

The Experience of International Volunteers Doing  
Liberation Theology in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

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**Thesis Abstract**

The objective of this research is to describe how the experience of working for social justice in the context of occupied Palestine, from the point of view of a sample of international volunteers, is aligned with the Palestinian liberation theology of Naim Ateek and the Palestinian contextual theology of Mitri Raheb. This paper begins by summarizing the historical trends and antecedents of liberation theology and the development of liberation theology in Latin America. This paper then outlines key aspects of the historical, social, psychological and religious contexts of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as well as unique aspects of Palestinian liberation and contextual theologies. The paper then presents the results of interviews with seven international volunteers who participated in various forms of non-violent resistance and witness activities in occupied Palestine. The theologies of Ateek and Raheb are used as tools for discussing the results of the interviews.

September 2, 2014

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## **Introduction**

Moved by the extent of damage incurred by the Israeli military to civilian life and infrastructure in Lebanon during the summer of 2006, I attended an information session in Halifax organized by Canadian Arabs and Jews for a Just Peace. One of the speakers was Dr. Magi Abdul-Masih who became one of my advisors in writing this thesis. That session was the first time I heard anyone question whether the use of force by the State of Israel was justified as a matter of that State's survival. I began to read more about the State of Israel and to learn what life was like for Palestinian refugees and those living under occupation. I attended the Seventh International Sabeel conference in Palestine-Israel in 2008 and travelled to Nazareth, East Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron. Speakers at that conference included Naim Ateek and Jean Zaru from Sabeel, Jeff Halper from the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Bishop Munib Younan from the Diyar Consortium, and representatives from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency. This thesis draws upon publications by these people and/or the organizations they represented. At the end of the conference, I felt I had to decide whether to ignore what I saw in Palestine or find out more about it; to respect the status quo or critique it; and, most importantly, to feel despair or feel hope. In each case, I chose the latter and the research that follows is the result.

The objectives of this research are to describe the lived experience of international volunteers engaged in social justice activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories as well as to explore the relationship between those experiences and faith, with faith defined

as a conviction that there is “something beyond” physical reality toward which people are willing to orient their lives. This research considers social justice activities undertaken by Christians to be a form of liberative praxis, a combination of action and reflection that is oriented toward transforming unjust social situations.

Chapter One summarizes the historical trends and antecedents relevant to liberation theology to show that Palestinian liberation theology is grounded in, and connected to, human history. After reviewing the development of liberation theology in Latin America, Chapter One ends with a discussion of the methods, forms of praxis, hermeneutical strategies, and themes and foundations characteristic of liberation theology. Chapter Two reviews the historical, social, psychological and religious contexts of doing theology in Palestine. As will be seen, theology that interacts with its context is a dynamic movement with a vitality that has the potential to liberate people, individually and communally, from oppression. Chapter Three outlines the unique characteristics of Naim Ateek’s Palestinian liberation theology and Mitri Raheb’s contextual Palestinian theology following the format used for the discussion at the end of Chapter One. Chapter Four presents the results of interviews conducted with Christians who participated in social justice activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and discusses the dynamic relationship between the participants’ religious beliefs, faith and actions in the context of occupied Palestine. As will be seen, narratives from personal interviews reveal how religious belief, faith and experience interact simultaneously in the search for social justice and in the act of becoming fully human.

## **Chapter One**

### **Development and key aspects of liberation theology**

Many theologies of liberation arose in the 1960s, a decade of social upheaval and political revolution. In Latin America, liberation theology criticized unjust social, political, economic and religious institutions and structures that were national and international in scope. Key aspects of Latin American liberation theology were later applied in other contexts such as occupied Palestine. The objectives of Chapter One are to summarize the Christian antecedents that informed the development of liberation theology in Latin America and later in Palestine, to give an overview of the historical context of Latin American liberation theology as a way of demonstrating the theological importance of human history, and to describe the major characteristics of liberation theology that became foundational to Palestinian liberation theology as discussed later in this paper.

#### **1.1 Historical trends and antecedents relevant to liberation theology**

As a tradition made real through praxis in human history, liberation theology draws upon and unites many themes that arose in earlier Christian thinking and praxis. This section summarizes major events, concepts and practices that contributed to the development of liberation theology, including Pentecost, medieval Christianity, colonialism, Marxism, theological reflection after World War II, and the Second Vatican Council.

## **From Pentecost to the European Enlightenment**

Witnesses to the gift of God's Spirit at Pentecost asked the apostles, "What should we do?" (Acts 2:37).<sup>1</sup> Peter's answer, that they should "repent, and be baptized" (Acts 2:38) emphasized the importance of individual faith and belief characteristic of Western Christianity. Pentecost also occasioned the fellowship and sharing of "all things in common" (Acts 2:44). Such attention to active engagement in the community was also part of Christianity, particularly in the East, but as will be seen later in this paper, grew in importance in the Western Christian tradition as a result of intense theological reflection after World War II.

As the Church's social influence grew in the centuries following Pentecost, so did its material wealth. In time, the Church's wealth drew criticism from some Christians that challenged the Church's wealth and power by linking faith to poverty. For example, St. Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) publicly renounced his family's wealth and voluntarily adopted a life of material poverty. Francis also linked commitment to the poor with obedience to the Church but by the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Franciscan order he founded had ironically amassed great wealth and power.

More pervasive than the Franciscan ideal of poverty was the influence of the scholastic theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274). Aquinas synthesized the contemporary understanding of scripture, the medieval tradition of *quaestio* and the Greek philosophy of Aristotle to suggest the existing social order, that privileged a

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America.



minority of people, was part of God's natural law for the world.<sup>2</sup> This social order was a series of dualisms that privileged God over humans, humans over the natural world, nobles over commoners and men over women. Natural law theology persisted through to the Enlightenment when philosophers like John Locke (1632–1704) began to advance theories of individual rights that ought to be recognized by the larger society.<sup>3</sup> However, the growing social acceptance of these human rights failed to keep pace with the industrializing economy of Europe and the colonizing project it facilitated.

### **Colonization, Conquest and Canaanites**

Through colonization, Europeans asserted Western Christian supremacy and feudal vassalage over non-Christian “others” in the Americas believing this system of privilege reflected a divine order for the natural world. The Western Church sanctioned using Christianity as a tool of European conquest in the Americas by applying the conquest paradigm of Exodus and comparing the indigenous people to the vanquished Canaanites (Ex 33:1-2).<sup>4</sup> By participating in the colonial enterprise in the Americas that began with the Spanish in 1492, the Church sought to impose its own values upon the region's indigenous peoples through extensive missionary activity. In the case of Latin America

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II.I.90-104, 2<sup>nd</sup> rev. ed., tr. English Dominican Fathers, 1920, <http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2090.htm> (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> “We have the same abilities, and share in one common nature, so there can't be any rank-ordering that would authorize some of us to destroy others, as if we were made to be used by one another, as the lower kinds of creatures are made to be used by us.” John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 2.6, <http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf> (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> “The LORD said to Moses, ‘Go, leave this place, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, and go to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, “To your descendants I will give it.” I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites” (Ex 33:1-2).

the church also sought to ensure the region's political servitude to Spain,<sup>5</sup> and Roman Catholic social teaching dominated the region even after Latin American countries gained political independence from European colonizers in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In North America, the biblical conquest paradigm was less directly implicated in colonization,<sup>6</sup> but as will be discussed later in the context of the lived experience of Palestinian liberation theology, some North Americans who are concerned about the occupation of Palestine are also confronted with their own history of occupying another people's land.

### **Roman Catholic social teaching and the development of Marxism**

Until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Roman Catholic social thought reflected Aquinas' theology of natural law. In 1891 Pope Leo XIII wrote that whereas the rich have less need of state help, "the masses of the needy should be specially cared for and protected by the government."<sup>7</sup> However, Leo XIII still believed the welfare of the Church was necessary for the good of society and wrote in 1901 that "the tranquility of order and the true prosperity flourish especially among those peoples whom the Church controls and influences."<sup>8</sup> Over the next thirty years the Vatican's position on social and economic justice softened. By the start of the Depression in 1931, Pius XI was encouraging a new

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<sup>5</sup> Penny Lernoux, "The Long Path to Puebla," in *Puebla and Beyond*, ed. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1979), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Mark G. Brett, *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2009), 9.

<sup>7</sup> Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (Vatican Archives, May 15, 1891), 37, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_1-xiii\\_enc\\_15051891\\_rerum-novarum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_1-xiii_enc_15051891_rerum-novarum_en.html) (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Leo XIII, *Graves De Communi Re* (Vatican Archives, January 18, 1901), 27, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/leo\\_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_1-xiii\\_enc\\_18011901\\_graves-de-communi-re\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/leo_xiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_1-xiii_enc_18011901_graves-de-communi-re_en.html) (accessed February 15, 2014).

concept of the social order with “social charity... as the soul of this order.”<sup>9</sup> However, even this document seemed as much concerned with the Church’s power in society as with the Church’s service to society.<sup>10</sup>

Whereas the Church traditionally responded to poverty with charity, Karl Marx (1818–1883) responded with moral outrage. Marx developed an ethical commitment to justice based not on biblical ideals but on his own critical investigations that later contributed to the development of the hermeneutic of suspicion used in liberation theology. Marxist criticism of the Church’s complicity in privileging the rich and powerful challenged Western Christians to examine their traditional focus on belief over praxis. The perspectives of the powerful classes generally dominated religious thought until Marx began to write from the perspective of the poor.<sup>11</sup>

### **World War II and the development of European political theology**

While Marxism grew in popularity in Eastern Europe in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the totalitarian and racist ideology of Nazism in Germany began turning the 19<sup>th</sup> century European colonizing project inward upon Europe. Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906–1945) developed a theology of resistance based on his experience of defying Nazism during World War II (1939–1945). By combining theology and praxis, Bonhoeffer, among

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<sup>9</sup> Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (May 15, 1931), 88, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/pius\\_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-xi\\_enc\\_19310515\\_quadragesimo-anno\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/pius_xi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-xi_enc_19310515_quadragesimo-anno_en.html) (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, trans. and ed. by Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1973/1988), 163.

<sup>11</sup> Gregory Baum, “The Impact of Marxist Ideas on Christian Theology,” *Laval Théologique et Philosophique* 54/3 (1998): 501.

others, provided a Christian witness and social activist response to the political and social situation in Nazi Germany.<sup>12</sup> Imprisoned for two years on suspicion of plotting to kill Hitler, Bonhoeffer was executed in 1945 but his letters influenced subsequent Christian reflection on the suffering caused by World War II, and of the holocaust in particular, as well as the failure of Christian theology to resist Nazi ideology.

Like many European countries, Germany had a history of anti-Semitism. By the 1930's German churches aligned historical anti-Semitism with contemporary Aryan racism. This effort contributed to the holocaust that killed six million Jews, representing two out of three Jews that had been living in Europe, as well as nine million other victims of Nazi ideology. These deaths challenged many Christians to acknowledge culpability, renounce anti-Semitism, embrace dialogue with Judaism and determine an appropriate response to the establishment of the Jewish State of Israel. Such theological reflection contributed to a general shift in theological emphasis away from individual piety and toward a renewed concern for the individual in his or her socio-political situation.

Following World War II, Jürgen Moltmann (1926–) of the Reformed Church developed a theology of resistance based not only on what happened in Nazi Germany but on the contemporary experience of oppression in South Africa and Latin America. Moltmann wrote that political theology was a hermeneutical method different from textual and historical criticism by its orientation toward life in the present.<sup>13</sup> According to Moltmann, only biblical interpretation from within contemporary society had the power

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<sup>12</sup> Werner G. Jeanrond, "From Resistance to Liberation Theology: German Theologians and the Non/Resistance to the National Socialist Regime," *The Journal of Modern History* 64 (December 1992): 193.

<sup>13</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, "Political Theology," *Theology Today* 28 (April 1971): 8.

to liberate humanity from the constraints of that society. Moltmann critiqued human ideology and, like Bonhoeffer, he believed God's creative agency was at work in human history.<sup>14</sup> Moltmann advocated praxis as a Christian duty to resist injustice based on love for one's neighbor, a theme picked up later by Jean Zaru and Mitri Raheb in Palestine.

Roman Catholic Johann B. Metz (1928–) also reworked Christian theology in light of the European experience of World War II. Metz believed the Christian triumphalist view of human history that flowed from biblical conquest imagery partly accounted for the weak political resistance of Germans against Nazism.<sup>15</sup> Influenced by Vatican II's call to look for God in the "signs of the times",<sup>16</sup> Metz sought to relate religion and society such that religion might become an integral part of contemporary life. Metz was critical of privatized theology that centered on the individual and wrote that the "deprivatizing of theology is the primary critical task of a political theology."<sup>17</sup> Metz's core belief, that indifference to injustice was morally wrong, was foundational to the development of liberation theology as discussed in the next section.

While Metz developed his political theology in the early 1960s, Catholic social teaching was adopting what would later become liberationist themes. *Gaudium et Spes* expressed the Church's concern for those who are economically and socially

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<sup>14</sup> Jeanrond, "From Resistance to Liberation Theology: German Theologians and the Non/Resistance to the National Socialist Regime," 197.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 199.

<sup>16</sup> Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes* (Vatican Archives, December 7, 1965), 4, [http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist\\_councils/ii\\_vatican\\_council/documents/vat-ii\\_cons\\_19651207\\_gaudium-et-spes\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html) (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>17</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, "Religion and Society in the Light of a Political Theology," *Harvard Theological Review* 61/4 (October 1968): 510.

marginalized with the understanding that “God intended the earth and all that it contains for the use of every human being and people.”<sup>18</sup> In 1967 Pope Paul VI also addressed widespread injustice and poverty in *Populorum Progressio* but stopped short of recommending practical solutions.<sup>19</sup> Together these documents expanded the concern of theology to include living conditions and social relations and thereby helped to facilitate the development of a new theology in Latin America.

### **Summary**

The preceding account shows how the justice-seeking tradition in Western Christianity co-existed with the Western Church’s complicity in structures of oppression. However, the need for a new Christian response in the West to the social realities of human life became imperative after World War II. Part of the newness about this response was its synthesis of earlier Western Christian reflection and praxis aligned with the pursuit of justice. This progression of thought and action reflected an understanding that became apparent in Latin America as shown in the next section, and in Palestine as shown in Chapter Three, that choices must be made when religious beliefs conflict with one another.

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<sup>18</sup> Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.

<sup>19</sup> “The hungry nations of the world cry out to the peoples blessed with abundance. And the Church, cut to the quick by this cry, asks each and every man to hear his brother's plea and answer it lovingly.” Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio* (Vatican Archives, March 26, 1967), 3, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/paul\\_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_p-vi\\_enc\\_26031967\\_populorum\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/paul_vi/encyclicals/documents/hf_p-vi_enc_26031967_populorum_en.html) (accessed February 24, 2014).

## **1.2 Latin America and the emergence of *A Theology of Liberation***

The goal of this section is to provide the social, historical and political context of life in Latin America and to show the connection of that context to the development of liberation theology in Latin America. The section begins with an overview of pre-Columbian Latin America and the impact of colonization upon the region as well as the trajectory of Roman Catholic thinking in Latin America that came to criticize the oppressive structures it was implicated in. This section also discusses the responses of Latin American bishops and of Gustavo Gutiérrez in particular that led to the formation of liberation theology and ends with a review of the support for, and opposition against, liberation theology that have developed since then.

### **Indigenous people and the Iberian presence in America**

Beginning with the arrival of Columbus in 1492, the indigenous people lost not only their territory to Europeans but also much of their ways of experiencing and understanding the world around them. Major indigenous groups in Latin America included the Arawak in the Caribbean, the Aztec in Mexico, the Maya in Central America and the Inca in the Andes. By the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century the Arawak were extinct and the number of most other indigenous groups in Latin America declined to 5-10% of their pre-conquest population by virtue of their dispossession, enslavement and inability to recover from European diseases.<sup>20</sup> When indigenous populations recovered, many native peoples were

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<sup>20</sup> Anthony McFarlane, "Pre-Columbian and Colonial Latin America," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Latin American Culture*, ed. John King (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 15.

assimilated into colonial society by virtue of their large presence, but generally as subordinates to the Spanish.

In their drive to exploit the natural resources of Latin America the Spanish often enslaved or coerced the indigenous population to work for their colonial masters. After the extinction of the Arawak the Spanish brought approximately one million slaves from Africa to work mainly in the Caribbean region, first on sugar plantations and later in gold mines and manor houses.<sup>21</sup> In Brazil, the native population had generally retreated inland and the Portuguese relied on African slave labor to exploit the land's resources along the coast. The Portuguese eventually transferred approximately two and half million Africans, mainly young men, as slaves to Brazil.<sup>22</sup>

When the practice of slavery ended in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Latin American society had become stratified such that whites of European descent enjoyed the most privilege and people of native and African descent the least, with *mestizos* of mixed European and native origin and *mulattos* of mixed European and African origin in the middle. These divisions reflected the dominant European and Christian understanding of the world's natural order. After the colonial authority of Spain and Portugal was weakened by Napoleon's invasion of the Iberian Peninsula in 1807-08, the white elite in Latin America began to transform its social privilege into political power. However, the local white elite used their control of the military and economic institutions to ensure

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<sup>21</sup>Anthony McFarlane, "Pre-Columbian and Colonial Latin America," 22.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.



colonial power structures and value systems continued long after the region was liberated from the control of Spain and Portugal.

### **Emergence of Liberation Theology in Latin America**

In 1931, Pius XI's *Quadragesimo Anno* encouraged lay Catholic Action groups to join the church in the search for "the solution to the social problems."<sup>23</sup> In post-World War II Latin America, these Catholic Action groups contributed to the formation of Christian democratic political parties that advocated a third way between capitalism and socialism.<sup>24</sup> However, Christian democrats tended to be conservative and to respect rather than challenge the boundary between the church and its socio-political context.

Benefiting from neocolonial economic and social structures in the years following World War II, the elite in Latin America generally controlled the land and industry while the majority, often indigenous, black or *mestizo*, provided the necessary labor. Guerrilla movements grew in many countries like Argentina, Uruguay, Peru and Guatemala in response to the exploitation of the working class and the lack of democratic government. The Cuban revolution in 1959 inspired similar uprisings, most notably in Chile in 1973 and Nicaragua in 1979, aimed at overthrowing ruling classes and capitalist structures.

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<sup>23</sup> Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, 138.

<sup>24</sup> William T. Cavanaugh, "The Ecclesiologies of Medellín and the Lessons of the Base Communities," *Cross Currents* (Spring 1994): 68.

Within this context of revolt, historians began to question whether the development of power in European nations preceded the colonization of the Americas.<sup>25</sup> They argued instead that the extraction of resources from the Americas facilitated European economic development and created the conditions for the European enlightenment and industrial revolution. By de-centering and contextualizing history, Latin Americans came to understand that the goal of economic development was more about creating wealth for others than well-being for themselves. As will be seen in Chapter Two, Palestinian historians used similar processes to determine the goal of the occupation of Palestine was more about conquest than peace.

### **The Medellín Conference**

Influenced by the European political theologies of Metz and Moltmann, contemporary Catholic social teaching and economic dependency theory, the Roman Catholic bishops at the 1968 Medellín Conference of the Latin American Episcopate (C.E.L.A.M.) emphasized the socio-political world and focused attention on unjust social structures and their impact on humanity. The Medellín documents attempted to develop a new theology unique to Latin America rather than to appropriate existing European political theology. Influenced by Pope Paul VI's focus on economic justice in *Populorum Progressio*,<sup>26</sup> a key theme of the Medellín document on justice was a critique of economic development

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<sup>25</sup> Jeremy Adelman, "Latin American and World Histories: Old and New Approaches to the *Pluribus* and the *Unum*," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 84/3 (2004): 408.

<sup>26</sup> "The development of peoples has the Church's close attention, particularly the development of those peoples who are striving to escape from hunger, misery, endemic diseases and ignorance; of those who are looking for a wider share in the benefits of civilization and a more active improvement of their human qualities." Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 1.

policies that prevented Latin Americans from overcoming the legacies of neo-colonialism and inequality endemic to the region. The document on justice also suggested changes in social institutions and reforms to political structures to ensure “all of the peoples but more especially the lower classes have, by means of territorial and functional structures, an active and receptive, creative and decisive participation in the construction of a new society.”<sup>27</sup> In addition, the Medellín document on peace focused on tensions between social classes, neocolonialism, excessive nationalism and the costly build-up of armaments in the face of mass poverty.<sup>28</sup>

### **Gustavo Gutiérrez and *A Theology of Liberation***

Gustavo Gutiérrez (1928–), a Roman Catholic priest, trained in Europe where he was influenced by the theologies of Moltmann, Metz and Bonhoeffer. From Moltmann, Gutiérrez learned a sense of active hope in the resurrected Christ, a future reality for which humanity can lay the groundwork in the present.<sup>29</sup> From Metz, Gutiérrez gained an understanding that human beings are responsible for the dehumanizing oppressive social systems in which they live. Gutiérrez also followed Metz’s understanding that religion needed to be liberated from the private sphere of life and brought into the socio-political sphere. Like Bonhoeffer, Gutiérrez believed silence in the face of oppression was tacit

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<sup>27</sup> Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 7.

<sup>28</sup> C.E.L.A.M., “Document of the Second General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate on Peace” in *Renewing the Earth: Catholic Documents on Peace, Justice and Liberation*, ed. David J. O’Brien and Thomas A. Shannon (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1977), 2-13.

<sup>29</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 124.

support for that oppression.<sup>30</sup> In addition, Gutiérrez's idea that religion exists with reference to its secular context and his insistence that the church must side with the oppressed were also influenced by Bonhoeffer.<sup>31</sup>

However, Gutiérrez strongly believed the context of Latin America was different from that of Europe. He believed the need in Latin America was not as much to move religion into the political sphere as it was to remove politics from the religious sphere. Gutiérrez believed the church in Latin America, unlike in Europe, was complicit in supporting the established political order against the majority of the people.<sup>32</sup> Gutiérrez wanted to awaken the masses to the reality that their impoverished socio-economic situation was not part of God's plan for humanity, but to do that he had to rid the church of the political elite's influence.

Gutiérrez combined his reflections on European political theology and the Medellín documents with his experience of working with the poor in his native Peru to write *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* in 1971. In this work, Gutiérrez presented liberation theology as a hermeneutical perspective from which the Christian message could be interpreted. He viewed Christian life as a form of praxis and viewed liberation theology as the outcome of critical reflection on that praxis.<sup>33</sup> Gutiérrez

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<sup>30</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 40.

<sup>31</sup> Alan Neely, "Liberation Theology in Latin America: Antecedents and Autochthony," *Missiology: An International Review* 6/3 (July 1978): 359.

<sup>32</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 130.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, xxxiv.

believed that “sin is evident in oppressive structures” and that the death and resurrection of Christ “redeems us from sin and all its consequences.”<sup>34</sup>

### **Support for liberation theology**

Support for liberation theology generally grew among Roman Catholics in Latin America during the 1970s. Among the laity, tens of thousands of base communities involved the region’s poor and working classes in the church’s project of social transformation. Base communities were small localized groups of Christians gathered to “reflect in light of their real-life situation and act upon their faith.”<sup>35</sup> Members of the base communities engaged in Bible study, charitable work and sometimes political advocacy, and were usually led by lay members of the Church rather than clergy. Through participation in base communities, lay Christians partnered with God in God’s activity in human history.

As priests and laity applied liberation theology at the pastoral level, many theologians began developing the theology of liberation that came out of Medellín and *A Theology of Liberation*. In their account of Latin American liberation theologians, Chopp and Regan wrote that Juan Luis Segundo (1925–1996) of Uruguay called for a new hermeneutical approach to the Bible that addressed socio-political structures rather than historical doctrines.<sup>36</sup> Segundo emphasized method over content and made the hermeneutics of suspicion, to be described in Section 1.3, part of his theological method.

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<sup>34</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Cavanaugh, “The Ecclesiologies of Medellín and the Lessons of the Base Communities,” 75.

<sup>36</sup> Chopp and Regan, “Latin American Liberation Theology,” in *The Modern Theologians: An Introduction to Christian Theology since 1918*, eds. David F. Ford and Rachel Muers (Madden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005): 474.

Chopp and Regan also wrote of how Jon Sobrino (1938–) of El Salvador expanded on the relationship Segundo identified between ideology and theology, and re-evaluated the historical Jesus as one who can only be known in the socio-political struggle of the poor against oppression.<sup>37</sup> Sobrino's emphasis on the role of the poor in communicating God's grace is a key aspect of liberation theology as will be seen in the next section.

Support for liberation theology also grew within the Protestant church in Latin America and elsewhere. For example, at its fourth assembly in Uppsala, Sweden, the World Council of Churches indicated that fear of change was an insufficient reason to defend obsolete ways of thinking and acting, and called upon Christians to join in solidarity to strive for social justice and equitable development.<sup>38</sup> By the end of the 1970s the threat that liberation theology posed to the world's established political and economic order that privileged the rich over the poor was drawing the attention of socially conservative leaders in the world's industrialized economies and in the Vatican.

