the easiness and the natural tension of humankind not to stand with the oppressed, to be blind for injustice, and to be deaf for the voice of

the hopeless. Yad Vashem testifies that a lot of people somehow felt or even knew that there was “something wrong” with the national socialist regime.

However, only a few people did something, risking their lives for other human beings. The majority of Nazi-Germany did not do anything. It was much easier not to stand with the oppressed, because it allowed people to continue their lives, being preoccupied about their own worries and needs. The same can be said of the Allied Forces that spotted Auschwitz in 1943, knowing based on pictures taken from air planes that Jews were killed, but they did not bomb it to stop it.

Yad Vashem calls for a moral responsibility to take care of the human family in terms of standing with people in their needs and being a voice of the voiceless. This has nothing to do with age, ethnic background or gender. Instead, it is a message for and an appeal to everyone to stand up for justice.

*They came for the Communists
And I did not object for
I was not a Communist
Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not object
For I was not a Socialist*

*Then they came for the Jews
And I did not object for I was not a Jew.*

*When they came for me,
There was no one left to object...*

—Martin Niemöller
German Pastor

MESSAGES FROM THE WALL

INTRODUCTION

In 2002, the Israeli government started constructing a segregation-wall between Palestinian-Israeli territories along the West Bank. By now, the length of the wall is approximately 720 km, with 8 meters height (twice the height of the Berlin Wall), disaggregating the territory of Jerusalem, Bethlehem, Qalqilya, parts of Ramallah and Tulkarm. The wall is also equipped by buffer zones and watchtowers in every 50-100 meters, using many advanced technology such as trenches, electric fences, surveillance cameras, and sensors of military patrol.

In general, the Israeli government claims that the reason for the construction of the wall is to provide safety for its citizens, protecting Israelis from Palestinian attacks, such as gun attacks and suicide bombings, especially after the Second Intifada of Palestinians at the beginning of the 2000s.

The wall, which is not yet completely finished at the time this report was written, is also labelled as 'security barrier', 'racial segregation fence', or even 'apartheid wall', depending on whom you ask. It segregates the area of Israelis on one side and Palestinians area on the other side.

For Palestinians, crossing the wall remains challenging. They must first cross the nearest check point, showing their identity cards and telling the reason for entering the occupied territory or Israeli settlements. Many Palestinians are rejected for passing the check point due to some reasons, which are neither always obvious nor convincing.

To address this issue, Palestinians have been using many ways to express their bottled up sadness that left a lump in their heart, describing how the 'segregation wall' humiliates them since it restricts their rights to freedom of a peaceful life. One way that has been employed by Palestinians to show their humiliated feeling is through the wall-art portrayals which are painted along the 'Apartheid wall' within the Palestinian area.

This short-report aims to depict some adorable messages and hopes of Palestinians that are painted along the wall's construction and then provide my personal reflection on this "humanitarian-segregation wall."

MESSAGES FROM THE WALL

I include here some touching pictures that I snapped in Bethlehem and Hebron during our study trip in Israel-Palestine on 4-11 March 2017. First, here is one photo that shows how the check point looks like.

First and foremost, This picture shows how the check point separates the Israeli and Palestinian territories in



Hebron. On the whole, I would like to say that standing at the check point in Hebron brought tears to my eyes. It is contradictory to human rights. Hebron, where the Abraham Mosque and Avraham Avinue synagogues, one of the biggest Jewish synagogues, are located, is one of the holiest sites for Jews and Muslims. In this holy city, Muslims and Jews share a single religious site, which is divided in two: The mosque for Muslims and the synagogue for Jews. In my humble opinion, the religious life in Hebron might be a good example of interreligious hospitality if Jews and Muslims would respect each other's religious traditions. As it is today, however, the holy site functions as a place of segregation.



This is one of the most touching pictures I have seen during my visit to Israel-Palestine. I snapped this picture in Bethlehem shortly after crossing the check point. In my opinion, this picture aims at showing two important messages

for the viewers. First, it depicts the deepest heart of Palestinian Muslims, longing to visit al-Aqsa Mosque in the occupied territory of Israelis, since it has not been easy for them to go back and forth into Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem after the establishment of check point regulations. Let me include here a verse of the Quran showing the importance of Al-Aqsa mosque for Muslims: *‘Glory be to Him Who carried His servant by night from the Sacred Mosque to the Farthest Mosque, whose precincts We have blessed, that we might show him some of our signs.’* (The Quran chapter 17:1). This verse refers to the holy Night Journey (*al-Isra*) of prophet Muhammad from ‘so called’ *masjid al-Haram* in Mecca to *Masjid al-Aqsa* in Jerusalem, the prophet then ascended into the seven heavens and finally met God. Jerusalem is regarded as the third holiest site for Muslims mainly due to the Prophet Muhammad’s miraculous journey to that city. So after several years of his journey, the Prophet and Muslim community made al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem as the first direction of prayer before its changing to Masjid al-Haram in Mecca. This is why al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem has its sacred status in Islam.