### **Opposition to liberation theology**

Concern grew in Western Europe and the United States that liberation theology was advancing Marxism in Latin America because of its critique of existing socio-political power structures. The United States supported military coups against many national governments in the 1960s but the 1973 military coup in Chile was the first of several

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<sup>37</sup> Chopp and Regan, "Latin American Liberation Theology," 475.

<sup>38</sup> Fourth Assembly of the World Council of Churches, *Official Report* (Uppsala: July 4-20, 1968), 1.2.8, <http://oikoumene.net/hostudies/gerecht.book/one.book/index.html?entry=page.book.1.2.8> (accessed February 15, 2014).

American-backed interventions in Latin America that considered religious repression a matter of national security. As will be seen in Chapter Two, this pattern of American intervention is also complicit in the occupation of Palestine.

In Europe, the Vatican also sought an end to the liberation theology movement. The Vatican therefore controlled the delegate selection process for C.E.L.A.M.'s third conference held in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979. Progressive bishops and well-known liberation theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez managed to communicate with delegates inside the conference hall and helped ensure the final Puebla document gave an overview of poverty in Latin America, described God's plan for salvation of humanity as it was playing out in Latin America and affirmed the Church's evangelizing mission in the world.

### **Summary**

The historical context of liberation theology has changed since its formation and growth in the 1960s and 1970s. With the rise of global capitalism and the demise of socialist alternatives, opposition to liberation theology has co-opted its understanding of the relationship between God and the world, thereby weakening liberation theology's ability to criticize socio-economic injustice.<sup>39</sup> At the same time, the focus of liberation theology broadened from the economic and political struggles of the masses in Latin America to include concern for other marginalized groups like Palestinians living under occupation.

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<sup>39</sup> Ivan Petrella, *The Future of Liberation Theology: An Argument and Manifesto* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 8.

### **1.3 Key aspects of liberation theology**

Major characteristics of Latin American liberation theology include attention to poverty and to the relationship between God and those who are economically disadvantaged, politically oppressed and/or socially marginalized. As will be seen in the following discussion, liberation theologies hinge on praxis as a matter of putting one's values into action and a preferential option for the poor. This section discusses the methods of doing liberation theology and Christian praxis in general, the importance of contextualizing scripture and employing a hermeneutic of suspicion, as well as the major themes of contextualized liberation theology.

#### **Methods of doing liberation theology**

Brazilian theologians Leonardo Boff (1938–) and Clodovis Boff (1944–) identify three processes used to discern the reason for oppression, God's plan for the oppressed and the necessary actions for overcoming oppression in accordance with God's plan.<sup>40</sup> These processes are dynamic and occur simultaneously while mutually informing and contributing to the development of each other.

The first process, socio-economic inquiry, seeks to locate the conditions of poverty and to determine the causes of oppression. Such inquiry makes use of Marxist techniques for socio-economic analysis and relies on Bonhoeffer's idea of solidarity with the oppressed as well as Sobrino's idea of the poor as communicators of God's grace.

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<sup>40</sup> Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 26.



The goal of socio-economic inquiry is to investigate the underside of history to understand, appreciate and adopt the perspective of those marginalized by poverty and/or oppression. If God's message to the poor and the oppressed is to be found in scripture, then socio-economic enquiry is needed to discern that message by acquiring the perspective of the poor and the oppressed when reading scripture.

Through hermeneutical investigation, the second process, an attempt is made to discern God's plan for humanity by interpreting the textual meaning of scripture with reference to its practical meaning. According to Boff and Boff, relevant themes in a liberative reading of scripture include "God the father of life and as advocate of the oppressed, liberation from the house of bondage, the prophecy of a new world, the kingdom given to the poor, the church as total sharing."<sup>41</sup>

According to Fernando Segovia, liberation theology distinguishes between scripture and the Word of God. The Word of God is not found in the letter of scripture or in the spirit of the reader but in the lived relationship between the reader and scripture.<sup>42</sup> When read through this lens of experience, scripture offers not a prescriptive meaning for all time but guidance for determining the limits of a range of possible meanings. It may also be said that in liberation theology the possible meanings of texts are not always as important as the social ramifications of those meanings.

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<sup>41</sup> Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 32.

<sup>42</sup> Fernando Segovia, "Liberation Hermeneutics: Revisiting the Foundations in Latin America," in *Toward a New Heaven and a New Earth: Essays in Honor of Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza*, ed. Fernando F. Segovia (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 112.

The third process mentioned by Boff and Boff's third process is praxis, or a course of action arising from the synthesis of factual analysis and faithful reflection. More than a matter of seeking social justice, praxis makes real one's love of God through active engagement in human relationships and by addressing situations of injustice. As Boff and Boff write, "Faith cannot be reduced to action, however liberating it may be. It is 'always greater.'"<sup>43</sup>

### **Christian praxis**

Gutiérrez writes that charity exists only in concrete actions.<sup>44</sup> Charity is the love of God for humanity and is made incarnate in unconditional human love.<sup>45</sup> The spiritual encounter between God and humanity therefore occurs through the active encounter between human beings. In the context of liberation theology this requires direct human engagement with the social, political and economic structures that impact on the lives of the most disadvantaged.<sup>46</sup> It follows that human salvation requires the transformation of society because salvation is mediated to human beings within their social contexts. It is for this reason Gutiérrez emphasizes the importance of Christian praxis over belief. The power of Jesus is not the power to dominate the world, for God's "kingdom does not belong to this world" (John 18:36), but to serve the world. By working to end oppression, human beings serve one another and participate in God's plan of salvation.

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<sup>43</sup> Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 39.

<sup>44</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 113.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>46</sup> Thomas A Lewis, "Actions as the Ties that Bind," *Journal of Religious Education* 33/3 (September 2005): 543.

The commitment to praxis flows from the “observe, judge, act” process of *Mater et Magistra*.<sup>47</sup> Though human beings participate with God through praxis, they do not replace or supersede God in the process of liberation from oppression, otherwise the liberation project would become idolatrous and human beings would believe liberation could happen with or without God. Instead, by actively seeking to bring about justice in the world, liberation theology gains a better understanding of justice and how to distribute power fairly among human beings. Working to eliminate social injustice creates greater awareness about situations of oppression and contributes to deeper theological reflection on the need for justice in human relationships.

Both Gutiérrez and Segovia agree that scripture prioritizes praxis over belief (1 John 3:18).<sup>48</sup> For both theologians, Christian praxis in the temporal world is connected to the growth of the kingdom of God that is both “now” and “not yet.”<sup>49</sup> An earthly and heavenly reality, the kingdom of God is inseparable from the “now” of human history. Seeking justice in the temporal realm is therefore a theological task because of the belief in the concrete reality of God’s kingdom. As will be seen in the context of Palestinian liberation theology, Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb are aligned with Gutiérrez and Segovia in their belief that injustice must end because it is incompatible with all dimensions of the kingdom of God “now”, although Raheb’s praxis focuses on preparing the Palestinian

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<sup>47</sup> John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*, (Vatican Archives, May 15, 1961), 236, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_j-xxiii\\_enc\\_15051961\\_mater\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_15051961_mater_en.html) (accessed February 24, 2014).

<sup>48</sup> “Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action” (1 John 3:18)

<sup>49</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 10.

people for the temporal “not yet” with respect to what the future holds for Palestinian civil society.

### **Biblical hermeneutics: contextualization and the hermeneutic of suspicion**

Because liberation theology arises from real-world experience with oppression, it is important when reading scripture to pay attention to the context of oppression as well as to critique the power structures that facilitate that oppression.

Influenced by the documents of the Medellín conference and Vatican II, the Theological Education Fund of the World Council of Churches introduced in 1972 the concept of contextual theology to take into account “the process of secularity, technology, and the struggle for human justice, which characterize the historical moment of the nations in the Third World.”<sup>50</sup> Whereas Vatican II called for reading the Gospel in light of traditional culture,<sup>51</sup> contextual theology is more expansive in that it requires relating scripture to the concrete situation of human life in all its fullness. Contextualization brings to life God’s message for the contemporary world and by concentrating on the present and the future, rather than on the past, it helps to facilitate social change. As will be seen in the praxis of Mitri Raheb, the task of interpretation

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<sup>50</sup> Theological Education Fund, *Ministry in Context: The Third Mandate Programme of the TEF*, (London: Theological Education Fund, 1972), 20.

<sup>51</sup> “For God, revealing Himself to His people to the extent of a full manifestation of Himself in His Incarnate Son, has spoken according to the culture proper to each epoch.” Paul VI, *Gaudium et Spes*, 58.

generally rests on those living in the local context but requires considering the relationships between those living within that context and those without.

Influenced by Marxist and feminist critical thought processes, the hermeneutics of suspicion generally rejects inserting historical meanings into contemporary readings of the Bible. Instead, the hermeneutics of suspicion considers the influences that contribute to the construction of meaning for a text.<sup>52</sup> As shown in Sections 1.1 and 1.2, the application of a hermeneutic of suspicion by Latin American theologians revealed how medieval and early modern interpretations of history, philosophy and culture influenced the interpretation of the Bible to support the European conquest of the Americas. As will be seen in Chapter Three, Naim Ateek relies heavily on the hermeneutics of suspicion in his criticism of using the biblical conquest paradigm to support the dispossession of Palestinians by the State of Israel.

### **Theological foundations: the preferential option for the poor and the levels of liberation**

The major themes that are generally unique to liberation theology by virtue of the emphasis placed on them are the preferential option for the poor and the three levels at which liberation can take place.

In *A Theology of Liberation*, Gutiérrez distinguishes three concepts of poverty: the real or material poverty made manifest in the lack of basic necessities of life; the

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<sup>52</sup> Amy-Jill Levine, "Hermeneutics of Suspicion," *Dictionary of Feminist Theologies*, eds. Letty M. Russell and J. Shannon Clarkson (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 140.

spiritual poverty of those who put others first and who are committed to sharing the resources of the world as at Pentecost; and poverty as a deliberate commitment to live in solidarity with the poor.<sup>53</sup> Whereas Francis of Assisi believed embracing poverty was a matter of individual piety, Gutiérrez believed poverty must first be experienced with the poor before it can be theologized about. This means “being present” with the poor is more important at the outset than “doing something” to alleviate poverty as this solidarity constitutes a protest against poverty.<sup>54</sup> For Gutiérrez, actively living one’s commitment to the poor is more important than the actual method of living one’s commitment.

Because liberation theology starts from the situation of the poor, poverty has a privileged place in the hermeneutics of liberation. Gutiérrez’s three notions of poverty are bound together in God’s preferential option for the poor. Although God’s love is universal, Gutiérrez argues God demonstrates a bias for the poor who live in material poverty and social oppression (Gal 2:10).<sup>55</sup> The word “option” refers to the decisions that must be made by Christians: one, to stand in solidarity with the poor; and two, to reject poverty and oppression as they are contrary to the will of God.<sup>56</sup> To take the Gospel seriously therefore is to take care of the poor and oppressed, not just at home but throughout the world.

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<sup>53</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 163.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>55</sup> “They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do” (Gal 2:10).

<sup>56</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, xxxviii.

C.E.L.A.M.'s Puebla document describes how the dynamic of liberation occurs, communally and individually, on three inseparable levels. First, at the level of the community, there is political and social liberation. Here the goal of theology and Christian praxis is to eliminate the causes of poverty and injustice, especially with regard to socio-economic structures.<sup>57</sup> The inherently "sinful situation" of these unjust social structures in Latin America is expressed in the Medellín document on peace,<sup>58</sup> which calls for transforming these structures to bring about a more just and caring society.

Next, at the level of the individual, is the opportunity for human liberation.<sup>59</sup> The goal here is personal transformation and the creation of a new human being with a focus on his or her character and consciousness. This involves people becoming subjects who control their own destiny and who continue God's creative activity in the world through a communal process of individual consciousness-raising, a concept promoted in Latin America by Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (1921–1997). Freire wrote that mass public education systems often transmitted the values of the ruling class and therefore called for raising the awareness of the oppressed to the reality of their situation.<sup>60</sup> In the process of gaining such critical awareness, individuals start the communal process of liberating

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<sup>57</sup> C.E.L.A.M., "Final Document of the Third General Conference of the Latin American Episcopate" in *Puebla and Beyond*, ed. John Eagleson and Philip Scharper (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979), 322.

<sup>58</sup> C.E.L.A.M., "Document on Peace," 1.

<sup>59</sup> C.E.L.A.M., "Final Document," 324.

<sup>60</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos (New York, NY: Continuum, 1970/2008), 64-65.

themselves from alienation and exploitation and in doing so, according to Gutiérrez, they contribute to the economic and political transformation of society.<sup>61</sup>

The opportunity to be spiritually delivered from selfishness and sin arises at the third level of liberation, “the plane of the Absolute Good.”<sup>62</sup> According to Gutiérrez, sin is the selfish refusal to love one’s neighbor that in effect amounts to a refusal to love God.<sup>63</sup> Sin constrains human beings from achieving the socio-political and personal liberation of the two previous levels. When human beings exercise their free will and choose to go where they believe they are called upon by God to go, they can achieve the ultimate freedom intended by Christ (Gal 5:1).<sup>64</sup>

### **Summary**

Latin American liberation theology originally developed to address the oppression and poverty faced by the masses. However, key elements like the importance of taking action to counter injustice, the preferential option for the poor and the critical investigation of the relationship between sin and unjust social structures have universal elements that facilitate the application of liberation theology to other contexts.

By reflecting on Christian praxis, liberation theology seeks inspiration to confront injustice and promote the liberation of all persons. According to Gutiérrez, the life of

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<sup>61</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 20.

<sup>62</sup> C.E.L.A.M., “Final Document,” 325.

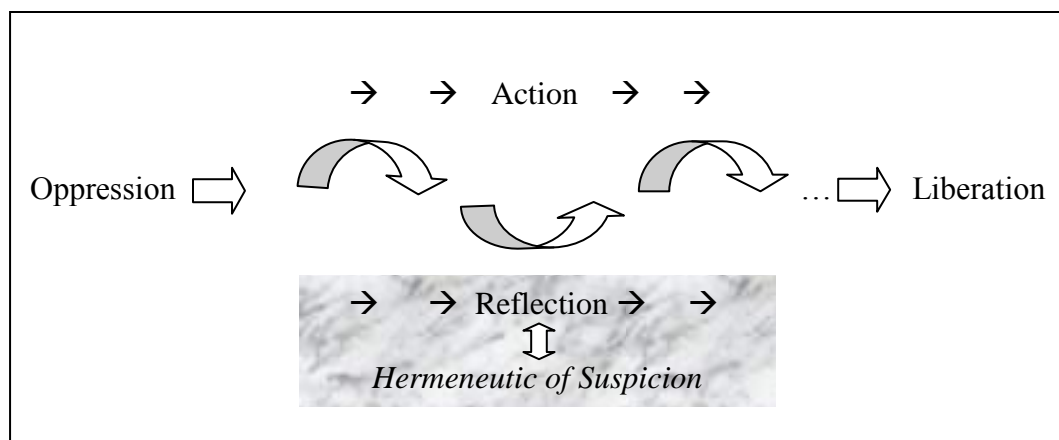
<sup>63</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 24.

<sup>64</sup> “For freedom Christ has set us free. Stand firm, therefore, and do not submit again to the yoke of slavery” (Gal 5:1).



faith is both the starting point and the goal of theological reflection such that action is in a spiral relationship with reflection.<sup>65</sup> Praxis creates new realities that facilitate reinterpretations that lead to new praxis, and so on, gradually bringing the individual and his or her community closer to freedom from oppression, as shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Liberation Theology's Spiral Relationship between Action and Reflection



The discussion that follows in Chapter Two demonstrates how the situations of oppression and injustice in Latin America that gave rise to Latin American liberation theology can be viewed as paradigmatic for life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories and can contribute to a contextualized Palestinian theology of liberation.

<sup>65</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, xxxiv.

## Chapter Two

### Life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

As discussed earlier in Section 1.3, an understanding of the real-world context in which liberative praxis is lived and carried out is prerequisite to understanding the theological meanings derived in the local context from that praxis. The following discussion attempts to summarize the historical, social, psychological and religious contexts of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. For the purpose of this paper, the term “Occupied Palestinian Territories” refers to the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

Philip Lemasters writes that the theologian’s culture and social context shape the outcomes of his or her theological investigation.<sup>66</sup> Lemasters also reveals how difficult it is for one immersed in his or her own culture to identify and question the dominant assumptions of that culture.<sup>67</sup> Each person’s self and culture is implicated in his or her understanding of the world such that pure objectivity is humanly impossible. However, awareness and acceptance of such limitations allows the theologian to seek out and listen to voices from “the underside of history” while simultaneously recognizing that all human beings, including the principal researcher of this paper, lack perfect knowledge or understanding of a situation (1 Cor 13:12).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Philip Lemasters, “‘Theology from the Underside of History’ as a Critical Theory of Theology,” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 19/1 (Spring 1992): 47.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 49.

<sup>68</sup> “For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known” (1 Cor 13:12).

## 2.1 Historical context behind life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories

According to Latin American liberation theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez, “a people that knows the past that lies behind its sufferings and hopes is in a better position to face and reflect on the present.”<sup>69</sup> As Munib Younan (1950–), Evangelical Lutheran Church Bishop of Palestine and Jordan, said in a homily at the 7<sup>th</sup> International Sabeel Conference attended by the researcher of this thesis, “Remembering contributes to identity... To remember ... is not to stir up hatred against the perpetrators. But neither is it to sanitize history or to gloss over the deeds of those who bear responsibility for it. Rather, we must remember our past in order to heal it.”<sup>70</sup>

In writing a brief account of history from the Palestinian point of view, it is important to be mindful of Edward Said’s observation that a Western researcher can only attempt to represent the view of the Palestinian “other” and that the resulting representation is always an interpretation.<sup>71</sup> As history is a matter of interpretation, the process of telling it can be framed to accomplish a desired outcome. The objective of the following précis is therefore to explore history as the connection of the Palestinian people to their past since that history informs who they are today.

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<sup>69</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, xxxv.

<sup>70</sup> Munib Younan, “Homily for the Sabeel 7<sup>th</sup> International Conference,” November 19, 2008, [http://www.elchjl.org/resources/younan/sermons/Nakba\\_sermon\\_4.doc](http://www.elchjl.org/resources/younan/sermons/Nakba_sermon_4.doc) (accessed October 19, 2009).

<sup>71</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 325.

### **Pre-1948 Palestine**

According to Albert Hourani, Palestinian society was generally patrimonial and organized around loyalty to clans of a few dozen politically and economically influential families, creating *'asabiyya* (Arabic: corporate spirit) that enabled mutual assistance within the clans.<sup>72</sup> Two prominent Muslim Palestinian families in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were the Nashashibis and the Husseinis. After Britain occupied Palestine in 1918, the Nashashibis were open to compromise with Britain over the growing Zionist presence in Palestine while the Husseinis opposed Britain and the Zionist project Britain supported.

Zionism was a political ideology, established by approximately 200 Jews in Europe in 1897, that sought to establish “a home for the Jewish people in *Eretz Israel* (Hebrew: land of Israel).”<sup>73</sup> According to Norman Finkelstein, Zionists’ framing of the migration of European Jews to Palestine as a return to their homeland diminished, to people outside the Middle East, how important Palestine was to its Arab residents.<sup>74</sup> Map 1 on page 33 shows Palestine under the British mandate as well as a general indication of the area proposed by the World Zionist Organization to the League of Nations in 1919 for a Jewish homeland.

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<sup>72</sup> Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1991/2002), 107.

<sup>73</sup> First Zionist Congress (Basel, 1897) [http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/First\\_Con\\_&\\_Basel\\_Program.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/First_Con_&_Basel_Program.html) (accessed July 13, 2014).

<sup>74</sup> Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London: Verso, 1995/2003), 14.

Map 1: Palestine under the British Mandate<sup>75</sup>

<sup>75</sup>Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, *Palestine under the British Mandate* [map], Scale not given, [http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/1923-1948-british-mandate.html](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/1923-1948-british-mandate.html) (accessed August 24, 2014). Reprinted with permission.

Hourani writes that between 1922 and 1949, the number of Jews in Palestine rose from 82,000 or 11% of the population, to 450,000 or 30% of the population,<sup>76</sup> and that Arabs were concerned about the increasing numbers of Jewish migrants and their plans to transfer Arabs out of Palestine.<sup>77</sup> Britain, despite accepting the principle of Arab independence,<sup>78</sup> supported establishing a Jewish national home in Palestine through the Balfour Declaration,<sup>79</sup> the terms of its mandate<sup>80</sup> and the Peel Commission.<sup>81</sup> Hourani writes that these tensions led to a revolt in 1936 that, by the time it ended in 1939, had strengthened the power of the Husseinis but weakened Palestinian society politically and militarily.<sup>82</sup> The Arab Higher Committee for Palestine, headed by Haj Amin Al-Husseini, created a Palestinian National Council to assume governmental responsibilities at the end

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<sup>76</sup> Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 323.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 359.

<sup>78</sup> "... I am empowered in the name of the Government of Great Britain to give the following assurances and make the following reply to your letter: 1. Subject to the above modifications, Great Britain is prepared to recognize and support the independence of the Arabs in all the regions within the limits demanded by the Sherif of Mecca..." Henry McMahon, *Letter from Henry McMahon to Sharif Husayn* (October 24, 1915), <http://www.balfourproject.org/translation-of-a-letter-from-mcmahon-to-husayn-october-24-1915> (accessed July 3, 2014).

<sup>79</sup> "His Majesty's Government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish People..." Arthur James Balfour, *Letter from the British Foreign Minister Lord Balfour to Lord Walter Rothschild* (London, November 2, 1917), <http://www.balfourproject.org/the-balfour-declaration> (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>80</sup> "The Mandatory shall be responsible for placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home..." Article 22, League of Nations, *Mandate for Palestine* (London, July 24, 1922) <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adbf322aff38525617b006d88d7/2fca2c68106f11ab05256bcf007bf3cb?OpenDocument&Highlight=0,palestine,mandate>

<sup>81</sup> "Partition seems to offer at least a chance of ultimate peace. We can see none in any other plan." Palestine Royal Commission, *Palestine Royal Commission Report* (His Majesty's Stationery Office: London, July 1937), 376, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/88A6BF6F1BD82405852574CD006C457F> (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>82</sup> Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 11.

of the British mandate in 1948 and the legitimacy of that government was recognized by the Arab League of Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia.

### **The *Nakba* (Arabic: catastrophe)**

Britain's objective, to create a Jewish state during its thirty-year occupation of Palestine, was taken up in the United Nations' recommendation in 1947 to partition Palestine.<sup>83</sup> Benny Morris determined that approximately 100,000<sup>84</sup> Arabs fled their homes in territory proposed for the Jewish state between December 1947 and March 1948 from a combination of Jewish "attacks or fear of an impending attack, and from a sense of vulnerability."<sup>85</sup> In April 1948 the *Haganah* (Hebrew: the defense), the main Jewish militia, began destroying Arab towns and villages within and beyond the borders of the proposed Jewish state. On May 14, 1948, the Jewish leadership unilaterally declared the existence of the State of Israel and by month's end another 250,000 to 300,000 Palestinians had been attacked and expelled from their homes.<sup>86</sup> The *Haganah* formed the core of the Israeli military and, between July and September 1948, attacked and expelled a third wave of 100,000 Arabs,<sup>87</sup> including 50-70,000 from the towns of Ramle and

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<sup>83</sup> "Independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem, set forth in part III of this plan, shall come into existence in Palestine." United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution 181 (II) Adopted on the Report of the Ad Hoc Committee on the Palestinian Question*, November 25, 1947, <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7f0af2bd897689b785256c330061d253> (accessed July 3, 2014).

<sup>84</sup> Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 67.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 448.

Lydda as the State of Israel expanded west into Arab-designated territory.<sup>88</sup> In October and November 1948, the Israelis attacked and expelled 200,000 to 230,000 Arabs from the Galilee and Negev as the State of Israel expanded to the north and south.<sup>89</sup> An additional 20,000 Arabs were displaced within the State of Israel from November 1948 to March 1949 as Israelis leveled Arab villages or populated them with Jewish settlers.<sup>90</sup> Palestinian territory was reduced to 23% of the land under armistice agreements negotiated between the Arab states and the State of Israel without the involvement of Palestinians. Table 1 on page 37 reports the movements of Palestinian refugees and Maps 2 and 3 on page 38 show the borders of the 1947 partition plan and the 1949 armistice agreements.

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<sup>88</sup> Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 425.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 492.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 536.