Second, it also represents a quite clear general overview on the ‘apartheid wall’ showing two different castes of life, Palestinians as low-level caste living in one side and Israelis as high-level caste inhabiting the other side. It is the current situation on both sides, people might easily find a sightseeing of life’s luxury with its beautiful scenery “green living area,” sophisticated buildings and a good flowing sanitation behind this great barrier, while on the other side, it symbolizes a serious “devastated-area,” or even -“untreated area.” Simply speaking, the arid areas lacking good road access, clear flowing water, and good public facilities.

Having looked at this picture, I was thinking about logical reason for establishing this separation wall. Through this wall, Israeli government seems to disaggregate totally between Palestinian Arab and Israeli Jews, doing systemic deprivation of human rights against Palestinians, such as deprivation of Palestinians heritage, land, and civil status, including an effort of exclusion from the access and legal status. That legal status will then finally determine their rights of living in Israel-Palestine territory.



Another 'message from the wall' is illustrated by the portrait of Leila Khaled. At first, I found this picture means a lot to Palestinians since it is able to convey a clear message for Palestinians to fight for their freedom. Leila Khaled, a Palestinian-women fighter with her weapon, calls for Palestinians not to forget the ongoing

struggle for freedom against Israeli occupation. However, I was thinking this art work is also problematic since it seems to be an illustration that freedom should be addressed by violent ways, weapon-by-weapon, not by non-violent peacemaking efforts.

In contrast, I found this picture meaningful as well. I took this picture in the Banksy Shop's street. It attracted me since it clearly illustrates an awesome message for Palestinians, a man throwing a bunch of flowers into the settlements territory. Instead of throwing stones into the Israeli settlement as many Palestinians did in the First and Second Intifada, this masked-Palestinian



man, as is shown in the picture, chooses to throw flowers into Israeli area. As we know, flowers have been used not only as a symbol to represent emotionally a romantic relationship but also as an effort to bring peace to interactions with the loved one. Flowers also symbolize love, happiness, protection and devotion. This picture gives a very meaningful message for both disputing parties, Israelis and Palestinians, to end the conflict with peace and love.



I also attach here a picture showing a number of displayed-posters on the wall along the segregation wall in Bethlehem. Interestingly, the displayed-posters are not merely about a speaking-picture but that also completed by impressive narration. At glance, I was wondering if those posters are the only possible way to let the world know what is actually going on in Palestine-Israel nowadays and then encourage outsiders to take part in helping them deal with this problem, apart from its effectiveness and

efficiency. One example poster that I found quite impressive entitled 'Treasure'. This poster illustrates how brave a Palestinian man, namely Abu Ahmad, in maintaining his wealth, the land of Palestine. As it is written in the poster: 'Everyone knows Abu Ahmad for his strength and hard work as a rural farmer. He was bribed many times to sell this land, so it could be used to expand the settlement but he refused. His land is a treasure that can't be bought with money. Abu Ahmad found Israeli soldiers mocked him daily, in hopes that he would give and sell his land. But he keeps his chin up. Abu Ahmad started telling his sons about the land and how must they keep it, he looked at his land, at the crops and trees that are grown now and said, 'This land, my children, is like a mother, it is the soul, give to it and it will give you in return. This land is all you have; it's for you and for your children after you.' For me, it was a remarkable poster, expressing how meaningful treasures should be kept in life. For Palestinians, within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, land is one of the most valuable forms of wealth in life, protecting the Palestinian lands means protecting future life of Palestinian's

livelihood. At glance, I got the impression that this picture is also an attempt to reveal that the main root of the conflict is the land's occupation fuelled by religious reasons, not purely a religious discourse. It is obviously a complicated case.

Many Palestinians are also demonstrating their deepest hope in order that the Israeli and Palestinian governments end this prolonged conflict. Here is one that represents that hope: *'I've been through a lot in my life while still a teenager. I saw a man got shot right in front of me and I saw Israelis shooting at our house. But I never stopped smiling and hoping. I hope that Israelis and Palestinians will find a way to live in peace, and that there be no wall.'*



But I never stopped smiling and hoping. I hope that Israelis and Palestinians will find a way to live in peace and that there be no wall'. From this poster, we may understand that what they (Palestinians) want is peace; what they hope is justice; what they need is freedom. To stop the Israelis-Palestinian conflict becomes the ultimate hope of Palestinians.

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Having been involved in the excursion to Israel-Palestine and having seen a lot of remarkable messages on the wall along the settlement area means a lot to me. I received many impressions that are mixed together in a feeling of uncertainty.