Table 1: Refugees from the 1948 *Nakba*  
as estimated by the United Nations<sup>91</sup>

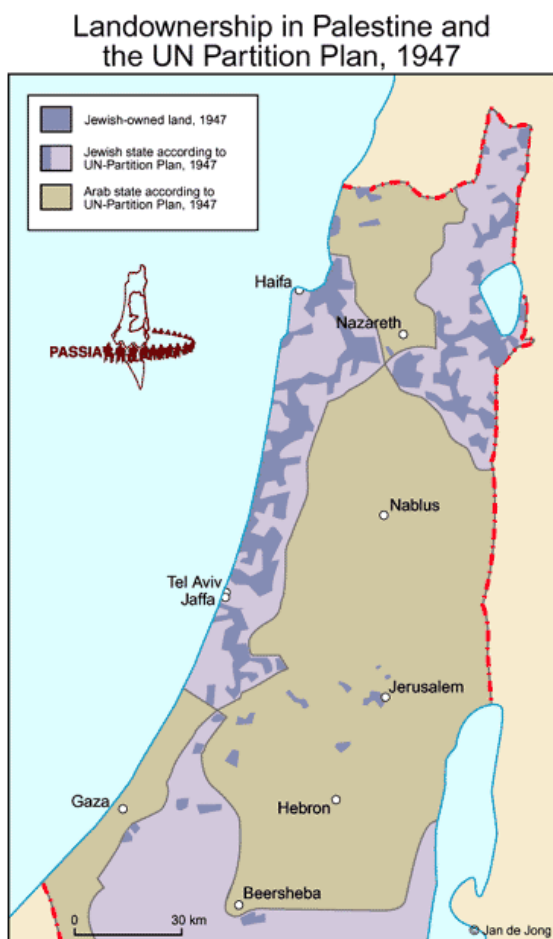
Number of Refugees	Location
280,000	West Bank
190,000	Gaza Strip
100,000	Lebanon
75,000	Syria
70,000	Transjordan
31,000	State of Israel
7,000	Egypt
4,000	Iraq

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<sup>91</sup> United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine, *Final Report of the United Nations Economic Survey Mission for the Middle East* (Lake Success, NY: United Nations, December 28, 1949), 18.

Map 2<sup>92</sup>

1947 Partition Plan

Map 3<sup>93</sup>

1949 Armistice borders



**Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs  
(PASSIA)**

<sup>92</sup> Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, *Land Ownership in Palestine and the UN Partition Plan, 1947* [map], Scale not given, [http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/Landownership.html](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/Landownership.html) (accessed August 24, 2014). Reprinted with permission.

<sup>93</sup> Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, *Palestinian Villages Depopulated in 1948 and 1967, and razed by Israel* [map], Scale not given, [http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/Landownership.html](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/Landownership.html) (accessed August 24, 2014). Reprinted with permission.

### **From 1949 to 1966**

Morris estimated that over 700,000 Arabs were expelled from the new State of Israel while approximately 100,000 of the pre-1948 Palestinian population were displaced within the State of Israel but without permission to return to their original homes.<sup>94</sup> The rights of Palestinians who wanted “to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours” or who preferred to receive compensation were confirmed in 1949 by the United Nations General Assembly.<sup>95</sup> However, the land of Palestinians who were expelled or internally displaced was confiscated by the State of Israel through the *Absentee Property Law* in 1950.<sup>96</sup> The possibility of repatriating Palestinians who were forced to leave was further reduced by the settlement of hundreds of thousands of new Jewish immigrants taking advantage of the *Law of Return*, that gives all Jews the right to settle in the State of Israel and to gain citizenship,<sup>97</sup> and the *Nationality Law* in 1952 that terminated the citizenship of non-resident Palestinians retroactive to 1948.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, 603.

<sup>95</sup> United Nations General Assembly, *Resolution 194 (III) Palestine – Progress Report of the United Nations Mediator*, December 11, 1948, Article 11, [http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A/resolution\\_194](http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/C758572B78D1CD0085256BCF0077E51A/resolution_194) (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>96</sup> Government of Israel, *Absentees' Property Law*, March 14, 1950, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/E0B719E95E3B494885256F9A005AB90A> (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>97</sup> Government of Israel, *The Law of Return*, July 5, 1950, <http://www.knesset.gov.il/laws/special/eng/return.htm> (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>98</sup> Government of Israel, *Nationality Law*, July 14, 1952, [http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/data/eng/law/kns2\\_nationality\\_eng.pdf](http://www.knesset.gov.il/review/data/eng/law/kns2_nationality_eng.pdf) (accessed February 23, 2014).

According to Hourani, social justice gained importance in the Middle East during the 1950s and 1960s with the rise of Arab socialism in Egypt.<sup>99</sup> This interest contributed to the creation by the Arab League of the Palestine Liberation Organization (P.L.O.), a grouping of many secular Palestinian political and popular organizations. The P.L.O. attempted to press the international community to recognize the Palestinian rights of return and self-determination.<sup>100</sup>

### **The *Naksa* (Arabic: setback)**

During six days in June 1967, the partition that the State of Israel forced upon the Palestinians ended when the State of Israel achieved the Zionist goal of controlling *Eretz Israel*. As Finkelstein writes, the image of a “Six Day War” of self-defense deceptively suggests the State of Israel responded to an existential threat from Syria, Jordan and Egypt, however Israeli aggression before June 1967 and the Arab lack of preparedness for a war suggest the existential threat was low.<sup>101</sup> In addition, the State of Israel’s subsequent refusal to withdraw from territories conquered in 1967 in exchange for peace suggests annexation, not self-defense, was the goal.<sup>102</sup> During the *Naksa*, 200,000 Palestinians, including 100,000 registered refugees from the 1948 *Nakba*, fled the West Bank for Jordan and 115,000, including 16,000 registered refugees, fled the Golan

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<sup>99</sup> Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 452.

<sup>100</sup> State of Palestine, “Statement of Proclamation of the Organization,” <http://www.un.int/wcm/content/site/palestine/pid/12355> (accessed July 24, 2014).

<sup>101</sup> Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 124.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

Heights for Syria.<sup>103</sup> Palestinians displaced by the *Naksa* are generally not refugees under international law because the United Nations narrowed the definition of refugees to limit international assistance to those fleeing political persecution, in deference to the focus of Western states on the politics of Eastern bloc countries.<sup>104</sup>

Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip became subject to an Israeli military administration that denied them their political rights and civil liberties such as freedom of expression. However, according to Hourani, this oppression also strengthened the sense of Palestinian identity.<sup>105</sup> Concomitant with the military oppression in the West Bank and Gaza Strip was the confiscation of Palestinian land for Israeli settlements, done in defiance of U.N. Security Council Resolution 242 that called for the “withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.”<sup>106</sup>

### **The October War of 1973 and the Camp David Accords of 1977**

According to Finkelstein, Egypt entered the Sinai in October 1973 after the State of Israel refused to exchange land for peace and instead attempted to consolidate its control over the Sinai.<sup>107</sup> By the end of October, the State of Israel, with the American backing it needed to prevent its defeat, overcame Egyptian as well as Syrian and Jordanian forces

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<sup>103</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency, “Report of the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East” (New York: United Nations, 1967), 32 and 39. <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.NSF/361eea1cc08301c485256cf600606959/2a43e4d980f2c20685256a48004d0424?OpenDocument> (accessed July 24, 2014).

<sup>104</sup> James Hathaway, *The Law of Refugee Status* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1991), 11.

<sup>105</sup> Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 414.

<sup>106</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 242*, November 22, 1967, <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/0/7D35E1F729DF491C85256EE700686136> (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>107</sup> Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 164.

that had entered their own territories that were occupied by the State of Israel. Arab states responded to American support of the State of Israel with an embargo of oil exports, between October 1973 and March 1974.

Finkelstein believes Egypt's show of strength in 1973 led the State of Israel to negotiate a peace treaty, the Camp David Accords, that required returning the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt<sup>108</sup> and that committed the State of Israel to withdrawing from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.<sup>109</sup> However, through these Accords, the United States and the State of Israel also strengthened their regional hegemony by neutralizing Egypt, which, Finkelstein believes, empowered the Israeli military to invade Lebanon, the base of the P.L.O., and weaken the power of the Palestinian national movement in 1982.<sup>110</sup>

### **The first *Intifada* (Arabic: “shaking off”)**

Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza began in 1988 to resist the Israeli occupation in the first *Intifada*. According to Hourani, the *Intifada* was a unifying force for Palestinians that disrupted the clan structure of *'asabiyya* and re-established the partition between the occupied territories and the State of Israel.<sup>111</sup> The *Intifada* also reasserted the P.L.O.'s power to represent Palestinians, particularly after Jordan dissolved its ties to the West

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<sup>108</sup> Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 151.

<sup>109</sup> “The agreed basis for a peaceful settlement of the conflict between Israel and her neighbors is United Nations Security Council Resolution 242, in all its parts.” *A Framework for Peace in the Middle East Agreed at Camp David* <http://sadat.umd.edu/archives/summits/AACK%20Camp%20David%20Framework%209.17.78.pdf> (accessed July 6, 2014).

<sup>110</sup> Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 171.

<sup>111</sup> Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 433.

Bank. According to the United Nations, over 1,000 Palestinians were killed and tens of thousands more were injured and/or arrested as their unarmed *Intifada* protests were met with Israeli force.<sup>112</sup>

Mitri Raheb wrote that this popular uprising was a cry for justice that had simmered during an oppressive twenty-year military occupation that began in 1967.<sup>113</sup> According to Raheb, the Palestinians achieved two significant gains during the *Intifada*: they were no longer afraid of resisting the occupation or of talking to the Israelis.<sup>114</sup> Those talks led to the Oslo Accords that helped end the first *Intifida* in 1993 by the State of Israel's apparent acceptance of the principle of partition, already accepted by the P.L.O. in 1977, as the basis for peaceful co-existence.

Prior to the Oslo Accords, the international consensus was, according to Finkelstein, that the Palestinians had the right to an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza, but the United States and the State of Israel rejected the right of Palestinian self-determination and used the Oslo Accords to attempt to legitimize the State of Israel's claim to the occupied territories.<sup>115</sup> The Oslo Accords tried to cancel the State of Israel's pre-1967 borders by violating the integrity of the West Bank and circling small areas subject to nominal Palestinian control with large areas controlled by the Israeli military, reducing the likelihood of an independent Palestinian state in the occupied territories.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> United Nations, *The Question of Palestine & the United Nations* (New York: United Nations Department of Information, 2008), 27.

<sup>113</sup> Mitri Raheb, *I Am A Palestinian Christian* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995), 29.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>115</sup> Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 172.

### **The Second *Intifada* to the present**

According to the United Nations, the visit to the *Haram al-sharif* (Arabic: Temple Mount) in Jerusalem by Israeli Defense Minister Ariel Sharon (1928–2014) in 2000 provoked a second *Intifida* against the Israeli occupation.<sup>117</sup> Launching “their biggest offensive action in the West Bank”<sup>118</sup> since the 1967 *Naksa*, the Israeli military reoccupied Palestinian territory it had withdrawn from under the Oslo Accords. The State of Israel also began constructing the barrier wall through the West Bank in 2002 and created military checkpoints to restrict the movement of Palestinians in the West Bank.<sup>119</sup> The second *Intifida* ended between 2004 and 2005 with Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and with recognition from the European Union, the United States, Russia and the United Nations that “a (Palestinian) state of scattered territories will not work.”<sup>120</sup> Map 4 on page 46 shows the fragmentation of the West Bank as a result of the occupation and the barrier wall.

Visiting the occupied Palestinian Territory in 2006, Louise Arbour, the United Nations Human Rights High Commissioner, noted “that virtually all their (Palestinians’) rights were being denied both individually and collectively, chronically and critically” and “the severe impact that the barrier and the system of checkpoints, road blocks,

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<sup>116</sup> Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 173.

<sup>117</sup> United Nations, *The Question of Palestine & the United Nations*, 36.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 50-51.



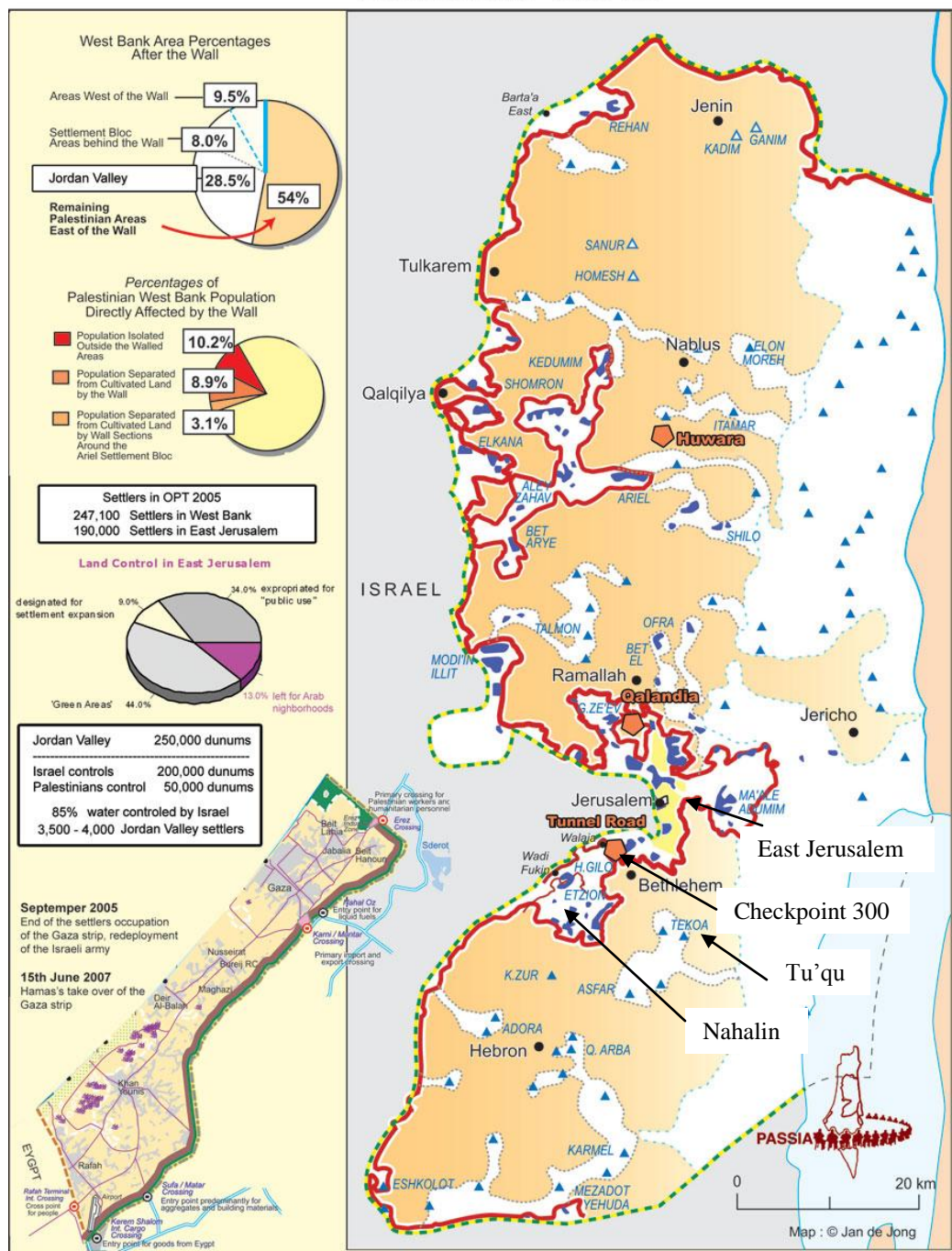
trenches and earth mounds was having on family and economic life, on the quality of life and human dignity in the West Bank.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> United Nations, *The Question of Palestine & the United Nations*, 66.

Map 4 - Barrier Wall around the West Bank<sup>122</sup>

West Bank Wall - Map 2006



<sup>122</sup> Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, *West Bank Wall Map 2006* [map], Scale not given, [http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/newpdf/WestBankWall.jpg](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/newpdf/WestBankWall.jpg) (accessed August 24, 2014). Reprinted with permission.

### **The siege of Gaza**

The Gaza Strip has been under siege by the State of Israel since shortly after Hamas won the region's democratic election in 2006. Since then, civilians in Gaza have been collectively punished by the State of Israel with air strikes and invasions, destruction of their homes, schools and hospitals, and no access to building supplies to repair damages. Known in the State of Israel as "mowing the grass," these tactics seek to debilitate but not end Palestinian resistance, and require intervals of *tahdya* (Arabic: calming) to "prove" to Palestinians that their goal of resisting the occupation is unattainable.<sup>123</sup> The most recent Israeli military action against Gaza in the summer of 2014, initiated by the State of Israel immediately after *Hamas* in the Gaza Strip and *Fatah* in the West Bank formed a unity government, is in keeping with practices described earlier by which the State of Israel works to fragment the Palestinian people.

Table 2 on the next page summarizes damages from major attacks on Gaza since 2006 and indicates how the Israeli code names can make the military strikes appear defensive in nature and sometimes connected to Jewish tradition and scripture.

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<sup>123</sup> Efraim Inbar and Eitan Shamir, "'Mowing the Grass:' Israel's Strategy for Protracted Intractable Conflict," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 37/1 (2014): 71.

Table 2: Major Israeli Actions against Gaza

	Major Israeli Actions		
	Dec. 27, 2008 to Jan. 18, 2009 <sup>124</sup>	Nov. 14 to Nov. 21, 2012 <sup>125</sup>	Jul. 8, 2014 to Aug. 18, 2014 <sup>126</sup>
English translation of Hebrew wording of Israeli code name	Cast Lead (reference to a Hanukkah song)	English: Pillar of Defense Hebrew: Pillar of Cloud (Ex 13:21)	English: Protective Edge Hebrew: Resolute Cliff
Number of people in Gaza who were killed	1,410	171	1,976
Number of people in Gaza who lost their home	22,179	21,070	100,750
Number of homes destroyed	2,652	124	16,792

<sup>124</sup> Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, *Cast Lead Offensive in Numbers*, (2009) <http://www.mezan.org/upload/8941.pdf> (accessed August 18, 2014).

<sup>125</sup> Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, *Statistical Report on: Persons Killed and Property Damaged in the Gaza Strip by the Israeli Occupation Forces during "Operation Pillar of Cloud"*, (2013) <http://www.mezan.org/upload/17207.pdf> (accessed August 18, 2014).

<sup>126</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "Gaza Emergency Situation Report" (August 18, 2014) [http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_sitrep\\_18\\_08\\_2014.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_sitrep_18_08_2014.pdf) (accessed August 18, 2014).

## Summary

Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish (1941–2008) asked the question, “Where should we go after the last frontiers/where should the birds fly after the last sky?”<sup>127</sup> The preceding narrative and maps show the Palestinian people have nowhere to go but home. As Elias Chacour (1939–), Archbishop of the Melkite Greek Catholic Church, asked in a speech in Halifax in 2010, “If I do not have a home, how can I show Jews hospitality?”<sup>128</sup> As shown in the cartographic sequence in Map 5 on page 50, the Palestinian people have been systematically dispossessed of their land since early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This dispossession has strengthened Palestinians’ identity as well as their resolve to secure recognition, by the State of Israel and the international community, of their rights to self-determination and to return to their homes. In addition, their steadfast opposition to the occupation draws attention to the way the Zionist goal of occupying all of Palestine is misrepresented as a matter of self-defense.

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<sup>127</sup> Mahmoud Darwish, "The Earth Is Closing on Us", in *Victims of a Map*, trans. Abdullah al-Udhari (London: al-Saqi Books, 1984), 13.

<sup>128</sup> Elias Chacour, Speech given at St. Andrew’s United Church, Halifax NS, May 10, 2010, researcher’s own notes.

Map 5<sup>129</sup>

<sup>129</sup> If Americans Knew, *4 Maps* [map], Scale not given, [http://ifamericansknew.org/about\\_us/4maps.html](http://ifamericansknew.org/about_us/4maps.html) (accessed August 29, 2014). Reprinted with permission.

## 2.2 The Palestinian socio-political context of life under occupation

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics there were approximately 11.6 million Palestinians at the end of 2012, nearly 5.3 million of whom were registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (U.N.R.W.A.) as refugees.<sup>130</sup> Table 2 below shows the geographical distribution of the Palestinian population and the numbers of refugees.

Table 2: Palestinian Population (December 31, 2012)

Location	Number of Palestinians <sup>131</sup> (including refugees)	Number of Refugees <sup>132</sup>
West Bank	2,700,000	901,000
Gaza	1,700,000	1,272,000
State of Israel*	1,400,000	
Other countries (mainly Jordan, Lebanon and Syria)	5,800,000	3,127,000
Total	11,600,000	5,300,000

\* As estimated by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, including approximately 248,000 Palestinians living in annexed East Jerusalem but who lack Israeli citizenship.

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<sup>130</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Special Statistical Bulletin: On the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba* (Ramallah: Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, 2013), <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/512/default.aspx?tabID=512&lang=en&ItemID=788&mid=3171&wversion=Staging> (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> United Nations Relief and Works Agency, as quoted in Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Special Statistical Bulletin: On the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba*.

The objective of this section is to describe the major social and political structures that relate to being refugees and to living in territory annexed or occupied by a foreign state. Although refugees living in third countries and citizens living under foreign military occupation have rights under international law, Palestinians have had difficulty successfully applying and enforcing international law in their case. The main reasons are the State of Israel's refusal to comply with the Fourth Geneva Convention with respect to its actions in the occupied territories and the physical reality of the barrier wall. Another reason is the lack of recognition by the United Nations (U.N.) of the rights of displaced Palestinians as refugees under the U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. The United States is implicated in both these reasons by virtue of its financial support for the State of Israel and its veto at the United Nations Security Council.

### **Land seizures, Israeli settlements and forced transfers of Arabs**

The State of Israel began authorizing Israeli civilian settlements and displacing the Palestinian population in the occupied territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 1967. However, article 4 of the Fourth Geneva Convention “protects those who, at a given moment and in any manner whatsoever, find themselves, in case of a conflict or occupation, in the hands of a Party to the conflict or Occupying Power of which they are not nationals.”<sup>133</sup> In addition, article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention indicates that “individual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from

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<sup>133</sup> *Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, August 12, 1949, Article 4, <http://www.icrc.org/ihl/WebART/380-600007> (accessed February 23, 2014).



occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited regardless of their motive.”<sup>134</sup> By 2011 the Israeli settlement population in the West Bank and East Jerusalem was 537,000.<sup>135</sup> The U.N. Security Council has ruled invalid the State of Israel’s settlements in the West Bank<sup>136</sup> and annexation of East Jerusalem, as well as the transfer of Jewish populations into, and Arab populations out of, East Jerusalem.<sup>137</sup>

### **The barrier wall**

In 2003 the State of Israel began constructing the 720 kilometre barrier wall between the State of Israel and the West Bank, shown in Map 4 on page 46. The wall system is up to 100 metres wide and in various places along its perimeter there are electronic sensors, ditches up to four metres deep, a two-lane paved road, a strip of sand smoothed to detect footprints and stacks of six coils of barbed wire. In 2004, the International Court of Justice determined 16% of the West Bank is confiscated by the barrier wall with 237,000 Palestinians and 320,000 Israeli settlers living within that area.<sup>138</sup> In addition, 160,000 Palestinians would reside in almost completely encircled areas upon completion of the

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<sup>134</sup> *Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, Article 49, <http://www.icrc.org/ihl/WebART/380-600056> (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>135</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, *Special Statistical Bulletin: On the 65<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Palestinian Nakba*.

<sup>136</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 446*, March 22, 1979, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/BA123CDED3EA84A5852560E50077C2DC> (accessed February 23, 2014),

<sup>137</sup> United Nations Security Council, *Resolution 479*, August 20, 1980, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/DDE590C6FF232007852560DF0065FDDB> (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>138</sup> International Court of Justice, *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Advisory Opinion*, I.C.J. Reports 2004 (July 4, 2004), paragraph 84.

wall.<sup>139</sup> The Court determined the construction of the wall contravened international law.<sup>140</sup>

### **Checkpoints**

As of 2011, the Israeli military operated 522 permanent roadblocks and checkpoints, plus another 495 ad-hoc checkpoints, in the occupied West Bank (Map 4, page 45).<sup>141</sup> The system of checkpoints restricts and sometimes prevents Palestinians from accessing their jobs, schools, farms, hospitals, places of worship and family gatherings, and exposes Palestinians to psychological humiliation and physical harassment by the Israeli military as they pursue their daily lives. Human rights abuses at these checkpoints are monitored and documented by Israeli non-governmental organizations like B'Tselem, an organization that seeks to change Israeli public policy in the occupied territories,<sup>142</sup> and Machsom Watch, an organization of Jewish Israeli women who “regularly document what we see and hear” at checkpoints in the West Bank and at the barrier wall.<sup>143</sup>

### **Lack of U.N. recognition of the rights of Palestinian refugees**

In 1949 the U.N. established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (U.N.R.W.A.) to provide humanitarian assistance to Palestinians. In 1951 the U.N. enacted the

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<sup>139</sup> International Court of Justice, *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall*, paragraph 122.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*, paragraph 142.

<sup>141</sup> Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, *Movement and Access in the West Bank*, September 2011, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/8F5CBCD2F464B6B18525791800541DA6> (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>142</sup> B'Tselem, [http://www.btselem.org/about\\_btselem](http://www.btselem.org/about_btselem) (accessed July 7, 2014).