For Palestinians, the art works seem to be the single most powerful weapon to show the world how humiliating and frustrating they feel during the Israeli occupation. From this, I was also wondering whether the root conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is more complicated, since it differs from what I know from reading books or some other sources of information.

Finally, in addressing the reason for establishing the segregation wall, it is often said that Israeli government argues that the building of 'segregation wall' and its supporting check points are for the sake of security reason, preventing Palestinian

militants, who aim at doing attacks and suicide bombings against Israelis, from entering Israeli settlements and territories.

Unfortunately, an estimated number of 30,000 Palestinians citizens, are day-laborers working within the Israeli settlements. In this case, they should cross the check point every day in order to reach their working places. On top of that, I see that the system of checkpoints not only restricts the movement of Palestinians within the occupied areas and Israeli territories but also significantly impacts the access of medical care, education, employment, and other pivotal social services of Palestinians.

APPENDIX

PEACE, TRAUMA, AND RELIGION IN THE PALESTINE-ISRAEL CONFLICT



General introduction

"I am not optimistic, but people of faith are never without hope!"

This was the answer of a religious leader from Israel/Palestine when he was recently asked how he imagines the future of the people of the "Holy Land", given the current political situation.

Israel/Palestine has witnessed an on-going conflict that seems almost impossible to be transformed into a peaceful situation of justice. How to imagine peace with justice in this context of human rights violations, terror attacks, occupation and discrimination?

The complexity of the context involves historical trauma, land issues, economic interests, international law issues, even war, and many other aspects - last but not least religion! There is hardly any conflict in which it seems so obvious that religion and different peoples of faith play a significant role: Jews, Christians, and Muslims.

For some, religion is the root-cause of the conflict itself. For others, religion is the only hope left.

What is the role of religion in this conflict?

It is this question that motivated the VU-students of the master specialisation on Peace, Trauma, and Religion to visit the context itself (March 2017), hosted by the Tantur Ecumenical Institute - on a hill in the outskirts of Jerusalem near Bethlehem.

In order to gain some deeper insight, we want to learn from people of different faiths in their contexts; experts from different disciplines about the role of religion - in the midst of trauma, violence and injustice.

In this series of Public Lectures 2017 we want to continue our analysis in the university-classroom. The lectures will address different aspects of the question at stake, addressed by scholars who have studied the context deeply for some time, some have even lived there. Their insights will help to:

- describe religious identities, and their interconnectedness,
- identify historical claims, memories and trauma of religious groups;
- gain clarity of the instrumentalisation of religion in the given context;
- gain insights about the potential role of religions in peacemaking;
- name concrete examples of building “just peace” from faith perspective.

SESSIONS AND SPEAKERS

4 APRIL: PEACE, TRAUMA AND RELIGION IN THE CONFLICT OF PALESTINE-ISRAEL

Insights from the Excursion of VU-Students of the Master Specialization on Peace, Trauma, and Religion

Prof. Dr Fernando Enns and Students

Prof. Dr Fernando Enns holds the Chair for Peace Theology and Ethics at the VU University's Faculty of Theology and is the director of the Amsterdam Centre for Religion and Peace & Justice Studies.

11 APRIL: ZIONISM AND ITS EUROPEAN CHRISTIAN ROOTS

Dr Janneke Stegeman

Dr Janneke Stegeman was declared Theologian of the Year in 2016. She is involved with the debate centre De Nieuwe Liefde Amsterdam. She obtained her doctorate with her dissertation Decolonizing Jeremiah: Narratives, Conflict, and Identity in Religious Tradition (2014).

18 APRIL: ECUMENICAL ACCOMPANYMENT WITH THE PEOPLES OF ISRAEL AND PALESTINE

Rev. Han Cuperus

Rev. Han Cuperus is a pastor for the Mennonite Churches in Rotterdam and Dordrecht. He worked in Palestine-Israel with the Christian Peacemaker Teams.

2 MAY: RELIGIOUS ASPECTS OF THE MIDDLE-EAST CONFLICT

Theological and Historical Perspectives

Dr Yaser Ellethy

Dr Yasser Ellethy teaches Quran and Hadith Studies at the VU University's Faculty of Theology and is involved in the Center for Islamic Theology.

4 MAY: WHO ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD?

A Comparative Theological Reading of the Story of Jacob and Esau

Prof. Dr Marianne Moyaert

Prof. Dr Marianne Moyaert holds the Chair for Comparative Theology and Hermeneutics of Interreligious Dialogue at the VU University's Faculty of Theology.

9 MAY: VIOLENCE AND NON-VIOLENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF OCCUPATION

A Christian-Palestine Perspective

Viola Raheb, University Assistant Mag.

*Viola Raheb works at the University of Vienna. A member of numerous organisations and committees on intercultural and interreligious dialogue, she has conducted various research projects, including the comparative study *Political Awareness and Political Participation of Palestinian Women*.*