<sup>143</sup> Machsom Watch, <http://www.machsomwatch.org/en/about-us> (accessed February 24, 2014).

Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. This Convention does “not apply to any persons who are at present receiving from organs or agencies of the United Nations other than the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees for protection or assistance.”<sup>144</sup> As U.N.R.W.A. is a U.N. agency, the rights of Palestinians living as refugees need not be recognized by states party to the 1951 Convention. This exception was requested by Arab states that believed the U.N. should bear direct responsibility for Palestinian refugees as their situation was caused by the U.N.’s partition of Palestine. The exclusion also satisfied the concern of several European delegates about having to extend rights to an influx of Palestinian refugees.<sup>145</sup> Early in 1967, the U.N. also changed the definition of refugee to exclude those fleeing war and Palestinians displaced by the *Naksa* are not officially recognized as refugees by the U.N. This exclusion reflected the concern of Western nations, engaged as they were in a cold-war with the Soviet bloc, that only those fleeing political persecution should have rights as refugees.<sup>146</sup>

## Summary

Dominated politically and economically by the United States, the United Nations generally fails to ensure recognition of the rights of Palestinians under international law and contributes to the oppressive social environment in occupied Palestine. The barrier wall, house demolitions, expulsions as well as the routine harassment, humiliation and

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<sup>144</sup> The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* (1951), Article 1, Paragraph D, <http://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10.html> (accessed February 23, 2014).

<sup>145</sup> Hathaway, *The Law of Refugee Status*, 207.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

violence at checkpoints are obstacles Palestinians must deal with to build maintain and/or strengthen the social structures of communal life under occupation.

### **2.3 Psychological effects of the occupation**

Living under an oppressive military occupation can negatively impact one's personal sense of well-being. The trauma, humiliation and defeat that Palestinians experience under the occupation also negatively affect the quality of social relationships, the functioning of civil society and the stability of political institutions in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. There are several differences in the way Palestinian men, women and youth experience certain aspects of the occupation by virtue of their different social positions in Palestinian society.

#### **Palestinian men**

Palestinian men are the primary targets of Israeli military activity in the West Bank. During the first *Intifada* nearly 100,000 Palestinian men were imprisoned by the State of Israel and upon release one-half of them had post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>147</sup> Nearly 100,000 Palestinian men were arrested during the second *Intifada* as well. For traditional Palestinian men, masculinity is reflected in their ability to provide for and protect the family.<sup>148</sup> Living under military occupation creates an environment of uncertainty where

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<sup>147</sup> Roney W. Srour and Anan Srour, "Communal and Familial War-Related Stress Factors: the Case of the Palestinian Child," *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 11 (2006): 295.

<sup>148</sup> Maria Holt, "Agents of Defiance and Despair: the Impact of Islamic Resistance on Palestinian Women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip," *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 11/3-4 (September-December 2010): 409.

employment is based on daily negotiations, sometimes with Israeli employers, with low pay, and the family's main wage-earner, usually the father or oldest brother, is unable to make long-term plans.<sup>149</sup> It is difficult for a man to provide a stable home life for his family when arrests, curfews and violence are common. The Israeli military's harassment of Palestinian women at checkpoints, as hurtful as it is to women, also challenges the masculinity of Palestinian men who are powerless to prevent it. Palestinians subject to verbal and physical abuse by the Israeli military in the West Bank have no legal recourse as the military has full legislative, executive and judicial authority in the West Bank. Palestinian men who are unemployed or underemployed, and those whose children witness them being beaten or humiliated at checkpoints, risk growing demoralized and becoming less able to meet the needs of their families or communities.

### **Palestinian women**

Jean Zaru (1940–), a peace activist and Quaker living in Ramallah, refers to Palestinian women as the glue that holds Palestinian families together even though their social contributions are sometimes valued less by Palestinian society than those of men.<sup>150</sup> For Zaru, the struggle for justice in Palestine incorporates the struggle for equality between women and men. Many Palestinian women want to protect their families and homes despite having known more helplessness and despair than security and stability. However, families living without an effective police force, a functioning legal system or

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<sup>149</sup> Srour and Srour, "Communal and Familial War-Related Stress Factors," 294.

<sup>150</sup> Jean Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 109.

mental health facilities are in danger of experiencing domestic problems. Women in this environment are vulnerable by virtue of being in weaker social positions relative to men,<sup>151</sup> but this position also offers opportunities for women's agency under the occupation. As Rima Tarazi of the General Union of Palestinian Women writes, "...Women have been at the forefront of peaceful civic actions. Whether commemorating national disasters or protesting the unending military measures and human rights violations by the Israeli government, women have continued to hold marches and sit-ins, often leading to their imprisonment, deportation, house arrest and various travel and visa restrictions."<sup>152</sup> Tarazi believes solidarity among Palestinian women creates a strong bond that unites Palestinian society in the face of the occupation.

### **Palestinian youth**

According to the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, children under the age of 15 comprised 38% of the population in the West Bank and 43% of the population in the Gaza Strip in 2013.<sup>153</sup> Almost half the children in occupied Palestine are from families that were displaced in 1948 and nearly all of them have parents or grandparents that witnessed or experienced the 1967 occupation.<sup>154</sup> As these children learn their family histories they also learn their parents cannot protect them, which can increase their sense of vulnerability at the expense of a sense of resiliency. Tertiary trauma such as this is

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<sup>151</sup> Srour and Srour, "Communal and Familial War-Related Stress Factors," 294.

<sup>152</sup> Rima Tarazi, "Palestinian women Under Occupation," *Cornerstone* 57 (Summer 2010): 8.

<sup>153</sup> Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics, "Population," <http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/site/881/default.aspx#Population> (accessed August 11, 2014)

<sup>154</sup> Srour and Srour, "Communal and Familial War-Related Stress Factors," 294.

complicated by the secondary trauma of witnessing family members being attacked or harassed and the direct trauma of being treated violently by the Israeli military.<sup>155</sup>

Phillip L. Hammack interviewed 16 Palestinian youths living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem in 2003 to learn their identities and daily experiences. The young people, having internalized the historical narrative of Palestinian dispossession as passed down from older generations, generally expressed a sense of loss with respect to their ancestral land. However, Hammack found the most salient issue expressed by the young people was the existential insecurity created by the Israeli military occupation of the West Bank.<sup>156</sup> With respect to living during the second *Intifada* and under military occupation, one youth said, “It’s terrible. You can’t imagine, every day, how we go to school. And whether we’re going to school or not. If the school is destroyed or not. Even if we’re in school, we hear shooting, we are confused all day, we can’t concentrate, we don’t understand anything.”<sup>157</sup>

## **Summary**

The occupation by the State of Israel of territory beyond its pre-1949 borders has a negative impact on the psychological well-being of those living under that occupation. As warfare practiced by western nations is generally a form of masculine aggression, the Israeli military’s primary targets for psychological intimidation are Palestinian men

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<sup>155</sup> Srour and Srour, “Communal and Familial War-Related Stress Factors,” 306.

<sup>156</sup> Phillip L. Hammack, “The Cultural Psychology of Palestinian Youth: a Narrative Approach,” *Culture & Psychology* 16/4 (2010): 529.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 527.

although women and children also experience psychological trauma associated with living under occupation. As will be seen in Chapter Three on Palestinian liberation theology, addressing the psychological sequelae of living under occupation is a particularly important component of Mitri Raheb's theological response to the occupation.



## **2.4 Religious context of life in the Occupied Palestinian Territories**

The Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths encounter one another in Palestine by virtue of many traditions of holy places in the region. The similarities and distinctions of each faith create a complicated reality for daily life in occupied Palestine where religion can paradoxically justify, coexist with, and seek an end to violence and injustice.

### **Judaism and Zionism**

The goal of Zionism was to create a Jewish state in Palestine. Originally a secular project, Zionists linked their project to Judaism such that narratives from Hebrew Scriptures were used to support a historical right “that required no proof” to the land of Palestine.<sup>158</sup> However, not all Jews are Zionists or claim such a historical right and most Jews have not chosen to immigrate to the State of Israel.

The United Nation’s acceptance of the State of Israel’s unilateral declaration of independence in 1948 was also welcomed by many Christians who believed that Christ could not return until Jews were living in the land of Palestine. This support for the establishment of the State of Israel, however, is self-serving as 1948 marks the beginning of the eschaton for Christian Zionists, the start of Christ’s return and the fulfillment of God’s reign on Earth. Christian Zionism supports the State of Israel’s ongoing dispossession of the Palestinian people and accepts the occupation as a matter of right.

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<sup>158</sup> Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, 100.

### **Christianity and Christian anti-Semitism**

It is difficult for Christians who share the goal of securing justice for the Palestinian people, to criticize the State of Israel's violations of international law and human rights without being willing to confront Christian anti-Semitism. Such reflection requires being honest about the ways in which the Christian interpretation of scripture has been used to support conquest and oppression.<sup>159</sup> Mitri Raheb believes that post-Holocaust theology based on the historical lack of power of Jews relative to Christians has little to say about the occupation of Palestine because the historical imbalance of power no longer exists.<sup>160</sup> For Raheb, resisting the occupation and protesting injustice are not anti-Semitic but arise from loving one's neighbour by virtue of all human beings' having been made in the image of God.<sup>161</sup>

### **Palestinian Christianity**

Christianity originated in Palestine. Nicene Christianity was decreed to be normative for the Roman Empire in 380 pursuant to the Edict of Thessalonica and by 500 C.E. most people in the Empire were Christians.<sup>162</sup> By the time of the arrival of Islam, Christian

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<sup>159</sup> Marc Ellis, *Unholy Alliance: Religion and Atrocity in Our Time* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 89.

<sup>160</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 59.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>162</sup> Hugh Goddard, "Challenges and Developments: Christian-Muslim Relations in the Middle East," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 3/2 (2003), 16.

faith in the region had divided into five Churches: the Coptic, Syrian, Armenian and Ethiopian Churches as well as the Church of the Chalcedonian orthodoxy.<sup>163</sup>

In the decades following Mohammed's death in 632 Islam became the dominant religion in Palestine, Syria, Egypt, Iraq and Iran. Muslims initially preserved their own identity by allowing Christians and Jews living in Palestine to keep their own faiths. Large scale conversion to Islam began in the region after the rise of the Abbasid dynasty, based in Iraq, in 763. By 1200 Islam was the dominant faith in the Middle East. By the 1500s the Ottoman Empire gained control of the Western part of the Arab world while the Safavid Empire ascended in Iran.<sup>164</sup>

Under the Ottomans, the Orthodox Patriarch had political power over the Christian population and was appointed by the Muslim state. Division grew between the Greek leadership and Arab laity, and some members of the older Christian churches, influenced by Roman Catholic missionaries, decided to accept the authority of the Vatican and created new churches. As a result, during the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries the Chaldean Catholic, Greek Catholic, Armenian Catholic, Syrian Catholic and Coptic Catholic Churches were established. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Protestant missionaries took interest in Palestine and established Anglican, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Lutheran, Reformed and Baptist churches in the region. These new churches grew mainly with converts from Orthodox churches, which created a division between the two groups that

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<sup>163</sup> Anthony O'Mahoney, "Christianity and Jerusalem: Religion, Politics and Theology in the Modern Holy Land," *International Journal for the Study of the Christian Church* 3/2 (2003), 89.

<sup>164</sup> Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples*, 215.

persists today.<sup>165</sup> As will be seen in Chapter Three, fostering ecumenical solidarity is one of the goals of Naim Ateek's programming at the Sabeel Center.

Roughly 2-4% of Palestinians are Christian<sup>166</sup> and the rise of Palestinian nationalism and Israeli oppression since 1967 has increased their involvement in politics. Jean Zaru, for example, a Quaker community leader in Ramallah, seeks political justice for the Palestinian people as well as an understanding of the complex reality of the present situation. In *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*, Zaru deconstructs the ways in which the reality of life in Palestine is often misrepresented by Western media. She also recognizes and affirms the common humanity of Jews, Muslims and Christians and their interdependence. Zaru's spirituality is about the whole of human life and is rooted in actively living in peace with justice and in harmony with creation.<sup>167</sup> Zaru's "on the ground" witness of life in Palestine calls for a Palestinian Arab way of peace-making and forgiveness that includes the State of Israel's accepting responsibility for wrong-doing and for making reparations.

### **Islam and resistance to the occupation**

In Egypt after World War I, Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949) advocated returning to the social principles of the Qur'an to resist the British occupation.<sup>168</sup> In 1928 al-Banna founded the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to put the Islamic tradition of resisting

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<sup>165</sup> O'Mahoney, "Christianity and Jerusalem," 90.

<sup>166</sup> Goddard, "Challenges and Developments," 25.

<sup>167</sup> Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: a Palestinian Woman Speaks*, 92.

<sup>168</sup> Muslim Brotherhood, *History of the Muslim Brotherhood*, <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=799&ref=search.php>, (accessed February 24, 2014).

oppression into action mainly through educating the masses.<sup>169</sup> The president of Egypt, Jamal Abd al-Nasser (1918–1970) dissolved the Brotherhood in Egypt in 1954 and drove its leadership underground. Revolutionaries used parts of the ideology of one of the Brotherhood’s leaders, Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), to create the Islamic fundamentalism movement that rose in popularity after the *Naksa* in 1967.<sup>170</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood became active in the West Bank following the *Naksa* by providing educational, health and social programming.<sup>171</sup> Inspired by the successful Islamic revolution in Iran, members of the Brotherhood created the *Islamic Jihad* in 1979 and *Hamas* in 1987 to resist the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories.<sup>172</sup> According to the Israeli press, as quoted by Naim Ateek, the State of Israel also supported creating *Hamas* to weaken the Fatah party and create a division among Palestinians.<sup>173</sup>

### **Islam and Arab Christianity**

Monsignor Rafiq Khoury (1943–) of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem attests to the generally positive history between Arab Christians and Muslims in the Arab world. He writes that Christians assisted Muslims when they first arrived from the Arabian Peninsula, integrated themselves into the public life of Islamic society and adopted the

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<sup>169</sup> Muslim Brotherhood, *History of the Muslim Brotherhood*.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid. See p.40ff, above.

<sup>171</sup> Eyal Pascovich, “Social-Civilian Apparatuses of Hamas, Hizballah, and Other Activist Islamic Organizations,” *Digest of Middle East Peace Studies* 21/1 (2012): 128.

<sup>172</sup> Muslim Brotherhood, *History of the Muslim Brotherhood*.

<sup>173</sup> Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 8.

Arabic language.<sup>174</sup> Khoury believes that Arab Christians are part of the cultural identity of Arab Muslims, and vice versa. Khoury also believes that Christian-Muslim relations run deeper in Palestine than anywhere else “since Christian and Muslim Palestinians suffered together, were exiled together, fought together and share the same aspirations for the future.”<sup>175</sup> Building solidarity between the Christian and Islamic communities is one of the goals of organizations like the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, the source of most of the maps in this thesis, as well as Naim Ateek’s Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre and Mitri Raheb’s Diyar Consortium.

### **Summary**

This summary reveals that although religion is used to justify and resist the occupation, political goals lie behind the systematic oppression of the Palestinian people. Unjustly framed as a matter of self-defense and the culmination of biblical prophecy, the occupation reflects the territorial ambition of the State of Israel to displace the Palestinian people from beyond the 1949 borders. As will be seen in the next chapter, addressing the injustice arising from this context is the goal of the liberation and contextual theologies of Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb respectively.

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<sup>174</sup> Rafiq Khoury, “Living Together: the Experience of Muslim-Christian Relations in the Arab World in General and in Palestine in Particular,” *Cornerstone* 64 (Winter 2012): 11.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Three

### Development and characteristics of Palestinian liberation theology

Although Latin American liberation theology initially addressed the concerns of the materially poor, its principles came to be applied to the situations of many other people who experienced marginalization or oppression. The discussion that follows seeks to show how liberation theology contributes to the search for justice for the Palestinian people by describing the origins of Palestinian liberation theology, its major themes as well as certain aspects that differentiate it from Latin American liberation theology. This section draws on the works of Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb, two Palestinian theologians who seek the political, socio-economic and spiritual liberation of the Palestinian people.

#### **Naim Ateek and Sabeel**

Naim Ateek (1937–) is the first and most prominent exponent of Palestinian liberation theology. A former Canon of St. George's Cathedral in Jerusalem, Ateek was educated in the United States and founded the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre (Sabeel)<sup>176</sup> in Jerusalem in 1992 after writing *Justice and Only Justice: a Palestinian Theology of Liberation*<sup>177</sup>, based on his doctoral thesis, during the first *Intifada*. Much of Ateek's writing focuses on reinterpreting the Bible to make it relevant to Palestinian Christians and to foster solidarity between Christians in Palestine and western countries.

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<sup>176</sup> Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre, <http://www.sabeel.org> (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>177</sup> Naim Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice: A Palestinian Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991).

Like Gutiérrez before him, Ateek seeks to inform the masses that the injustice of their situation is not divinely ordained.

The organization Ateek founded, Sabeel (Arabic: the way or spring of water), hosts regular ecumenical meetings for clergy, mainly of Arab origin, to cultivate awareness of what they have in common as Christians living under an oppressive occupation. Based in East Jerusalem, Sabeel also hosts international conferences and witness visits to create a greater sense of solidarity between Christians living in Palestine and those living outside Palestine, mainly in Western countries.

### **Mitri Raheb and the Diyar Consortium**

Mitri Raheb (1962–) is pastor of the Evangelical Lutheran Christmas Church in Bethlehem. He received his theological education in Germany and his understanding that “only the suffering God can help” reveals the influence of the writings of Bonhoeffer.<sup>178</sup> His approach to doing theology is contextual as it reflects the experience of the local Arab Christian people of Palestine. As Raheb’s goal is to empower Palestinians, socially and spiritually, to help them build a nation, his use of the term “contextual” rather than “liberation” reflects a desire to characterize his theology as having roots in Palestine.

By connecting the faith of Palestinian Christians to their Arab culture, Raheb seeks to the reverse the divisiveness of the mandate era that facilitated European control over the Middle East.<sup>179</sup> Raheb presides over the Diyar Consortium, an umbrella

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<sup>178</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 44.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid.



organization based in Bethlehem for many Palestinian educational, cultural and social institutions that are open to people of all religious traditions.<sup>180</sup> Through the activities of these institutions, Raheb seeks to make the Palestinian Arab experience of life a constituent part of Palestinian Christianity. Whereas Ateek and Sabeel focus on advocacy and ecumenism, Raheb and Diyar focus on building the cultural, educational and socio-economic institutions that empower the Palestinian people to liberate themselves from oppression. Raheb's attention to discerning the biblical message under the real-life conditions of Palestinian society also reveals the influence of Johann B. Metz.

Consistent with his focus on developing the Palestinian character and consciousness, Raheb uses the term "contextual" rather than "liberation" to describe his method of theology that seeks to reach the souls of those who participate in, and benefit from, Diyar's projects. Raheb's attention to building social institutions to benefit the Palestinians reflects major principles discussed earlier in the Medellín Document on Justice. In addition, his way of resisting the occupation has much in common with Paolo Freire's process of conscientization<sup>181</sup> in that he helps Palestinians become aware of their own identity. The following sections explore the similarities and differences between Raheb's and Ateek's methods, forms of praxis, biblical hermeneutical approaches, and major theological and contextual themes found in their work, as well as key differences between Palestinian and Latin American liberation theology.

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<sup>180</sup> Diyar Consortium, [www.diyar.ps](http://www.diyar.ps) (accessed July 15, 2014).

<sup>181</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 64-65.

### 3.1 Methods

Palestinian liberation and contextual theologies use different methods, and are based on different presuppositions, to enable the oppressed people of Palestine to be subjects of their own history rather than objects of someone else's. Through Palestinian liberation theology, Ateek attempts to "rediscover the liberation that Christ has already accomplished and of which we (Palestinians) should be aware."<sup>182</sup> By directing the attention of the oppressed and the oppressor toward what he considers are the prophetic and liberating aspects of the Word of God, Ateek attempts to bring God into the Palestinian struggle against oppression. Raheb, on the other hand, begins with the faith of the Palestinian Christian as it is articulated and made manifest in his or her identity in the Arab Islamic world.<sup>183</sup> Under Raheb's approach, therefore, it is the people who direct the theologian's attention, by virtue of their witness, to what the Word of God has to say to the oppressed and oppressors.

As seen earlier in the historical and social overview, the occupation continues partly because the rights of Palestinians are ignored by Western countries that control the world's economic and political structures. One of Ateek's goals therefore is to bring about a change in the Western theological mindset that helps to facilitate the occupation. By giving new content to the theological concept of liberation already known in the West, Ateek's theology interacts with Western Christians who live where wealth and

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<sup>182</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 6.

<sup>183</sup> Raheb, *I Am A Palestinian Christian*, 10.

political power are centered.<sup>184</sup> This interaction takes advantage of the historical ties between Arab and European Christians described earlier in the section on religion.

Ateek also draws parallels between the ongoing struggle for justice in Palestine and the successful struggle against apartheid in South Africa that is more familiar to people in Western nations.<sup>185</sup> By making this connection, Ateek hopes to educate and obtain support from Westerners to weaken the Western power that sustains the occupation. Divestment was one of the tools used by Westerners to protest apartheid in South Africa and Sabeel has called for divestment from companies that sustain or profit from Israeli settlements, the Israeli occupation or any violence against civilians.<sup>186</sup>

Ateek also directs attention toward Christians living in Palestine. As discussed earlier, there are divisions among the Christian denominations in Palestine. Ateek therefore holds weekly prayer meetings at Sabeel's office and other ecumenical gatherings in Palestine to unite Christians today with Jesus' stand against oppression in the 1<sup>st</sup> century. Through these activities, Ateek strives to strengthen and vivify the Church from within the Palestinian context.<sup>187</sup>

Raheb's contextual method recognizes that the Arab culture has ancient roots and has survived being devalued by European colonialism and global consumerism. Raheb understands that Muslim and Christian Arabs share the same cultural and socio-political

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<sup>184</sup> Samuel J. Kuruvilla, "Theological Praxis as Resistance in a Contextual Framework: Palestinian Christian Peace-building in the Occupied West Bank," *Theological Review* 34 (2013): 76.

<sup>185</sup> Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 179.

<sup>186</sup> Sabeel, *A call for morally responsible investment: A non-violent response to the occupation*, <http://www.sabeel.org/pdfs/mri.htm>, (accessed August 24, 2014).

<sup>187</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 72.

situation under occupation, and seeks to unite Muslim and Christian Arabs through educational and social programming.<sup>188</sup> In a personal interview with Samuel J. Kuruvilla, Raheb said that, rather than focus on the occupation, he wanted, through the inter-faith activities of the Diyar consortium, to “create a taste of the new life that could possibly be enjoyed in Palestine once the Israeli occupation is ended.”<sup>189</sup> Unlike Ateek’s top-down approach that looks to church hierarchy for leadership, Raheb’s approach tends to focus on creating the conditions that allow the people in the local context to take the initiative. Unlike Ateek’s focus on ending the occupation that requires him to address Western audiences, Raheb’s focus on building a self-confident Palestinian identity is limited by its nature to the Palestinian people and their relationship to the wider Arab community.

### **3.2 Praxis**

Liberative praxis is the main methodology of both liberation and contextual theologies. Although Sabeel and the Diyar Consortium undertake advocacy activities oriented to Western Christians, the focus of their other forms of praxis differs. By virtue of its Western-oriented approach, the praxis of Sabeel focuses on bringing together Palestinian and non-Palestinian Christians in locally-hosted conferences, as well as organizing local encounters among Christians in the region to foster a sense of community in opposition to the fragmentation created by the occupation.<sup>190</sup> Through its efforts with international groups and volunteers, Sabeel undertakes a prophetic role by creating witnesses to the

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<sup>188</sup> Kuruvilla, “Theological Praxis as Resistance,” 89.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 84.

truth of what is happening in occupied Palestine who will then become advocates in the international community for justice for Palestinians.

On the other hand, Raheb tries to create, through the Diyar consortium, positive opportunities that create “facts on the ground” that deepen the connection of Palestinians to their land in opposition to the “facts on the ground” intentionally created by the State of Israel to justify the occupation.<sup>191</sup> Although both Ateek and Raheb focus on the present, Raheb also pays particular attention within Diyar to how the present will shape the future. Diyar employs Palestinians in providing education, health care and recreational opportunities to Palestinians of all faiths, with a view to strengthening the Palestinian social fabric. This reflects Raheb’s belief, and a line of thinking developed earlier by Jon Sobrino, that by virtue of the historical Jesus’s having “already gone down this road”<sup>192</sup> of dispossession and oppression, the Palestinian people are not alone as they resist the occupation by constructing a civil society for themselves.

For both theologians, engagement in the real world through praxis represents an understanding that the kingdom of God is “now” even though, as Gutiérrez wrote earlier, “it will arrive in its fullness only at the end of time.”<sup>193</sup> Raheb echoes this sentiment when he writes the kingdom of God began “with the coming of Jesus of Nazareth and the sending of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>194</sup> The attention Raheb and Ateek pay to social justice as a

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<sup>191</sup> Kuruvilla, “Theological Praxis as Resistance, 89.

<sup>192</sup> Raheb, *I Am A Palestinian Christian*, 106.

<sup>193</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, xxx.

<sup>194</sup> Raheb, *I Am A Palestinian Christian*, 75.

practice of love makes “being present” with Palestinians important even if it is not as politically effective as other forms of resistance.

### **3.3 Biblical hermeneutics**

Ateek and Raheb use the same points of departure for theological reflection: the occupation of Palestine and the dispossession of Palestinian people. Both call for reading scripture in light of one’s own context. Since no context is socially or culturally objective, it follows that the interpretation of scripture is influenced by the interpreter’s past and present circumstances.

Raheb believes “the Bible is God’s Word in human words.”<sup>195</sup> This implies the truthfulness of those human words lies not in their historical or literal accuracy but in the nature of the experience they attempt to describe. Although Raheb advocates using techniques of socio-historical criticism, he focuses instead on what the text means to the reader in the context in which it is being read.<sup>196</sup> The cultural context is dynamic, however, and places upon the reader the burden of assessing the relevance of a text and its place in the Christian tradition. Raheb’s approach allows for a reader’s understanding of the text even if he or she lacks sophisticated tools of theological enquiry.

Liberation theology, on the other hand, tends to avoid theological issues that do not have a direct relationship to liberation. For example, Ateek does not accept the validity of portions of scripture inconsistent with the character of God as revealed

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<sup>195</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 59.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

through Christ.<sup>197</sup> Ateek's testing of the authority of scripture, with Christ as the hermeneutical key, against the concept of liberation, and his using scripture to support theological arguments, align liberation theology with political ideologies that seek to end the occupation. This differs from Raheb's hermeneutical approach that generally allows theology to flow out of the Bible instead of continually testing theology by the hermeneutics of suspicion.

Raheb agrees with Ateek that the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament form a unity,<sup>198</sup> but differs from Ateek with respect to his approach to the Hebrew Scriptures. Whereas Ateek believes Christ is the hermeneutical key for interpreting God's Word in the Hebrew Scriptures, Raheb believes both the Law of the Hebrew Scriptures and the Gospel of the New Testament are hermeneutical keys to interpreting the Bible.<sup>199</sup> Ateek therefore appeals to the New Testament and the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, whereas Raheb generally draws relevance from either the Hebrew Scriptures or the New Testament, depending on the particular context in which the Bible is read. These differences in approach are illustrated in the following sections about the theological and contextual concerns of Palestinian liberation and contextual theologies.

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<sup>197</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 82.

<sup>198</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 61.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

### 3.4 Major themes and theological foundations

Many of the concerns of Ateek and Raheb center on the concept of divine justice, the relationship between God's love for all creation and God's connection to the people of both ancient Israel and the modern State of Israel, the theological importance of the land of Palestine, and the role of non-violence in resisting the occupation.

#### Divine justice

In *Justice and Only Justice*, Ateek interprets the Christian tradition in light of the Palestinian context by focusing on God's justice and mercy.<sup>200</sup> Much of his theology rests on God's concern for justice (Gal 6:7).<sup>201</sup> Ateek rejects any biblical literalism that connects God to war, conquest and subjugation. Instead, he believes the only appropriate hermeneutical lens for interpreting the Bible, and the Hebrew Scriptures in particular, is the character of a just and merciful God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Passages that portray God to the contrary, Ateek believes, may have value as representing a historical understanding of God but otherwise carry little theological significance. Ateek believes the injustices arising from the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories offend the divine justice of God and must therefore be addressed as a matter of Christian faith.

The implication of Ateek's understanding of divine justice is that sin has structural dimensions that involve moral matters and choices. Doing justice therefore requires transforming the personal mindset behind the occupation, as well as

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<sup>200</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 88.

<sup>201</sup> "Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow" (Gal 6:7).



transforming the political and social structures that facilitate the occupation. For Ateek, faithfulness to God blesses God's people and such faithfulness requires acts of justice, righteousness and mercy.<sup>202</sup> His understanding of divine justice is central to his understanding of what it means to be Christian.

Raheb appeals not as much to scripture as to life on the ground in Palestine for his understanding of divine justice. He believes the injustice of the occupation of Palestine is the result of deliberate Israeli policies and serves to increase the power of the State of Israel.<sup>203</sup> He understands divine justice to require redistributing power such that power will serve and protect justice.<sup>204</sup> He believes protecting the rights of all human beings is a matter of divine justice since all human beings are created in the image of God. For Raheb, the power and authority of political and religious institutions cannot be misused against the purpose that God has for the world.

### **Universality of God's love and particularity of being chosen by God**

The *Nakba* of 1948,<sup>205</sup> and the underlying conquest ideology that supported it, prompted Palestinian Christians to seek alternative ways of interpreting the Bible to show how the displacement of a people is inconsistent with God's love for God's creation. For example, Michel Sabbah (1933–), the first Palestinian Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, writes that

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<sup>202</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 110.

<sup>203</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 45.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>205</sup> See p.35ff, above.

chosenness is the consequence of God's grace and not of individual merit.<sup>206</sup> Sabbah cautions against exclusive interpretations of the Bible that question the right of Palestinians to their land. Sabbah's words also reveal the power of Arab leadership to transform traditional Christian belief, a power that the Eastern and Western Christian churches feared for many centuries.

Ateek notes three streams in the theological development of the Hebrew Scriptures that range from an exclusive to an inclusive understanding of God's love for human beings.<sup>207</sup> The first stream includes the books of Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings, books that privilege the relationship between the Israelites and God and that show God using force to accomplish God's will in human history. The second stream is based on the Pentateuch books of Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy, books that emphasize practice and study as the means to advancing God's will for God's people. The books of Jonah and of later prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Amos comprise the third stream and reveal an inclusive understanding of God whose justice places demands on all human beings. Ateek believes that the love of God revealed in Jesus Christ (John 3:16)<sup>208</sup> is a continuation of the third stream. This inclusive understanding that God's love is universal and encompasses all humanity is a cornerstone of Palestinian liberation theology. While not denying the Israelites were

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<sup>206</sup> Michel Sabbah, "Reading the Bible Today in the Land of the Bible," *Catholic International* 5/4 (1994): 177.

<sup>207</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 93-97.

<sup>208</sup> "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life" (John 3:16).

God's chosen people, Ateek rejects using this particularity to exclude another people from the universality of God's love and desire for justice.

Key to Raheb's theology is the identification of contemporary Palestinians living under occupation with Jesus who also lived under occupation. For Raheb, God's own experience in the person of Jesus creates a personal connection between God and those who are refugees today. Raheb believes the uniqueness of Israel's history with God does not mean Israel as chosen by God is superior to the other who is not chosen. Raheb rejects Jewish statehood as the fulfillment of a divine promise but accepts it as politically necessary given the history of Jews in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>209</sup> Raheb believes the Incarnation of God means no one can claim to rightfully use religion to discriminate among human beings or to set God in opposition to any human being.

### **Theology of land**

The theologies of land devised by Ateek and Raheb stem partially from their reflection on what happened to Jews during World War II and on the goal of Zionism in Palestine. When put forward in the late 19th century, the Zionist project of a Jewish homeland in Palestine reflected contemporary European colonial ideology based on the biblical paradigm of conquest (Dt 9:5).<sup>210</sup> The Irish Catholic theologian Michael Prior (1942–2004) draws parallels between European conquest of Africa and the Americas and the

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<sup>209</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 78.

<sup>210</sup> “It is not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart that you are going in to occupy their land; but because of the wickedness of those nations that the LORD your God is dispossessing them before you, in order to fulfill the promise that the LORD made on oath to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Deut 9:5).

establishment of the Jewish state in Palestine-Israel. In both cases, Prior criticizes using literal interpretations of the Bible to add moral legitimacy to colonizing foreign lands.<sup>211</sup>

Jewish theologian Marc Ellis (1952–) is likewise critical of combining morality and God in a discourse that justifies oppression.<sup>212</sup> Ellis questions the validity of calling upon a narrative that arose in a different context, such as the biblical conquest paradigm, and applying it to a current situation. Ellis also questions the value of limiting human destiny to stories told by ancient peoples and suggests instead that a new destiny can be created by reinterpreting the inherent messages of those stories.<sup>213</sup>

Naim Ateek offers an example of a new approach to an ancient narrative when he writes, “The land that God has chosen at one particular time in history for one particular people is now perceived as a paradigm, a model, for God’s concern for every people and every land.”<sup>214</sup> Ateek believes the Palestinian church must take its context seriously and that peace with justice is the church’s highest calling today. The State of Israel’s expropriation of Palestinian land to build Israeli settlements while participating in the Oslo Peace Process prompted Ateek in 2008 to further develop an inclusive theology of the land in *A Palestinian Cry for Reconciliation*. Ateek interprets Ezekiel 47:21-23<sup>215</sup> to

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<sup>211</sup> Michael Prior, “The Bible and the Redeeming Idea of Colonialism,” *Studies in World Christianity* 5: 134.

<sup>212</sup> Ellis, *Unholy Alliance: Religion and Atrocity in Our Time*, 17.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>214</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 108.

<sup>215</sup> “So you shall divide this land among you according to the tribes of Israel. You shall allot it as an inheritance for yourselves and for the aliens who reside among you. They shall be to you as citizens of Israel; with you they shall be allotted an inheritance among the tribes of Israel. In whatever tribe aliens reside, there you shall assign them their inheritance, says the LORD God” (Ezek 47:21-23).

mean “that God demands an equal inheritance for all the residents in the land, regardless of their ethnic or racial background.”<sup>216</sup> Although Ateek’s inclusive theology stands in opposition to the “excessive nationalism”<sup>217</sup> that obstructs the pursuit of peace, he nevertheless recommends two states on the land of the State of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories because he believes this is politically more achievable than one state with equality for everyone.<sup>218</sup>

Raheb believes many promises in the Hebrew Scriptures were meant as “words of hope” particularly when the Israelites were weak and living in exile.<sup>219</sup> He argues that fulfilling those promises rests with God and not with human beings. For Raheb, Jewish migration to Palestine in the 20<sup>th</sup> century is an expression of human faith rather than fulfillment of God’s plan for the Jewish people. Raheb understands the State of Israel is a political necessity in light of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish history, but believes the tie between the State and Judaism increases the State’s obligation to comply with international law.<sup>220</sup> Raheb does agree with Ateek, however, that the land always belongs to God (Lev 25:23).<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 64.

<sup>217</sup> C.E.L.A.M., “Document on Peace,” 12.

<sup>218</sup> Naim Ateek, “How the *Nakba* Affects Faith and Theology,” speech at the Sabeel 2008 Conference in Nazareth, Israel, November 15, 2008, researcher’s own notes.

<sup>219</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 76.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>221</sup> “The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants” (Lev 25:23).

## Non-violence

Biblical interpretations that suggest divine sanction for violence against Palestinians can test the faith of Palestinian Christians. According to Jean Zaru, advocates for violence and non-violence may appear to have the same goal but non-violence is the only method consistent with that goal: refusing to cooperate with injustice now with a view to securing justice in the future.<sup>222</sup> The goal of non-violent engagement is therefore not the transfer of power from one group to another but the recognition of the human rights of everyone.

Naim Ateek understands non-violent acts of Palestinian civil resistance as expressing Christ's ethic of non-violence.<sup>223</sup> For him, this is accomplished by shaming the occupying force (Mt 5:39), exposing its cruelty (Mt 5:40) and maintaining dignity despite its humiliating presence (Mt 5:41).<sup>224</sup> Through these biblical examples Ateek rejects the Western Christian tradition, for which Thomas Aquinas is mainly responsible, that war can be justified.<sup>225</sup>

Mitri Raheb also adheres to the ethic of non-violence but seeks to empower the Palestinian people within the context of their Arab culture. He believes "Christianity is not an eternal law but rather a faith – in space and time – in the God incarnate in space and time."<sup>226</sup> Raheb is wary of redefining religion and giving it political content, and

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<sup>222</sup> Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*, 76.

<sup>223</sup> Ateek, *A Palestinian Christian Cry for Reconciliation*, 136-137.

<sup>224</sup> "But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile" (Mt 5:39-41).

<sup>225</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 135.

<sup>226</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 46.

therefore emphasizes that the oppression of the Palestinian is a political, not religious, issue. For this reason Raheb focuses not on the occupation but on nation-building as a way of expressing the full humanity of the Palestinian people.

### **3.5 Differences between liberation theologies of Latin America and Palestine**

Latin American and Palestinian liberation theologies share several themes: God's concern for justice; God's active presence in human history; and the need to overcome structural and institutional forms of sin. Generally absent from Palestinian liberation theology is the Marxist critique of capitalist economic policies although the activities of the Diyar Consortium do create a Palestinian alternative to global capitalism. There are several other differences in the nature in which Palestinian and Latin American liberation theologies are supported, the biblical traditions they draw upon and what they focus on.

Both Palestinian and Latin American liberation theologies enjoy grass roots support but in Palestine that support includes the non-violent resistance activities of many organizations. The Latin American struggle for justice by the masses against the power of the elite had support from many Roman Catholic lay members and some clergy, many of whom had some knowledge of liberation theology. On the other hand, all Palestinians are involved in the struggle for justice, a struggle that incorporates ecumenism and comprises many religious, non-governmental and Palestinian organizations, and many of their supporters lack an understanding of Christian liberation theology. Whereas Christians are a minority in Palestine, they have many options outside the Christian church for doing liberation theology.

Both Latin American and Palestinian liberation theologies employ the hermeneutics of suspicion to find paradigms of liberation in scripture, but they appeal to different stories or different aspects of the same stories. For example, Latin American liberation theologians take inspiration from the tradition of the Israelites' deliverance from bondage in Egypt (Ex 14:13).<sup>227</sup> Palestinian liberation theologians, by virtue of their experience of dispossession, tend to see the history of salvation through the lens of the Canaanites. In a major difference with Ateek, Mitri Raheb believes the God of the Exodus narrative is the God known through Jesus Christ, for God knows when people are deprived of their rights and suffers with the suffering.<sup>228</sup> However, both Ateek and Raheb share common attention to interpretations of the biblical Prophets that criticize the oppression of people by ruling political and social elites.

Whereas the option for the poor in Latin American liberation theology focuses on the oppressed majority, Palestinian liberation theology includes all Palestinians as well as the land of Palestine, because the major issue in Palestine is the systematic dispossession and military occupation of the land. The connection of the Palestinian people to the land is sufficiently strong to allow Naim Ateek to say that "what is at stake today in the political conflict over the land of the West Bank and Gaza is nothing less than the way in which we understand the nature of God."<sup>229</sup> In addition, by drawing attention to the land, Palestinian liberation theologians try to allow one to see, literally and metaphorically,

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<sup>227</sup> "But Moses said to the people, 'Do not be afraid, stand firm, and see the deliverance that the LORD will accomplish for you today; for the Egyptians whom you see today you shall never see again'" (Ex 14:13).

<sup>228</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 89.

<sup>229</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 111.



through the omnipresent barrier wall that would otherwise conceal from view the house demolitions, land confiscations, illegal settlements and military harassment that occur under military occupation.

### **Summary**

Although Raheb uses the term “contextual” rather than “liberation” to describe his way of doing theology, his praxis is consistent with liberation theology and has therefore been included in his review of liberation theology. Through different methods and approaches, the theologies of Ateek and Raheb seek to liberate the Palestine people from the oppressive context of Palestinian life. The goal of the following chapter is to see how the experience of international volunteers in Palestine aligns with the liberation and contextual theologies of Ateek and Raheb.

## Chapter Four

### **The lived experience of Palestinian liberation theology**

The objectives of Chapter Four are to describe the phenomenon of Western involvement in Palestinian liberation theology by investigating the reasons international Christians engage in liberation theology in occupied Palestine, what they do during that engagement, how those activities align with Palestinian liberation and contextual theologies, and how reflecting upon those activities influences the development of their faith. The significance of this part of the study lies in giving voice to Christians who are seldom heard, those engaged in non-violent resistance in occupied Palestine, and by showing the extent to which their activities are aligned with the liberation and contextual theologies coming out of Palestine.

#### **4.1 Nature of this study**

The primary method of this part of the study is qualitative research by means of personal interviews. As the research phenomenon studied is experiential, qualitative means are the best method to collect and analyze this information. According to Clark Moustakos, the goal of phenomenological research is to gain a deeper understanding of the personal meaning derived from a particular experience.<sup>230</sup> Phenomenological research is retrospective in nature and relies on participants to describe their experiences and the meanings they derive from them.

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<sup>230</sup> Clark Moustakos, *Phenomenological Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 1994), 13.

### **Research questions**

Through analysis of responses to personal questions about liberation theology and liberative praxis, this study attempts to describe the process and experience of praxis in occupied Palestine. The questions posed in this research study to participants were:

1. Can you describe what aspects of your faith led you to respond to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza?
2. What types of activities did you get involved in?
  - (i) How did you learn of them?
  - (ii) Which ones had the most spiritual meaning for you and why?
3. What were some of the unique characteristics of doing liberation theology in the occupied territories? Are there situations that you commonly encountered or any that stand out in particular?
4. How did your involvement in those activities affect your religious faith?
  - (i) Did your faith change as a result of those activities?
  - (ii) If yes, in what way did your faith change?
  - (iii) Did this, or would this, change in your faith result in a change in future activities you might consider?

- (iv) If yes, how did, or would, the type of activities be different from the ones you engaged in?
5. Did your experience change the way you interpret the Bible or understand your religious tradition? If so, how? Are there any Bible passages that you understand differently now than you did before you became involved in resisting the Occupation?

Participants were also asked to mention any other issues that they felt were important but not raised in the process of answering these questions.

### **A definition of “faith”**

As will be seen in the discussion about participants’ responses, inadequately validating the questions prior to engaging the participants was a weakness of this research project. The questions lacked clarity about what was meant by “faith” and did not make the distinction defined by Protestant theologian Paul Tillich (1886–1965) between belief as a matter of religious belief and faith as a matter of “ultimate concern” toward something beyond what human beings can understand or know.<sup>231</sup> Where this lack of clarity is evident in the researcher’s questions and in the participants’ responses, the word faith is presented in quotation marks.

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<sup>231</sup> Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1956), 9.

### **Sample characteristics**

Participation in this study was limited to international volunteers who understood liberation theology, had some involvement with resisting the occupation of Palestine, and were interested in sharing their understanding of the nature and meaning of that involvement.<sup>232</sup> As only one group was researched and the goal was to interpret rather than to explain, the design was not experimental and the sample was not random. Three organizations were contacted for contributors to this study: the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre (Sabeel) in Jerusalem; Christian Peacemaker Teams (C.P.T.) in Toronto; and the Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel (E.A.P.P.I.) through the General Council of the United Church of Canada in Toronto.

Sabeel is “an ecumenical grassroots liberation theology movement among Palestinian Christians.”<sup>233</sup> Sabeel works to promote unity among Palestinian Christians, to develop spirituality based on justice and nonviolence and to promote international awareness with respect to the concerns of Palestinian Christians. Sabeel hosts bi-annual international conferences in the State of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories and annual witness visits to the region. The people interviewed for this research with connections to Sabeel included:

- Olivia,<sup>234</sup> a Canadian who attended an international Sabeel conference in Bethlehem, interviewed in person;

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<sup>232</sup> Moustakos, *Phenomenological Research Methods*, 107.

<sup>233</sup> Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre, <http://www.sabeel.org> (accessed February 15, 2014).

- Bill and Sue, a Canadian couple who participated in an ecumenical two-week witness visit to Palestine locally hosted by Sabeel and initiated by the United Church of Canada, interviewed in person;
- Anna, a European who volunteered for one and a half years with Sabeel in Jerusalem, interviewed via email; and,
- Kerri, an American who moved to Jerusalem to live in solidarity with Palestinians and volunteer with Sabeel, interviewed via email.

International volunteers with the E.A.P.P.I. “provide protective presence to vulnerable communities, monitor and report human rights abuses, and support Palestinians and Israelis working together for peace.”<sup>235</sup> The accompaniment programme was initiated by the World Council of Churches in 2002 as part of the Council’s Ecumenical Campaign to End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine. One person from E.A.P.P.I. was interviewed for this research:

- Robert, a Canadian who served for three months with E.A.P.P.I. based in Bethlehem, interviewed via telephone.

C.P.T. is “a faith-based organization that supports Palestinian-led, nonviolent, grassroots resistance to the Israeli occupation and the unjust structures that uphold it.”<sup>236</sup>

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<sup>234</sup> Each participant provided a pseudonym that is used in this paper to respect his or her right to privacy.

<sup>235</sup> Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Palestine and Israel, <http://eappi.org/en/about/overview.html> (accessed February 15, 2014).

<sup>236</sup> Christian Peacemaker Teams, <http://www.cpt.org> (accessed February 15, 2014).

C.P.T. works in Palestine from a base in the West Bank city of Hebron. C.P.T.'s activities include accompanying Palestinian children walking to and from school, monitoring the treatment of Palestinians at Israeli roadblocks and checkpoints in the West Bank and intervening during human rights abuses and violations. One person from C.P.T. was interviewed for this research:

- Elizabeth, a Canadian who volunteered for four three-month terms of service with C.P.T. based in Hebron, interviewed via telephone.

Although these participants did not constitute a representative sample of Christians involved in non-violent resistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the range of their experience in terms of time commitment, activities and relationships with the Palestinian people provided a descriptive overview of the relationship between faith and action in the context of occupied Palestine.

## **4.2 Results and discussion**

The goals of the following sections are to summarize and interpret the participants' responses to the interview questions. The primary intention behind the questions was to see how the activities and experiences of international volunteers are aligned with contextualized Palestinian liberation theology. A secondary intention was to observe the relationship between the context of daily life in Palestine and the theology that arises from that context. In each of the next five sections, the participants' responses to the questions are described and then discussed in light of the general characteristics of

liberation theology described in Chapter One, the Palestinian context in Chapter Two and the theologies of Ateek and Raheb in Chapter Three.

**Q1 Aspects of “faith” that led participants to respond to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza**

**Responses**

Several participants had difficulty responding to this question, suggesting the question may have incorrectly assumed that faith was a uniquely identifiable aspect of a person’s selfhood. This came across when Olivia, Bill and Sue indicated it was difficult for them to isolate the influence of faith from other aspects of their personalities. For them, their faith was such an integral part of their sense of self that its influence was not something they could segregate from other aspects of their being. As Sue explained it, “being Christian is about doing the right thing for all humanity, following the examples of Jesus, Gandhi, Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr, with no thought, hope or belief in a hereafter reward.” Bill and Olivia also stressed the importance of human relationships. “We are all part of creation,” Bill said. “The greatest relationships are between us as human beings.” Olivia believed all human beings were related like brothers and sisters, something she learned at a young age from her experiences at Sunday school, at home and during her life in general. “We are to respond to people in trouble, to be with each other in solidarity,” Olivia said. “Social justice is something we should do as Christians.”



Another potentially invalid assumption behind Question 1 was that faith makes a unique and identifiable contribution to the decision to participate in non-violent resistance to the occupation. Instead, responses to this question generally revealed that a strong commitment to social justice, usually life-long in duration, contributed to the decision to respond to the occupation. All participants indicated their concern for social justice formed during their youth and young adulthood and that their involvement in seeking justice in the occupied territories stemmed from that concern.

Anna's decision came about after she heard stories from Palestinian Christians that challenged stories she had heard earlier about the State of Israel. "I felt that as Christians worldwide we form one community, and neglecting the stories of our Palestinian brothers and sisters because we value more our own understanding of how we read the Bible, or of how we want to see (the State of) Israel, was not good," she wrote. "I have always had a passion for social justice," she added, "and since my childhood I do not take easy answers, so in a way getting involved with Palestine was also a way to understand better where I come from, the diversity of the world and the people living in it, and eventually to deepen my relationship with the God of this world and life."

Kerri's decision to go to Palestine was in response to what she perceived to be a "call" that occurred over time. "First there was a 'call' to missionary work that I felt when in high school and university. That call lay dormant as I married and raised a family... Second, throughout my husband's ministry I gravitated to the margins, which focused on disadvantaged children and street ministry." After the shooting death of an

African American youth who participated in one of Kerri's programs, Kerri advocated for him and his family. Kerri's third "call" came when she learned the story of the Palestinian people: "They also needed a voice and I felt a strong call to be that voice." Kerri began volunteering for Sabeel and giving talks to tour groups in Jerusalem "in an attempt to inform them of the contemporary situation within their pilgrimage experience. That, to me, was my real call and I've been doing this work now for eight years."

Robert also understood "call" in a broader sense as coming not only from God but from sensing a need to learn more about injustice, to stand in solidarity with the oppressed and to raise his voice in the face of injustice. Robert had some regret about being unable to accept an invitation to visit South Africa during that nation's struggle against apartheid. Not wanting to let a similar opportunity slip by, Robert decided to respond to the invitation extended by Palestinian Christians in the 2009 Kairos Palestine statement.<sup>237</sup> This happened around the same time Robert attended the United Church's General Council 40 in 2009. There delegates heard from Nora Carmi of the Jerusalem office of Sabeel as part of a debate about a proposal to involve the United Church in sanctions against the State of Israel. Robert was uncertain whether the General Council was given a clear picture of what was happening in Palestine, and it became "a matter of faith" for him to go there in person to clarify the issue in his own mind.

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<sup>237</sup> "In order to understand our reality, we say to the Churches: Come and see. We will fulfill our role to make known to you the truth of our reality, receiving you as pilgrims coming to us to pray, carrying a message of peace, love and reconciliation. You will know the facts and the people of this land, Palestinians and Israelis alike." Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, *A Moment of Truth* (Jerusalem: Kairos Palestine, 2009), 6.2.

Elizabeth said that the orientation of her faith toward social justice “started when I was born in an Old Order Amish Church.” From the beginning Elizabeth learned to value community and to embrace her church’s peace tradition of non-violence. Elizabeth defended relatives in the United States who were conscientious objectors during the Viet Nam war. She also helped a loved one desert the Marine Corps when it became clear to him that involvement in the Viet Nam war violated his basic values. Of her involvement in developing and improving relations between the Mennonite Central Committee and First Nations groups Elizabeth said, “I learned much about the history, culture and impact of colonization, the stealing of land, residential schools and abuses.” After Elizabeth joined C.P.T. she became active in First Nations communities and along the border between the United States and Mexico. Elizabeth believed her exposure to the indigenous American experience of colonization and marginalization by Europeans sensitized her to the Palestinian experience of dispossession and occupation by Israelis. She noted that like the State of Israel, Canada also had a history of subjugating another people. For Elizabeth, the reality of this history meant all human relationships were imperfect and this encouraged her to work on building those relationships. “When I built a trust relationship with people, they shared painful stories,” she said. “It was a gift to receive that trust.” But that gift of trust came with a responsibility to act that deepened Elizabeth’s commitment to C.P.T. She had a life-long interest in visiting Palestine-Israel and when the opportunity arose to go there with C.P.T., Elizabeth said, “I chose to make a major leap... and it was the most intense experience of any project I went on.”

## Discussion

All the participants' responses seemed to indicate the decision to go to Palestine was a matter of living out their commitment to social justice. Their faith, as a matter of "ultimate concern," was generally inseparable from that commitment, such that the need to confront the oppression and injustice of the occupation seemed to coexist with the need to respond to the occupation as Christians. Their decision to go to Palestine was a pivotal moment that started the process of learning about the "underside" of history from the Palestinian point of view, and of experiencing first hand that "the only thing that counts is faith working through love".<sup>238</sup> Their decision reflected awareness that they lacked total understanding of what was happening in Palestine as well as their determination to gain greater understanding. This decision marked the start of a process of socio-economic inquiry, the first process of liberation theology as identified by Boff and Boff.<sup>239</sup> For each participant, the decision to act appeared to be pre-theological and was undertaken to determine the causes of oppression in Palestine as well as to appreciate the perspective of those faced with such oppression.

Each participant generally indicated that the desire was more for him or her to become an agent in the Palestinian struggle rather than to facilitate the agency of Palestinians in that struggle. For Robert, this decision was explicitly connected to the struggle against apartheid in South Africa, a connection made earlier by Naim Ateek. For all participants, the visit to Palestine was intended to facilitate direct participation in the

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<sup>238</sup> Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 23.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

struggle for justice and/or to acquire the skills and knowledge to advocate on behalf of Palestinians in Canada. In this regard, the decision process was more in line with Ateek's Palestinian liberation theology rather than Raheb's contextual theology.

Elizabeth's awareness that all human relationships are imperfect resonates with Gutiérrez's understanding that sin, as a fundamental alienation, is evident in oppressive structures.<sup>240</sup> By reflecting on the relationship between Canadians and the First Nations peoples, Elizabeth became aware of the ubiquity of evil and that in a broken world of "original sin" everyone is implicated in systems of oppression and alienation. Elizabeth's process of making the decision to go to Palestine reflected her suspicion that the system for telling the major narrative served the interests of the State of Israel, Christian Zionists and Western Christian churches in general, and denied Palestinians the opportunity to tell their experience of occupation. As will be seen later in this chapter, her lived experience in Palestine confirmed that suspicion.

## **Q2 Information about the activities participants were involved in**

### **(i) (a) How participants learned of those activities**

#### **Responses**

Olivia became aware of what was happening in Palestine and felt motivated to get involved in working for peace and justice when she saw on television the bombing and devastation of Gaza during "Operation Cast Lead", the State of Israel's three-week

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<sup>240</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 103.

aerial, naval and ground assault on the Gaza Strip in December 2008 and January 2009. Later in 2009 Olivia heard Jeff Halper, from the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, speak in Canada. Olivia began to read books about the occupation of Palestine and joined a group of peace activists in her home town. In 2010 Olivia organized and co-led a study group for her church about a Christian response to the occupation of Palestine. While getting additional resources from the internet for that study group, Olivia learned about Sabeel and decided to attend a Sabeel conference in Bethlehem. She also encouraged three companions to join her at that conference.

Sue became interested after hearing Olivia speak about the Sabeel Bethlehem conference at a regional social justice committee meeting associated with Sue's church. Bill was at that same meeting. However, Bill's interest started earlier in 2004 when he met Palestinian peace activist Hanadi Loubani when she was part of a group of Palestinian women who met with Mi'kmaq women from the Burnt Church First Nation in New Brunswick. In 1999 Burnt Church was the scene of a conflict over treaty rights between natives on one side and non-natives and the government of Canada on the other. Both Bill and Sue believed their advocacy efforts in Canada would be strengthened if they were able to offer first-hand eye-witness accounts of life in occupied Palestine.

Anna attended a Sabeel youth conference in Jerusalem at the urging of a friend. Anna was a theology student at the time and after her return to Europe she decided to pursue a degree in Arabic and Islamic studies at the same time as her theology degree.

Based on her experience at the Jerusalem youth conference, Anna decided to return after graduation to volunteer with Sabeel.

Kerri also learned about Sabeel on a trip to Jerusalem. Kerri later helped to coordinate a Sabeel conference in her home state. She met Naim Ateek at that conference and learned more about what was happening during the occupation of Palestine. She quickly felt a desire to work with Sabeel in Jerusalem and left for Palestine soon after.

Robert learned of the E.A.P.P.I. program while looking online for a volunteer opportunity for his three-month sabbatical from ordained ministry. As a Christian with a firm commitment to social justice and an interest in learning first-hand about what was happening in Palestine, it did not take Robert long to decide upon E.A.P.P.I..

Elizabeth learned of the C.P.T. program from three separate presentations in her church by former C.P.T. participants. One of those presenters called her at the same time she was completing her application to join C.P.T. “That coincidence,” Elizabeth said, “was a moment of epiphany.” Elizabeth attended a C.P.T. training delegation within a month of submitting her application, but volunteered for many two- to six-week terms with C.P.T. in First Nations communities and along the border between the United States and Mexico before going to Palestine for the first time.

## **Discussion**

In summary, most participants learned about the programs they became involved with, either directly or indirectly, through the person-to-person advocacy efforts of social justice activists. Robert was unique in learning about the E.A.P.P.I through that

organization's advocacy on the internet. For all participants, advocacy was an effective tool for raising their conscience and motivating them to act against injustice in Palestine. Advocacy also presented them with either the means to get involved or guidance in their search for ways to resist the occupation. As will be seen later in the responses to Question 4(iv), the participants were generally committed to ensuring the success of future advocacy efforts by planning to directly participate in them. This suggests the international advocacy work of organizations like Sabeel is effective in reaching people outside Palestine. This finding also implies Ateek's Palestinian liberation theology, by including internationals in its audience, is effective at building solidarity between Western and Palestinian Christians.

**(i) (b) Participants' resistance activities in the occupied Palestinian territories**

**Responses**

Some participants found this part of the question difficult to answer as it was based on the researcher's potentially invalid assumptions that faith was separate from one's identity and that there would necessarily be a spiritual meaning derived from participating in social justice activities. This part of the question also appeared to assume pursuing social justice was essentially the same as liberative praxis, whereas it is only one of several processes of liberative praxis, as identified in Chapter One by Boff and Boff, that can happen simultaneously in a spiral relationship.



The nature of Sabeel conferences and witness visits allowed Sue, Bill and Olivia to make personal contact with people who live under the occupation as well as with representatives of non-governmental organizations that protest against and resist the occupation. For Olivia, the face-to-face encounter with Palestinians confirmed the reality behind the stories she had previously read and heard about: “Having met many people there I feel more of a personal connection.” One such connection came from visiting illegal Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem with Jeff Halper, the speaker who initially aroused her interest in Palestine. Connections like this gave Olivia something she could relate to when she later read or heard about events in the occupied territories after her visit there and sustained her commitment to pursue justice for the Palestinian people.

Bill and Sue were also moved by the personal contact with Palestinians they experienced on their witness visit. “Being there with a (Palestinian) family was touching,” Sue said. “A husband, wife and two daughters aged seven and four, children the same as children here. But life is so different in (occupied Palestine). In the (family’s) back yard they were forbidden from growing or building anything and in the corner there was a surveillance tower built by the Israeli Defense Force.” Their short-term witness visit impressed upon Bill and Sue how ordinary the constant threat of violence was in the life of Palestinians under occupation.

Anna did administrative work in Sabeel’s office, mainly helping to organize an international conference as part of Sabeel’s international advocacy efforts. However, Anna sometimes took European visitors to Bethlehem to meet with Palestinian clergy or

to Hebron to meet former Israeli soldiers who were once stationed in Hebron (Map 4, page 46). These ex-soldiers belonged to an Israeli non-governmental organization called “Breaking the Silence.”<sup>241</sup> When they were members of the Israeli military, these men and women participated, and later refused to participate, in the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Although they are dedicated to their Jewish heritage and the security of the State of Israel, members of “Breaking the Silence” are committed to describing the actions they were forced to do by the Israeli military in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, actions they believe violated their values as human beings.

Anna also participated in a weekly demonstration against continued construction of the barrier wall. “After a while the army came and they would shoot rubber bullets and tear gas to end the demonstration,” she said. “I didn’t go often though, just a few times because I was curious and I quit after a while because I felt that it was a bit of a cat-and-mouse game instead of a demonstration.” Anna added, “I didn’t feel comfortable being so opposed to the soldiers, though I disagree with the occupation for sure, but I felt that through participation in such demonstrations I had to identify completely with the demonstrating crowd and there was no space for talking, reconciling or whatsoever [sic].” Anna did not feel she could identify completely with one side or the other because she believed the situation was too complex. The nature of Anna’s experiences in Palestine

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<sup>241</sup> “We shall not continue to fight beyond the 1967 borders in order to dominate, expel, starve, and humiliate an entire people. We hereby declare that we shall continue serving in the Israeli Defense Forces in any mission that serves Israel’s defense. The missions of occupation and oppression do not serve this purpose, and we shall take no part in them.” *Declaration of Israeli Combatant Reservists: a Refusal to Serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* in Ronit Chacham, *Breaking Ranks: Refusing to Serve in the West Bank and Gaza Strip* (New York: Other Press, 2003), 2.

and the knowledge she gained from them grew out of the commitment she had made to living in solidarity with Palestinian Christians.

Like Anna, Kerri also made a deliberate commitment to live with the oppressed in Palestine. Though Kerri's multi-year involvement in Palestine focused mainly on education and advocacy, her long-term commitment to voluntarily live in solidarity with Palestinians established what Boff and Boff called "a living link with living practice."<sup>242</sup> Kerri regularly spoke with tour groups about the Palestinian situation, helped coordinate several international Sabeel conferences and taught Bible studies to groups of Palestinian women. However, Kerri indicated that her "main focus was just to experience as much (of life in Palestine) as possible in order to be able to share and teach when I return to the U.S." From her home base in East Jerusalem, Kerri was able to witness first-hand the painful displacement of the Palestinian population as part of the State of Israel's process of transferring Palestinian residents out of Jerusalem. Kerri's commitment to living in East Jerusalem reflected the need she felt to actually experience oppression before she could talk comfortably about it. For Kerri, "being present" in Palestine was a precondition to "doing something" about the injustice she experienced there, consistent with Gutiérrez's understanding of doing liberation theology.

As an Ecumenical Accompanier, Robert's primary role in Bethlehem was to monitor Checkpoint 300 (Map 4, page 46) between 4 and 7 a.m. on weekday mornings, when between 3,500 and 4,000 Palestinians, mostly men, sought entry to work in the State of Israel. Checkpoint 300 is a heavily armed gate in the separation wall between

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<sup>242</sup> Boff and Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology*, 22.

Bethlehem and Jerusalem and is the main entrance to the State of Israel from the southern West Bank. Robert and his team-mates from E.A.P.P.I. would track the numbers of Palestinians passing through the Israeli checkpoint and take note of the length of time it took to transit the checkpoint, which was usually between one and a half to two hours. Robert felt that the presence of international monitors helped to keep a check on the level of harassment Palestinians experienced at this and other checkpoints in the West Bank.

Robert also accompanied Palestinian children en route to an elementary school in the village of Tu'qu (Map 4, page 46). "The military sends about four to six soldiers when the children go to and from school," Robert said. "The military can be very aggressive with children. The military would yell at them, intimidate them." Robert would interact with the children, play with them and try to make them feel safe. As an international volunteer in situations like this, Robert believed his presence provided an independent verification of how the Israeli military mistreated the Palestinian population.

Robert often spent time in Palestinian villages, particularly Nahalin (Map 4, page 46) where E.A.P.P.I. volunteers had developed a relationship with the mayor. Three illegal Israeli settlements on hilltops nearly closed off the valley community of Nahalin from the rest of the West Bank. "He (the mayor) told us of problems like demolition orders, settler violence, the cutting down of olive trees and the overflow of sewage from the Israeli settlement of Gush Etzion on a hilltop above Nahalin. The settlement's sewage system regularly broke down every other week and destroyed the soil, olive trees, crops and local water supply for the village below," Robert said. The frequency with which the

settlement's sewage polluted the Palestinians' land made Robert believe Israeli settlers were using it as a tactic to intimidate the Palestinian villagers and drive them off the land. As an E.A.P.P.I. volunteer Robert tried to respond quickly to these incidents, witness them and publicize them beyond Palestine. Robert believed that witnessing an event gave him responsibility for publicizing it as well as addressing it.

Most days, Elizabeth would help ensure Palestinian school children and teachers made their way safely to and from school in Hebron as they walked by Israeli settlers and passed through military checkpoints. There are less than 1,000 Israeli settlers in four locations in the downtown area of Hebron, a city that is home to over 100,000 Palestinians (Map 6, page 108). The settlers are protected by a large presence of Israeli soldiers who maintain dozens of road closures and checkpoints to restrict the movement of Palestinians in and around the city. Sometimes Elizabeth and a C.P.T. team-mate would monitor activity at these checkpoints. "Our presence," she said, "helps keep them (Palestinians) from being physically abused." Sometimes Elizabeth would photograph abusive actions of Israeli soldiers to deter them from continuing. If Palestinians were detained more than twenty minutes or so she would report it to the district administrator and attempt to secure their release. Elizabeth witnessed first-hand the practice of the Israeli military of targeting Palestinian men for psychological harassment. "Sometimes we would interact with the young (Palestinian) men, ask why they were stopped and ensure it was not beyond the 'normal' harassment." She added, "It was always young men they harassed, especially on Fridays when they wanted to go to the Ibrahimi mosque

for prayers.” In 1994 an Israeli settler massacred 29 Muslim worshippers and wounded more than 100 others at the Ibrahimi mosque. The Ibrahimi mosque is currently surrounded by Israeli soldiers who have erected barricades to control access to it.

Elizabeth believed her presence in Hebron helped to deter violent conflict, particularly on Shuhada Street near her home base in the centre of Hebron. Once Hebron’s main thoroughfare, Shuhada Street was closed by the State of Israel to Palestinian vehicles and most pedestrian traffic. “The doors to Palestinian homes on Shuhada Street are welded and bolted shut,” she said. Palestinians living on Shuhada Street climb over rooftops and use windows to access their homes. “There were times when we would have to get in the way (between Israelis and Palestinians) and remind them they needed to respect each other,” she added. Elizabeth noted the ever-present potential for violence in Hebron. “Palestinians are not allowed to carry any weapons,” she said. “But (Israeli) settlers carry AK47s and M16s. One Saturday morning I counted eight men with M16s entering the synagogue.”

Elizabeth and her C.P.T. team-mate also helped a Palestinian farmer harvest grain on his farm near Hebron. Israeli settlers from Kiryat Arba, an illegal settlement near Hebron, had attacked the farmer’s goats and destroyed his grape vines. Elizabeth said that when the farmer went to harvest his grain by hand, the settlers stoned him. When Elizabeth and her team-mate were helping the farmer, “small children from the settlement stood at the (farmer’s) fence and yelled at us in Hebrew. A group of settlers walked through the field while we harvested but we ignored them.” By her presence, Elizabeth

believed she was able to deter an act of violence against the farmer. For Elizabeth, “being present” and “doing something” were one and the same.

## **Discussion**

The activities described by the participants gave them first-hand accounts of the social context of Palestinian life under occupation. For Olivia, Sue and Bill, those accounts came from meetings with Palestinians and excursions in the West Bank where they were exposed to the poor living conditions in Palestine and the mechanisms Israelis use to control the occupied territories. These visits were the result of ecumenical efforts coordinated by Sabeel as part of its international advocacy strategy to encourage Western Christians to engage their governments to pursue peace based on justice.<sup>243</sup> The locally-hosted encounters with Palestinians appeared effective in exposing Olivia, Bill and Sue to the cultural and political context of Palestinian Christianity. These witness visits enabled Olivia, Sue and Bill to better advocate in Canada, in line with Sabeel’s goal of encouraging international support for the Palestinian people.

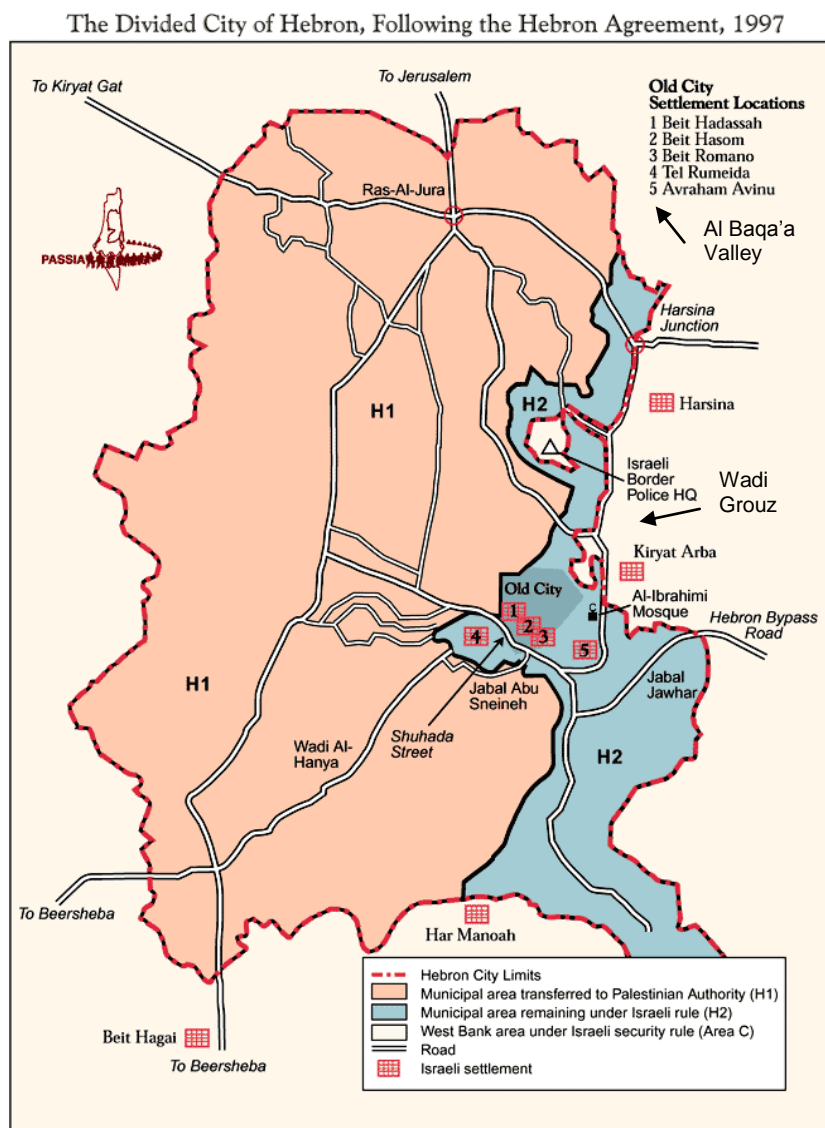
The longer-term involvement of the other participants gave them first-hand experience with the violence Palestinians endure as they go about their daily lives. Kerri’s act of living in solidarity with Palestinians in East Jerusalem helped her feel the pain of people being evicted from their homes and removed from their land. Anna’s activities brought her to an encounter with the violent military response of the State of Israel to Palestinian protests in the West Bank. Her activities also led her to meet with ex-

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<sup>243</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 159.

soldiers in Hebron who refused to participate in such violence. Map 6 below shows how the city of Hebron has been divided by the occupation.

Map 6. Occupation of Hebron<sup>244</sup>



**Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs  
(PASSIA)**

<sup>244</sup> Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs, *The Divided City of Hebron* [map], Scale not given, [http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/Hebron-1997.html](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/Hebron-1997.html) (accessed August 24, 2014). Reprinted with permission.



Robert's accompaniment efforts showed him the daily humiliation and harassment the Israeli military inflicted on Palestinians of all ages. Robert and Elizabeth witnessed the deliberate harm that illegal Israeli settlements had on the people and land of Palestine as well as the determination of the people to not allow settlers to displace them from the land. In addition, the experiences of Robert and Elizabeth showed the power that one's presence and witness could offer in deterring violence and aggression.

The participants' activities were organized by Sabeel, C.P.T and E.A.P.P.I. and their experiences reflected the goals of those organizations that included having Westerners witness and resist the occupation of the West Bank. When viewed through the lens of Ateek's liberation theology, these activities allowed the participants opportunity to participate in varying degrees in the liberation of the Palestinian people. The dynamic nature of liberation theology was revealed in the way the participants' praxes lead to a deeper understanding of the context of life under occupation. For example, the time spent by the participants in Palestine allowed them to see that the systematic dispossession of the Palestinian people from their land, as well as their humiliation and dehumanization, was generally hidden behind the dominant narrative that the military occupation is a matter of national security for the State of Israel as discussed earlier in this paper. It seemed the more time the participants spent in Palestine, the greater their impression that the major narrative about the occupation as self-defense unjustly framed the Palestinian people in a negative manner. In terms of Raheb's contextual theology, this involvement

of Western volunteers was a connection between the Western and Arab worlds, a connection based not on dependence or influence but on respect and equality.

**(ii) Specific activities that held religious meaning**

**Responses**

Although none of the participants associated a spiritual experience with visits to traditional sites of Christian pilgrimage, several did connect a religious experience to a physical place in occupied Palestine. For example, Olivia described seeing a shepherd and sheep near Hebron that reminded her of a scene in a Sunday school book, until she learned that Israelis from a nearby illegal settlement occasionally killed some of the sheep at night. “It must have been like that thousands of years ago for those writings (about dangers to flocks of sheep) to have gotten into the Bible in the first place,” she said. “Examples of good shepherds and warnings of evil shepherds are in the Bible and both are still very real in this land (Palestine-Israel) today.” For Olivia, “this sense of the need to be discerning – to recognize, appreciate and relate to the good shepherd and to be wary of those who have evil intent – is timeless wisdom and good advice that gives an enduring quality to the scripture written in the Bible thousands of years ago.”

Sue found something spiritual about the sense of a common humanity that she felt while sharing time with a Palestinian family in their home in Bethlehem. The spiritual aspect of that experience came from the feeling of being united in hope with people far from Sue’s own home.

Bill experienced a spiritual moment while walking on a dirt path between Cana and Nazareth in the State of Israel (Map 3, page 38). He heard gunfire and saw an Israeli militia coming over the crest of a hill. “I felt like I was watching Roman troops coming on the road to Jerusalem,” he said, adding that this made him feel connected to the early Christian movement. This led Bill to believe that today’s Palestinians and the historical Jesus were united in a common objective of ending oppression.

Anna found spiritual meaning during her work in Palestine after a period of despair. “For a while I was struggling with my faith and didn’t know how to believe in Jesus’ resurrection,” she wrote. “Walking through checkpoints, settlements, seeing the division, I felt hopeless.” But at this low point the thought came to her that, “there is only hope for this country when there is a God who is stronger than fear, hatred and even stronger than death. That’s why my beliefs about the resurrection became stronger. As human beings, we’ll never manage to solve conflicts, to reconcile and to love our enemies without a God who is able to overcome hatred, separation, even death.” Of this realization, Anna wrote, “that’s when I felt close to God. I didn’t necessarily feel close to God during demonstrations or whatsoever [sic].” For Anna, spiritual meaning was associated with the experience of daily life in Palestine, not as much with the “doing” as with the “being.”

For other participants, the main spiritual meaning they gained from their activities came from what Sue described earlier as “doing the right thing.” For example, in her presentations to tour groups, Kerri tried to move their focus from “I Walked Today

Where Jesus Walked” to “Where Is Jesus Walking Today?” She wrote, “I share scripture with the groups, applying it to the situation here and how we, as Christians, need to respond to situations of injustice and oppression.” For Kerri, spiritual meaning emerged from the process of contextualizing scripture and developing and sharing interpretations of that scripture in light of the daily injustices experienced by the Palestinian people. Kerri also found meaning in sharing her way of understanding her own spiritual journey with Palestinian Christian women who understood their own journeys differently.

Robert’s feeling about living in Bethlehem, a land filled with biblical stories, did not conform to what he considered a sense of traditional spirituality. Instead, Robert found spiritual meaning while observing Palestinians going about their daily lives. “Watching the resilience of Palestinians trying to hold on to what is important to them,” he said, “and the sense of prayer and purpose that goes along with that, the giving of oneself to God and recognizing that God believes in peace with justice, all this convinced me their efforts were not without merit.” For Robert, the most spiritual moments came not from contemplative reflection but from the sense of community among his E.A.P.P.I. colleagues. “The sense of connection to one another and that the struggle is important, standing in solidarity is important. Learning Palestinians’ stories and sharing them in Canada,” Robert added, “are spiritual tasks.”

For Elizabeth, the greatest spiritual meaning arose in situations that brought to light the resilience and commitment to nonviolence held by the people she dealt with. She spoke of being called to the Al Baqa’a valley where the Israeli military was demolishing

two homes. When Elizabeth arrived in Al Baqa'a the barrier previously erected by the Israeli military to stop vehicles from entering the village had come down to allow the military's bull-dozer to enter. Elizabeth then observed the demolition of a new home that the owner had not yet had a chance to live in. "Palestinians apply (to Israeli authorities) for building permits. They never get them," she said, "but they build anyway. This home was demolished in eight minutes to a pile of rubble with dust rising. Women from the community were hysterical, crying, the children were very frightened, clung to their mothers' skirts." A convoy of fifteen to twenty soldiers had prevented people from getting near the building. After the bull-dozer left, the convoy started to leave. "He (the owner of the house) followed the soldiers with both arms out-stretched to keep the women back...and then he shook hands with each soldier and shared his cigarettes. They smoked together, the soldiers got in their trucks and left." Elizabeth was taken by the power of this man's commitment to non-violence and how he treated those who were supposedly his enemy. "Then we all went into the garden," she added, "contacted B'Tselem and the Red Cross to bring tents, food, clothing, whatever the family needs. All the men talked of what happened, the impact on their lives, but there was no talk of vengeance, getting even, nothing like that." It was a deeply spiritual experience for Elizabeth to witness how the command of Jesus to love one's enemy<sup>245</sup> was taken seriously in such difficult circumstances.

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<sup>245</sup> "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; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous" (Mt 5:43-45).

Elizabeth also described a spiritual feeling that had caught her by surprise. “It was my first time in Palestine,” she said, “and I had a moment of overwhelming joy. What was it? It felt so good. Where did it come from? It was almost physical. I did not question it further, I immersed myself in the feeling, let myself enjoy it. It has happened several times since then.” However, Elizabeth did not attach the occurrences of this elated feeling to any particular events during her stay in Palestine. Instead, she said, “it was a matter of being in the right place, at the right time, doing the right thing: following God’s lead. I was freed from myself and felt at one with all creation, at one with the Creator, all from being true to myself.”

## **Discussion**

In their descriptions of spiritual moments, the participants revealed how they theologized or derived theological meaning from events they experienced as individual international volunteers. For Olivia, Bill and Elizabeth, these meanings generally reflected a deeper connection to scripture. In Anna’s case this connection to scripture created a greater awareness of the role of the power of the cross, similar to the understanding of Bonhoeffer and Raheb that only a God who suffers can be the God of human salvation.<sup>246</sup>

For Sue and Robert, meaning arose from the feelings aroused by experiences with Palestinians and, in the case of Robert, with other like-minded internationals volunteering in Palestine. For Kerri however, spiritual meaning was associated with getting closer to experiencing and understanding the Palestinian “other” as well as appreciating the

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<sup>246</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 44.

different spiritual perspective of that “other.” Kerri also found meaning in the process of helping Western Christians appreciate the difference between Western and Palestinian theological worldviews. In most of these cases, the spiritual meaning appeared to be more in line with the early Christian experience of fellowship at Pentecost rather than the individual piety characteristic of pre-20<sup>th</sup> century Western Christianity.

Elizabeth’s narrative about the house demolitions in the Al Baqa’a valley reveals the possibility of a Palestinian seeing his or her opponent as a neighbour. According to the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, over 27,000 Palestinian structures have been demolished in the occupied territories since 1967.<sup>247</sup> The Palestinian response witnessed by Elizabeth brings to mind the understanding in the *Kairos Palestine Document* that resisting injustice can be based on love for one’s neighbour.<sup>248</sup> Such love also makes possible Jean Zaru’s concept of reconciliation that involves seeing the humanity in one another and working together for the respectful co-existence of Israelis and Palestinians.<sup>249</sup> Together these suggest that the occupation could end, not by winning a war along the lines of the biblical conquest paradigm, but by building what Marc Ellis calls a new community, “one of equality and human dignity.”<sup>250</sup> Indeed, as Ateek points

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<sup>247</sup> Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, <http://www.icahd.org/the-facts> (accessed February 14, 2014).

<sup>248</sup> “Love is seeing the face of God in every human being... However (this) does not mean accepting evil or aggression on their part. Rather this love seeks to correct the evil and stop the aggression.” Patriarchs and Heads of Churches in Jerusalem, *A Moment of Truth*, 4.2.1.

<sup>249</sup> Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*, 78.

<sup>250</sup> Ellis, *Unholy Alliance: Religion and Atrocity in Our Time*, 174.

out, the Palestine Liberation Organization has always proposed one democratic state for all Palestinians and Jews.<sup>251</sup>

For all participants, the connection they felt to God while in Palestine came not as much from being near traditionally holy sites as it was from experiencing new contexts that gave them new or deeper understandings of biblical messages they had already heard. Each spiritual moment described by the participants was dependent upon their having already engaged in the activities they spoke of earlier. For Elizabeth, however, her active engagement led her to situations where she felt she was fully the person she was created by God to be, and the feeling was blissful. Elizabeth's experience reveals how faith and praxis are integrated in a dynamic relationship such that her sense of something mystical was intrinsic to, and inseparable from, praxis.

The descriptions of spiritually meaningful experiences reflected personal, rather than universal, experiences of being Christian that were dependent on the specific context in which they arose. This uniqueness illustrates how context is simultaneously internal, in terms of one's personality and values, and external, in terms of one's culture and environment. The participants' reflections revealed how praxis and reflection inform one another in the spiral relationship characteristic of liberation theology as shown at the end of Chapter One. When viewed in light of Raheb's contextual theology, the participants' reflections also revealed how the participants' own context as international witnesses in Palestine could help them to interpret the religious significance of certain experiences they submitted themselves to.

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<sup>251</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 165.



**Q3 Unique characteristics of doing liberation theology in the occupied territories, examples of common encounters and biblical reinterpretations**

**Responses**

The short time frames of conferences and witness visits did not afford Olivia, Sue and Bill many opportunities to consider liberation theology in the occupied territories. Olivia believed Palestinian liberation theology was drawing attention to how interpretations of Hebrew Scriptures were used to justify oppressing a group of people. Olivia recalled a speech by Naim Ateek at Sabeel's Bethlehem conference in 2011 when Ateek said it was important for Christians to find a new way to understand and relate to the Christian faith. "In the past," she said, "some Jews and Christians considered the story of Moses leading the Hebrews out of slavery and towards the Promised Land as the primary liberation example. But now I realize that story is not the best or most helpful story of God liberating those in peril. We need a story, or interpretation of a story, of a universal God that loves and protects all people, and especially supports those in trouble, so that all people may share life and its gifts together."

Sue was also concerned about historicizing violent events in the Hebrew Scriptures. "There is too much violence in it (the Hebrew Scriptures). I could not read it so I stopped trying. The only parts I value now are the teachings of Jesus."

Both Kerri and Bill expressed an appreciation for the effectiveness of Palestinian liberation theology's tradition of non-violent resistance as discussed in Chapter Three. Kerri recognized how non-violent the Palestinian people were in the way they approach the difficulties of daily life in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Bill too was intrigued by the widespread commitment of Palestinians to non-violence. "Palestinians referred to Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. as much as they did to the teachings of Jesus," he said. Bill felt inspired by the Palestinian commitment to non-violence in the face of violent oppression. Bill told of how he stood alongside a Palestinian man at a checkpoint. An Israeli soldier ridiculed the Palestinian man while examining the man's passbook. However, the Palestinian remained calm, Bill said, "in spite of the fact the soldier's objective was to belittle him in front of internationals."

Bill was disappointed that the minister and congregation of his church were uninterested in hearing about what he had learned about Palestine. "I had to go to the occupied territories so I could give a firsthand eye-witness," he said. However, Bill still found it difficult to engage his minister's interest after his witness visit. For Bill, the lack of interest among Canadians posed a challenge to Palestinian liberation theology. Following a presentation he made in Canada about his witness visit, a Lebanese Canadian member of the audience approached Bill and revealed he was actually a Palestinian who had come to Canada by way of Lebanon. He thanked Bill for bringing to light a part of his history he had previously been reluctant to share with other Canadians. This experience confirmed for Bill the importance of doing advocacy work in Canada.

Elizabeth also embraced Palestinian liberation theology's commitment to non-violence. She noted how internationals were able to effectively use non-violent tactics to resist the occupation. "When settlers throw rocks and smash outside lights," she said, "we act as deterrents by our presence. We carry cameras and video cameras, they are our weapons." She gave the example of how two female C.P.T. volunteers in Hebron managed to stop a group of six male Israeli soldiers from following them and pestering them with sexual comments. "They (the C.P.T. women) turned around, videotaped the soldiers, and announced they would put the video on the C.P.T. web site that night." Elizabeth also spoke of Palestinians taking to the streets in Hebron in 2009 to protest Israel's "Operation Cast Lead" in Gaza. "Israeli soldiers responded with tear gas, sound grenades and rubber bullets," she said. "We went there as a non-violent presence. We encouraged Palestinians to be calm and to not provoke the soldiers because they would retaliate ten-fold. We were tear-gassed."

Elizabeth believed the way the occupation affected children presented a unique challenge for Palestinian liberation theology. "Six soldiers apprehended a 10 or 11 year-old boy. He was screaming," she said. "We intervened and the soldiers let him go. But children are usually taken to the military base. They handcuff them, blindfold them, make them kneel, harass them, shout at them and accuse them, usually of throwing stones." Then Elizabeth asked, "What is the impact on children?" Elizabeth admitted she only saw Israeli settler children peripherally but questioned how settler children were affected by growing up in this environment. "Seeing the 'other' as the enemy, being encouraged to

yell at Palestinians for fun, hearing their mothers yell obscenities, what is the impact on those (Israeli settler) children?” she asked.

For Anna, special characteristics of Palestinian liberation theology emerged in weekly ecumenical Bible studies at the Sabeel office. “It’s good to study together and learn from one another,” she wrote. “Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox, Anglican, Lutheran, Mennonite, Reformed – all so different. During our Bible study, and I must add also during weekly communion we celebrate on Thursday (where everyone is invited), we read scripture and try to make it relevant and applicable for our lives here in Jerusalem and Palestine. Often people read a story (e.g. a Gospel story) and try to connect it to ‘being Christian under occupation.’ Jesus lived under occupation as well and following his example, people try to make the stories, especially the Gospel stories, relevant for today’s life under occupation.”

Robert also connected Palestinian life under occupation to the life Jesus lived under occupation. He believed the paradigm of Empire that was present at the time of Jesus was evident during his term in Israel and Palestine. For example, Robert made a connection between the power structures imposed upon Palestinians today and those imposed during the time of Jesus.

Robert then described witnessing the Israeli military using its power to subjugate Palestinians. He was particularly affected by witnessing what he considered the Israeli military’s routine violations of the 4<sup>th</sup> Geneva Convention at Checkpoint 300 at the wall

between Bethlehem and Jerusalem.<sup>252</sup> “In Bethlehem I lived 100 metres from the wall on the main road to Jerusalem. I would see ambulances heading to Jerusalem having to join the line of vehicles when they should be automatically allowed to transit through. But often,” he added, “they would be pulled aside and searched more thoroughly than any other vehicle.” Robert understood from conversations with physicians in the area that only the most serious medical cases would be transported by ambulance from the West Bank to the hospital in East Jerusalem. He believed using intimidation tactics during medical emergencies violated international law and were meant to show control, in his words, “of an Empire with an iron fist.”

Robert also recounted an instance where he saw ambulances heading to a site where settlers had shot a Palestinian. “When I arrived at the sight,” Robert said, “the Israeli military and the settlers were on one side of the *wadi* (valley or dry riverbed) and the Palestinians were on the other... there were three ambulances sitting on the road at the bottom of the *wadi* and the Israeli military fired tear gas at them.”

Robert added that he believed that most Israelis had little or no knowledge of what happens in the West Bank. While at a reception at the Canadian ambassador’s residence, an Israeli man said to Robert, “I used to know what was going on in places like Bethlehem all the time, now I don’t. It’s like somebody has built a wall.” Robert wondered how this Israeli man could not know his country had actually built a wall

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<sup>252</sup> “Persons regularly and solely engaged in the operation and administration of civilian hospitals, including the personnel engaged in the search for, removal and transporting of and caring for wounded and sick civilians, the infirm and maternity cases shall be respected and protected.” Article 20, *Convention (IV) relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War*, August 12, 1949, <http://www.icrc.org/ihl> (accessed February 23, 2014).

through the West Bank. Robert came to believe that many Israeli civilians were like this man, good and just, but because of state control over the media, they likely did not know everything their state was doing in the West Bank.

## **Discussion**

The participants' responses in this section often reflected an awareness of the need to reinterpret the Bible in light of the Palestinian experience of oppression under occupation. In a dynamic relationship with experience, this awareness was best approached by the process of contextualizing theology. For example, Robert framed the parallels between the Israeli occupation today and the Roman occupation of Jesus' day in terms of Empire and unjust structures of control. These structural injustices have been documented by the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions.<sup>253</sup> Robert's comments reflected a process of contextualizing theology through which he determined a way of making scripture relevant in occupied Palestine.

The weekly Bible studies described by Anna were characteristic of the base ecclesial communities in Latin America, where lay members interpret the gospel in the light of their contemporary experience of oppression. Participants like Anna in Sabeel's weekly Bible studies, like their counterparts in Latin America, read scripture in light of current events to help them determine a Christian response to those events.

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<sup>253</sup> "(The State of) Israel's 'Matrix of Control' is a maze of laws, military orders, planning procedures, limitations on movement, kafkaesque bureaucracy, settlements and infrastructure – augmented by prolonged and ceaseless low-intensity warfare – that serves to perpetuate the Occupation, to administer it with a minimum of military presence and, ultimately, to conceal it behind massive Israeli 'facts on the ground' and a bland façade of 'proper administration.'" Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, <http://www.icahd.org/matrix-of-control> (accessed August 11, 2014).

Most participants believed the ways the language and literal interpretations of Hebrew Scripture passages are used to justify the violence of the occupation present a strong theological challenge for those seeking to end the occupation. In particular, Olivia's assessment of Western Christian support of the biblical conquest paradigm that supports the occupation echoes the analysis presented in Chapter One with respect to Western Christianity's complicity in oppressing the masses in Latin America.

Themes of justice for the people and justice for the land were prominent in the interview responses, consistent with the major themes and foundations of Palestinian liberation theology in Chapter Three. All the types of situations described by the participants have been documented by organizations like the United Nations, MACHSOM Watch and B'Tselem as described in Chapter Two. The systematic mistreatment of Palestinian children by the Israeli military described by Elizabeth is corroborated by the United Nations Children's Fund and occurs nowhere else in the world.<sup>254</sup>

The constant threat of violence highlighted to most participants the value of non-violent resistance. This commitment to non-violent resistance is best viewed through the lens of Naim Ateek's liberation theology, by virtue of that theology's focus on the temporal "now" of the occupation. In this regard, Sue's comment about reading only the New Testament likely reflects not a supersessionist reading strategy but a need among

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<sup>254</sup> "The pattern of ill-treatment includes the arrests of children at their homes between midnight and 5:00 am by heavily armed soldiers; the practice of blindfolding children and tying their hands with plastic ties; physical and verbal abuse during transfer to an interrogation site, including the use of painful restraints; lack of access to water, food, toilet facilities and medical care; interrogation using physical violence and threats; coerced confessions; and lack of access to lawyers or family members during interrogation." United Nations Children's Fund, *Children in Israeli Military Detention: Observations and Recommendations* (Jerusalem: UNICEF, February 2013), 14.

Western Christians to better understand and reinterpret the violence in scripture not as historical fact but as a reflection of how God was thought of in biblical times.<sup>255</sup>

The themes noted above reflect a Western understanding by a select group of people of the unique characteristics of doing liberation theology in Palestine and this understanding is generally framed in terms of Western political thought. What matters most to these volunteers, and to Palestinians in general according to Raheb and Ateek, is the physical liberation of Palestine from Israeli occupation and the repatriation of refugees. The dynamic of resistance however differs somewhat between Western volunteers and Palestinians given the difference in their social power relative to the military power of the State of Israel. Whereas the focus of these volunteers is on resisting and ending the occupation today, the Palestinian concern, according to Raheb in particular, also includes laying the social, cultural and economic foundation for a post-occupation Palestinian society that draws upon the people's Arab heritage.

**Q4 How did your involvement in those activities affect your religious “faith”?**

- (i) Did your “faith” change as a result of those activities?**
- (ii) If yes, in what way did your “faith” change?**
- (iii) Did this, or would this, change in your “faith” result in a change in future activities you might consider?**
- (iv) If yes, how did, or would, the type of activities be different from the ones you engaged in?**

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<sup>255</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 82.



## Responses

The questionnaire's weakness of not defining what was meant by the word "faith" resurfaced in responses to Question 4 that did not distinguish between belief as a matter of knowledge and understanding, and faith as a matter of concern and personal commitment. As Paul Tillich wrote, faith is a centered action of the human mind that participates in all the dynamics of personal life.<sup>256</sup> Olivia referred to this idea of faith when she said her witness visit did not change her faith and that she remained "who I have always been." However, she became more aware and critical of other people's interpretations of the Bible that suggested the modern State of Israel was the land promised to Jews through God's covenant with Abraham (Gen 12:6b-7).<sup>257</sup> Olivia indicated that she had believed such ideas in the past without questioning them, but after visiting Palestine she wanted to challenge them whenever she heard them.

Olivia grew more sensitive to preaching and biblical interpretations that condoned violence in the Hebrew Scriptures and indicated she felt more compelled to engage and challenge those thoughts and interpretations. Olivia spoke of the renewed understanding that she had of the role of nonviolence in Jesus' ministry. She indicated that she had read and reflected more on the writings of Walter Wink, an American biblical scholar who wrote about non-violent resistance, and the relevance of those texts to Palestinians today as well as to Jewish people in Jesus' day. "It comes alive to me now," she said.

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<sup>256</sup> Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 4.

<sup>257</sup> "...At that time the Canaanites were in the land. Then the LORD appeared to Abram, and said, 'To your offspring I will give this land.'" (Gen 12:6b-7).

“Christians today should resonate with non-violence.” Olivia added she “now interprets non-violent resistance in Palestine as being part of the ancient Christian way (of life).”

Looking forward, Olivia recognized that Christianity was undergoing a period of transition. “Christians are undergoing changes. Who or what is God? How do we talk about God? How do we talk to God?” she asked. “We have not yet got those things sorted out.” For Olivia, questioning the use of the Bible to support the occupation of the Palestinian Territories and the displacement of the Palestinian people was part of a larger process of questioning that Christians needed to face if their religion was to endure. Olivia believed visiting Palestine and working for justice in Canada formed “part of the process of growing and maturing my faith understanding.” This strengthened her resolve to continue with advocating in Canada on behalf of the Palestinian people.

Sue did not indicate that her witness visit had changed her “faith” but she expressed disappointment that “there was little interest when I returned about hearing my story.” She was particularly disheartened that the minister of her church seemed reluctant to hear about the *Nakba* and the occupation of Palestinian Territories. Sue’s resolve to continue advocating in Canada on behalf of Palestinians reflected a deepening in her belief that violence, particularly in the context of the occupation, was incompatible with her understanding of the nature of God.

Bill felt strongly that the oppression of the Palestinian people had to be countered by human action. “We are part of creation,” he said. “We cannot really explain the connection. We (human beings) are all in the same boat. When someone hurts, I hurt,

despite the distance.” Bill said that responding to injustice by getting more involved in advocacy work in Canada was central to his sense of self, no matter where in the world the injustice occurred.

As indicated earlier, Anna’s belief in the resurrection of Christ deepened as a result of her experience of living in Palestine. “Getting to know Palestinian Christians made me aware of the fact that my own faith is so European – I realized that I too have a contextual faith.” For Anna, living and worshipping with Palestinians showed her not only how Palestinians understood scripture in light of their own context, but how her understanding of scripture was shaped by her own context as well. “I became more aware of the contextual nature of all theology,” she wrote, “and of the need to have a theology that speaks to us in our own circumstances, whether the circumstances of Palestinians under occupation or the circumstances of Christians in Europe.” This experience influenced the direction of Anna’s career in Europe where she decided to devote much of her time to ending the occupation. Looking to the future, Anna wrote, “I might not necessarily do different things... but I might do them in a different way, being more aware of the need to contextualize theology. I find it difficult to attribute this change to my involvement with Sabeel only, though, as there are also other events in my life that made me change a bit more.”

Kerri indicated her long-term experience of living and working in the Palestinian Christian community has definitely changed her beliefs. Kerri found that Palestinian Christians generally focus on the teachings of Jesus, particularly the Sermon on the

Mount (Mt 5-7), and that this focus reoriented her beliefs such that justice became the heart of her ministry. The way that Kerri read the Bible had also changed. “I see how the Bible has been used to oppress people and how the violent stories of the Hebrew Scriptures are very real here and have consequences that affect people’s lives today.” Kerri gave the story of Joshua and the destruction of Jericho (Josh 6:2, 6:21)<sup>258</sup> as an example of a text that, when applied literally to the Israeli occupation, appeared to justify the dispossession of Palestinians from their land.

Looking forward, Kerri was interested in exploring how spiritual issues work with justice issues. Kerri drew on her Methodist background when she wrote, “Wesley talks about acts of piety and acts of mercy so this type of thinking is foundational to the Methodist tradition. It makes me more appreciative of my own tradition.” For Kerri, the re-focusing of her faith toward justice issues created an opportunity to value her own religious tradition and to explore it more deeply.

Elizabeth experienced what she labeled “a paradigm shift in terms of my (Christian) faith based on the understanding I developed of Islam and Judaism.” “I see elements in both Judaism and Islam that embrace non-violent resistance and respect for basic human rights,” she said. “There is a spirit within that compels them (Jews and Muslims) to work for equal rights, to live together in peace and community,” she added, “and I see this spirit more now than before.” Although Elizabeth said she saw common elements of violence in Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities, she believed the

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<sup>258</sup> “The LORD said to Joshua, ‘See, I have handed Jericho over to you, along with its king and soldiers’” (Josh 6:2). The wall around Jericho fell and “Then they (God’s people) devoted to destruction by the edge of the sword all in the city, both men and women, young and old, oxen, sheep and donkeys” (Josh 6:21).

common elements of non-violence in all three faith traditions were stronger. Elizabeth gave the example of a group of Jewish women known as the “Women in Black” that held a protest every Friday at a major intersection in West Jerusalem. These women held black signs in the shape of a hand with “Stop the Occupation” written in English, Hebrew and Arabic and, according to Elizabeth, endured much verbal abuse from passing vehicles and pedestrians for taking such a public stand.

Elizabeth also developed what she called “a better awareness of how passive our (Christian) peace position is.” “People are comfortable in their pews in church, singing peace songs, listening to peace sermons, but never taking it beyond the pew, going into the community, taking the risks, making the sacrifices to truly become the people of God’s peace,” she said. This comment brought to Elizabeth’s mind a term she had read on the internet, “slack-tivists,” to describe people who go no further than reading about social activism.

Elizabeth went to Palestine with C.P.T. several times and would like to go again. She remained committed to speaking out and making presentations in Canada about her experience in Palestine. Elizabeth knew, from the way her first exposure to C.P.T. changed the course of her life, that presentations “are a way of fanning the sparks into a flame of passion and compassion.” “It’s rewarding,” she added, “when people want to know about C.P.T. and have similar values, understanding and passion and want to put their own faith into action.” Elizabeth also said, “I am aware of the need for people to get

out there, to be a voice for God's love and peace, to be the hands and feet of God. I identify myself as Christian and I want there to be evidence."

In contrast to Elizabeth's insight about the common goodness of humanity, Robert gained from his experience in Palestine a greater appreciation of the nature of evil. "I now understand the presence of evil in the world far more dramatically," he said. "Evil is rooted in the presence of Empire but can be extended to Palestinians who are amongst the militants who hate the Jews... I understand evil as a living breathing reality. I had seen glimpses of evil before but I had never seen how a group of people can be brought to hatred and to see another human being as less than they are." Robert believed the message of Jesus and the Prophets issued a strong call for all people to counter evil by having more of a sense of humility.

Robert indicated he had a long history of peace activism. "I oftentimes felt that peace, no matter what, was important," he said. "But that passage in Jeremiah 6:14, 'saying peace, peace when there is no peace...' resonates more fully with me now. How I read scripture is different...I am more engaged in trying to understand the struggles in Palestine-Israel and to relate scripture to the reality of the context there today." Robert's experience in Palestine made him believe that although peace was important, it must be accompanied by justice.

But Robert also indicated he better understood scripture that speaks of righteous anger. Robert said this understanding came from "having sat by the bedside of a 13 year-old who was 150 metres from the wall when he was shot and seriously wounded in the

kidney, liver area; having sat with the family of a 17 year-old who had a bullet lodged in his brain and seeing how his family was affected; and having sat with a man shot by a settler, hearing him tell me about the incident and how he was in his mid-20s with two young daughters and needed to recover for them.” Referring to the man in his mid-20s, Robert said that “he was wounded in the abdomen, which happens most often because it presents more long-term problems, affects organs and is susceptible to infection.” Robert believed that experiences like these helped him to understand how his feeling of righteous anger could function to call him to work for the benefit of others even when those others were unknown to him. Like Sue in her response to Question 2 (ii), Robert had gained a new understanding of “neighbour” that transcended physical distance.

Thinking of the future, Robert was committed to sharing his witness of Palestine to Canadians. “I cannot break faith with so many people I came to know, love and respect within the Palestinian population. I cannot break faith with them,” he said. “They told me to go to Canada and tell their stories. To not tell their stories breaks my faith with them and with God.” “What Palestinians desire,” he added later, “is the same as for most us, to live in peace and to have hope for the next generation.”

## **Discussion**

Participants who were in Palestine for the shortest lengths of time generally indicated that reflecting on their experiences strengthened their faith, as a matter of “concern about the

truly ultimate,<sup>259</sup> but altered their beliefs in the sense of becoming more inclined to adopt a hermeneutic of suspicion when interpreting scripture. These reflections deepened their resolve to continue with the same social justice and advocacy efforts they were already involved in. When understood in the context of the life history of these participants, their experience in Palestine and theological response to it were but one chapter in an ongoing life story wherein praxis and reflection continually informed one another in a spiral relationship.

Bill's comment about the interconnectedness of human beings is best viewed in light of a contextualized theology of creation that holds that all human beings are equal. This suggests that for Bill, ending injustice is an inherently proper thing to do without needing to refer to concepts of human liberation or structural sin.

The four participants who spent the most amount of time in Palestine offered the deepest theological reflections on their experiences and indicated the biggest changes in the course of their lives as a result. Anna, for example, devotes much of her time in Europe to ending the occupation. As a result of her early experiences in Palestine, Kerri determined to spend much of the past eight years living in East Jerusalem. For Elizabeth, her first term with C.P.T. in Palestine led to several more terms with C.P.T. in Palestine as well as another conflict area in the Middle East. For Robert, theological reflection on his experiences helped him make use of his "righteous anger." These participants' answers to the questions in this section seemed to confirm the existence for them of an

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<sup>259</sup> Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 12



ongoing spiral relationship between praxis and reflection consistent with Tillich's understanding of faith as an act of the total personality.<sup>260</sup>

Anna's comments in particular revealed her awareness that her own theology is influenced by her European cultural and historical background, and makes use of the relationship between faith and culture that Mitri Raheb believes is important. Anna's comments also reflect the concept that an objective "view from nowhere" does not exist and confirms Philip Lemasters' assertion that the theologian's context influences the outcome of his or her theological inquiry.<sup>261</sup> Anna's comments highlight how Palestinian liberation theology contributes to the context of the experiences as narrated by the participants and how it influences their reflections on those experiences. This helps explain the reason the three most prominent themes in Palestinian liberation theology, justice, the universality of God's love and the theology of the land, are also prominent in the participants' responses to the questions asked of them. This also reveals the dynamic relationship between praxis, context, liberation and theological reflection.

Anna's greater awareness of context raises another weakness in the present research project: whether someone implicated in the ideology of Western culture and Western Christianity can represent the issues of Palestinian Christianity. As Palestinian intellectual Edward Said (1935–2003) writes, this issue about representing an "other" is always present "in discussing the problems of human experience."<sup>262</sup> Anna's comments

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<sup>260</sup> Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 4.

<sup>261</sup> Lemasters, "Theology from the Underside of History," 47.

<sup>262</sup> Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 325.

show that the participants' contributions to this thesis and their descriptions of the Palestinian context, as well as the researcher's discussion of those contributions and descriptions, are matters of Western interpretation rather than Palestinian representation.

Robert's comments about Empire touched on the balance of power between the State of Israel and the Palestinians as well as the different relationships God has with the powerful and the powerless. Empire in the Palestinian context appears to be at the intersection of the local and the global, for the oppression of the Palestinian people takes place within a web of regional and international power relationships. Blending liberation and contextual theologies, Robert's comments synthesized his experience-based socio-political analysis of the occupation with his contextualized interpretation of scripture. Robert's comments seemed to share the belief of Metz and Gutiérrez that remaining silent in the face of oppression could amount to tacit support for that oppression.<sup>263</sup> In addition, Robert's conviction revealed that his faith was a matter of deep personal integrity and of "being ultimately concerned."

Elizabeth's comments appeared to reflect Jean Zaru's concept of peace being a process as well as the presence of social justice,<sup>264</sup> and Bonhoeffer's understanding that being Christian came with a responsibility to resist injustice.<sup>265</sup> The "Women in Black" mentioned by Elizabeth were among the first volunteers that joined Machsom Watch to witness Israeli military activity at checkpoints in the occupied territories. Using the

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<sup>263</sup> Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation*, 40.

<sup>264</sup> Zaru, *Occupied with Nonviolence: A Palestinian Woman Speaks*, 83-84.

<sup>265</sup> Jeanron, "From Resistance to Liberation Theology," 193.

“Women in Black” as an example, Elizabeth seemed to find the combination of the non-violent ethic of the three faiths created a larger moral space that gave her cause to hope for justice. Such an understanding arises from Mitri’s Raheb’s contextualized approach to praxis that considers the presence of three major faiths in the land of Palestine.

**Q5 Did your experience change the way you interpret the Bible or understand your religious tradition? If so, how? Are there any Bible passages that you understand differently now than you did before you became involved in resisting the Occupation?**

### **Responses**

Following her witness experiences, Olivia became more sensitive about hearing people connect the modern State of Israel in the Middle East to the people of Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures. Olivia in particular appeared aware that the Bible can be used to make history by virtue of the conquest paradigm. She also began to question the historicity of God’s role in events like the destruction of Jericho and expulsion of Canaanites (Ex 33:2).<sup>266</sup> This caused Olivia to oppose inserting the current displacement of Palestinians into biblical narratives of destruction and dispossession as a way of supporting the policies of the State of Israel with respect to the Palestinian population.

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<sup>266</sup> “I (God) will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, and Perizzites, the Hivites and Jebusites” (Ex 33:2).

Seeing a Palestinian family picnicking in the shade of their olive trees reminded Bill of Micah 4:3-4.<sup>267</sup> To Bill, the olive branches symbolized peace and he connected the olive trees to a future when war would no longer exist. Having seen rows of stumps where Palestinian olive orchards once stood, Bill felt the deliberate destruction of olive trees by Israeli settlers and soldiers damaged both the Palestinian economy and any plan for peace in the region.

Focusing on the New Testament, Sue came back from her witness visit thinking about the ending of the parable of the Good Samaritan, “Go and do likewise” (Lk 10: 37). Sue understood this parable to illustrate the command to love one’s neighbour. “Palestinians and Israelis are neighbours in need of peace and justice and we as Canadians must do all we can to help make peace and justice a reality,” she said. Sue’s witness visit made her rethink her answer to the question, “Who is my neighbour?”

Kerri indicated that the reference to loving one’s neighbour in Mark 12:28-31<sup>268</sup> took on a deeper meaning for her as she lived with people of another culture, Arab, and another faith, Islam. “What does it mean to love your neighbour when your neighbour is not like you?” she asked as she experienced the challenge of genuinely living in accordance with her religious tradition. Kerri read the commandment to love one’s

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<sup>267</sup> “He shall judge between many peoples, and shall arbitrate between strong nations far away; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore; but they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken” (Micah 4:3-4).

<sup>268</sup> “... ‘Which commandment is the first of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The first is, “Hear, O Israel: the LORD our God, the LORD is one; you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’” (Mark 12:28-31).

neighbour in conjunction with the words spoken by Jesus in Luke 4:16-17<sup>269</sup> about Jesus' ministry to the poor and the oppressed. Kerri also wrote that she relied on the message of Micah 6:8<sup>270</sup> to guide her efforts. The influence of this passage was evident in the active yet unassuming nature of her unique contribution to the search for justice in Palestine.

Although his experience in Palestine brought Micah 6:8 to Robert's mind as well, it was in the larger context of what he understood to be the call of the Prophets to bring people back to a sense of justice that was part of the covenant between God and the Israelites. "The Prophets showed that the leadership became interested in their own selves and forgot about the orphans, the blind, the lame, the prisoners, the poor," he said. When he read the Prophets after living in Palestine, Robert began to ask himself, "What does breaking the covenant mean today?"

Elizabeth also thought of the Prophets after her experience in Palestine, suggesting it was the prophetic call to justice that was relevant. Elizabeth recalled the State of Israeli's military offensive in 1967 and remembered that at the time she believed it was part of the fulfillment of God's plan for the Jewish people. But after her experience in Palestine, she said, "I believe the Prophets are prophetic for our day and time, not in foretelling the future." For Elizabeth, the modern state of Israel cannot be read back into

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<sup>269</sup> "The Spirit of the LORD is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favour" (Luke 4:16-17).

<sup>270</sup> "He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

the Prophetic literature. Rather, she said, the prophetic call to justice should be read in light of current situations of injustice.

Anna's experience also changed the way she read the Hebrew Scriptures. "I realized that some texts are difficult to read for Palestinians, for example, the Book of Joshua, and I realized that you can read it in a way that encourages violence and oppression," she wrote, "or in a different way." Anna expressed difficulty with the idea of disregarding texts solely because they appeared oppressive when read in a literal sense. "I would still find the texts valuable," she wrote, "because they are part of the Bible and we should continue to struggle with it and look for its meaning."

## **Discussion**

All of the participants seemed to employ a biblical reading strategy that followed what Paul Ricoeur called a hermeneutical arc that starts with a sense of the text and leads to the reference of the text.<sup>271</sup> According to Ricoeur, to understand a text is to generate a new event from the text from a dialectical relationship between what the text says and what the text is talking about. In this way the meaning of the text can lie in front of the text, with the reader, as well as behind the text, with the author. However, Ricoeur believes the meaning appropriated by a reader from the text is more important than the meaning the author intended to convey. This reading strategy is an important aspect of contextualizing scripture in the theologies of both Ateek and Raheb.

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<sup>271</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: The Texas Christian University Press, 1976), 87.

Although, according to Segovia, Christian tradition generally puts limits on acceptable interpretation of the Bible,<sup>272</sup> contextual theology expands those limits through dialogue with the world in which it is being fleshed out. For example, several participants showed how the prophetic element of some of the Hebrew Scriptures was relevant in the current context. On the other hand, the participants generally considered illegitimate any literal interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures that was used to justify the State of Israel's occupation of Palestine and oppression of the Palestinian people. It should be noted that, according to Mark Brett's survey of the archaeological record, reading certain texts from Hebrew Scriptures as historical accounts of actual events is generally not supported by archaeological evidence.<sup>273</sup> This is consistent with Raheb's understanding that the Bible is not a factual account of historical experiences but a means of sharing past experiences and inviting others to identify with them.<sup>274</sup> The participants' responses also revealed a perception among them that Western Christian theology still tends to tolerate political ideologies based on the biblical conquest paradigm.

Participants who spent the longest time in Palestine were generally less inclined to look backward to the God of history and Christian origins and more inclined to look inward for the presence of God and outward for divine manifestation in human relations. These participants sought to expand the boundaries of acceptable interpretation in the

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<sup>272</sup> Segovia, "Liberation Hermeneutics," 112.

<sup>273</sup> Brett, *Decolonizing God: The Bible in the Tides of Empire*, 63.

<sup>274</sup> Raheb, *I Am a Palestinian Christian*, 60.

search for what Ellis terms a “deeper reckoning”<sup>275</sup> of North American and European Christianity. For Elizabeth, Robert and Kerri this deeper reckoning involved discerning what biblical texts were about rather than what they said or their historical accuracy. This process of attending to what biblical texts were about also reflected Moltmann’s orientation toward life in the present and away from historical and textual criticism.<sup>276</sup>

For Robert, the broken relationship among people of God signified a broken relationship between those people and God. Robert’s approach can be seen as universal in the sense that what happens to the Palestinian people affects the well-being of all people. Naim Ateek also believed the prophets spoke to the “universal and inclusive nature of God.”<sup>277</sup> This concept differs from the “particular understanding”<sup>278</sup> of Jewish suffering that is used to legitimate the dispossession of the Palestinian people from their land.

### **Other issues not addressed by the previous questions**

Kerri indicated how her experience in Palestine caused her to question the way she understood Christianity. “It’s made me question the exclusiveness of my own faith and given me an appreciation and respect for other faith traditions, primarily the Muslim faith. I see how ‘westernized’ our Christian faith is, how it has been influenced by our culture and economy.” Kerri was aware of how easy it could have been for her to remain in her comfort zone and think she had all the answers to questions about her religious

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<sup>275</sup> Ellis, *Unholy Alliance: Religion and Atrocity in Our Time*, 175.

<sup>276</sup> Moltmann, “Political Theology,” 8.

<sup>277</sup> Ateek, *Justice and Only Justice*, 96.

<sup>278</sup> Ellis, *Unholy Alliance: Religion and Atrocity in Our Time*, 7.



beliefs. “But now,” she wrote, “I’m not sure of any of my answers!” This insight from Kerri reveals that loving one’s neighbour and pursuing social justice involve interrogating one’s own beliefs and religious traditions, a process that can be disquieting.

For Elizabeth, one’s neighbor in Palestine also included Jewish settlers. “I build into my delegation a visit with a settler who is 100% Zionist. It is important to hear his point of view, even though I disagree with what he says. I genuinely like him.” Elizabeth believes it is important to interact with this settler to foster mutual respect between him and her. Elizabeth also spoke of the importance of visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum. “It creates a better understanding and therefore a better basis for a relationship when you understand the history and the impact of trauma on people’s lives,” she said.

Elizabeth said that many people asked her if she was afraid when she was in Palestine. “I was not afraid,” she said. “I will go up to a soldier and say what I must... I see humanity in the soldiers, I respect their potential and what they are capable of doing.” She attributed her fearlessness to a Palestinian man she met in the village of Wadi Grouz (Map 6, page 108). An Israeli from a nearby settlement occupied the man’s house and refused to leave. “The man resisted when the settler claimed his land and went to prison for three or five years. But since he did not tend his land for at least two years (while he was in prison) the settler had the right (under Israeli law) to claim it,” Elizabeth said. “I accompanied the man back to Wadi Grouz to witness him removing the settler’s lock from the door to his home. An SUV arrived, the settler got out with a sidearm on his hip. The man greeted him politely and said, ‘this is my land and my house.’ The settler

replied, 'you were not here.' The man said, 'that's fine, we will settle in court,' and held his hand out to shake hands with the settler. The man then turned to me and said, 'They can take my land, my house, but they cannot take me, they cannot take that essence that is me.'" Since then, Elizabeth has never felt afraid and her experience shows that, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18).

## **Conclusion**

Much of the research presented in this thesis arises at the intersections between theology and the social sciences, the past and the present, the global and the local, and faith and understanding. The experience of doing theology in Palestine as described by the participants in Chapter Four reflects a development in the Christian tradition that has occurred across time and place as strands of a web of influences and relationships. The radical inclusivity of Pentecost and the caring tradition of the early Church were interwoven in Latin American liberation theology with the systematic thought processes of Aquinas and the critical analysis of Marx. These tools and experiences were brought forward to post-World War II theological reflection that saw the role of scripture and European conquest in a new light. As an understanding arose that all knowledge is based on interpretation, the relevance of contextualizing scripture grew in importance and this facilitated new theologies of liberation whose originality reflected the specifics of their contexts, like those developed by Naim Ateek and Mitri Raheb in occupied Palestine.

As a form of the researcher's own praxis, this paper's approach to liberation theology generally drew more from the social sciences and differed in this respect from the more theoretical framework of Ateek's liberation theology. Borrowing from Raheb's approach to contextual theology, the research presented in this thesis relied on biblical interpretations from within the context of international workers volunteering in occupied Palestine. The researcher's discussions of the experiences described by the participants, for example, usually reflected the researcher's own synthesis of the sociology, politics,

economics and even archaeology with the history, culture and religion of the Palestinian people. The praxis and theological reflection of the researcher, as well as those of the participants as co-researchers in this study, have similarities and differences with the Palestinian theologies developed by Ateek and Raheb in terms of theological method, forms of praxis, biblical hermeneutics and major themes. These praxes and reflections often interacted with these Palestinian theologies, sometimes drawing from them, sometimes being infused with them and sometimes contributing to them.

### **Theological methods**

The theological methods used by the researcher and participants are generally best viewed through the lens of Ateek's liberation theology. The decisions of the participants in this research to go to Palestine reflected the results of advocacy efforts by organizations like Sabeel to gradually change the Western Christian mindset, by providing Western Christians the opportunity to witness the occupation and to return home as advocates for justice in Palestine. By organizing conferences and witness visits, Anna in particular directly helped Sabeel's advocacy efforts directed at the international community. For the three participants who participated in witness visits, their exposure helped them to increase their knowledge of the occupation via lived experience. The comments from Olivia and Sue revealed how experiential knowledge could be used as a tool for discerning the meaning of scripture in the context of what they witnessed in occupied Palestine. In addition, Olivia, Sue and Bill planned to use their personal witness as a resource for their advocacy efforts in Canada.

The weekly prayer meetings Anna attended as well as resistance activities directed at the barrier wall gave Anna experiences that influenced her reinterpretation of scripture and her subsequent resistance activities. For the other participants however, the reinterpretation of scripture did not necessarily lead to new resistance activities as much as to deeper interest and commitment in continuing existing resistance activities.

For Elizabeth and Robert, active resistance such as observing checkpoints and accompanying children to school helped to create more humane living conditions. When viewed in light of Raheb's contextual theology, these activities contributed to building a civil society wherein the Palestinian people can determine their own destiny.

Kerri's long-term commitment to living with Palestinians in East Jerusalem gave her a deep insight into the living conditions under occupation and this experience provided the basis for her educational activities geared toward international visitors. Kerri's activities directed at the international community dovetail with Sabeel's strategy of encouraging people living in politically powerful Western countries to influence the policies of their governments with respect to the occupation.

### **Imperative of praxis**

The participants' reflections on their experiences generally resembled the spiral relationship between experience and faith shown earlier in Figure 1. Some of the outcomes of their praxis included changing beliefs, having a greater understanding of one's own beliefs and the beliefs of others, strengthening of faith as a matter of ultimate concern, and a greater sense of how that faith is actualized as a matter of daily life. All

indicated these effects would influence future activities either by deepening their commitment to existing activities or directing them to initiate new ones.

The descriptions of activities undertaken in Palestine revealed that meaningful involvement ranged from “being present” to “doing something.” Sometimes just standing alongside people who were oppressed was as much a form of resistance as was doing something more to resist that oppression. As a tool of resistance, “being present” meant to the participants and to Palestinians in general a refusal to acquiesce to oppression. Such solidarity reflected the spiritual poverty associated with putting others first as defined by Gutiérrez as well as, in the case of Elizabeth, Anna, Robert and Kerri, a deliberate commitment to live with the people of Palestine that involved experiencing and resisting oppression at the same time. Although the participants’ resistance activities were in harmony with the praxis of liberation theology, these activities simultaneously contributed to, and drew from, the context of doing theology in occupied Palestine.

All participants hoped their actions contributed, or would contribute, to the social and political liberation of the Palestinian people. In addition, it seemed the longer the time spent in Palestine, the more likely the participants’ reflections on their experiences were to reveal a deeper understanding of his or her values and faith. The comments offered by Anna and Elizabeth indicated the inherent transformative power of actively putting one’s values into action, a manifestation that seemed to be in the order of Puebla’s third level of liberation, a feeling of transcendence and absolute goodness.

### **Biblical hermeneutical strategies**

All participants employed a hermeneutic of suspicion that started with the decision to go to Palestine and led to their reinterpreting and understanding scripture differently. This hermeneutic generally addressed the socio-political situation of Palestinians under occupation by evaluating the oppression in the light of scripture and engaging in praxis of faith.<sup>279</sup> The viability of a process of reinterpretation, as shown by the participants, helps to create hope for an end to injustice and therefore has a role within the liberation theology of Ateek and contextual theology of Raheb. Bill's comment about the time of peace that was to come dovetailed in particular with the goals of these theologies.

Sue's response to using Christ as the only hermeneutical key reflected one end of the spectrum of hermeneutics presented in this research and was the one most closely aligned to Ateek's hermeneutical approach. Olivia's comment that a new story was needed also corresponded to the liberationist approach of finding scripture that aligns with socio-political realities.

At the other end of the hermeneutical spectrum, Anna's valuing all scripture was more in accordance with Raheb's hermeneutical approach. Anna, Elizabeth, Robert and Kerri used a reader-response strategy resembling Raheb's approach when interpreting scripture. For these for participants, this involved looking within themselves to discern the meaning of scripture. Robert in particular revealed an appreciation for allowing theology to flow out of the Bible by his reference to the prophetic literature as well as his attempts at discerning what scripture was "about" rather than what its words "said."

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<sup>279</sup> Segovia, "Liberation Hermeneutics," 110-111.

Each participant indicated that he or she derived some spiritual meaning from his or her activities in Palestine, often in connection with a feeling of solidarity with Palestinians. This generally conforms to the expected outcomes of doing liberation and contextual theology. For Olivia and Bill, spiritual meaning came from feeling connected in the present moment to the historical context of biblical narratives. But for Kerri, Robert and Elizabeth it came from understanding biblical narratives in the current context of occupied Palestine. In each case the spiritual meaning seemed to coincide with Raheb's understanding that only biblical interpretation from within contemporary social context has the power to liberate those living in that context.

### **Themes raised by participants**

The themes of divine justice, the land and non-violence that were common in the writing of Ateek and Raheb were also represented in the participants' comments about their experiences in Palestine. These themes generally reflected understandings that arose from participants' synthesizing reinterpreted biblical passages with their experiences in Palestine. The situations that gave rise to those themes were consistent with those described by other western observers and Palestinians themselves as reported in Chapter Two. The experiences of Bill, Elizabeth and Kerri also revealed how difficult it can be to actually live out the Gospel command to love one's neighbor. Their witness of what might seem to someone unfamiliar with the occupation as an extraordinary commitment to non-violence adds to the hope of finding a non-violent way to end the occupation.



**Recommendation for future research**

One finding from the interviews that the researcher did not anticipate was the importance participants gave to experiencing, understanding and respecting the context in which people do liberation theology. Although this outcome could have been influenced by the wording of the interview questions, all participants expressed an appreciation for the need to understand and respect the Palestinian context when reading scripture, thinking about God and engaging in social justice activities. Anna seemed to express the greatest awareness that each person's theological understandings are influenced by his or her own context. The participants' emphasis on the need to contextualize theology highlights the need to consider how Western contexts, including Western Christian theologies that support and resist the occupation, influence the way the occupation is represented outside of Palestine and the way the occupation is resisted by non-Palestinians. A recommendation for future research would therefore be to interview Palestinians, either in English or with Arabic-English translators, to move the centre of discussion away from the Western experience and closer to the Palestinian perspective. This suggests that the research presented in this thesis represents only one step of many toward justice in occupied Palestine.

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## Appendix 1 - Written permission to reprint maps

From the Palestinian Academic Society for the Study of International Affairs for Maps 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6:

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**From:** PASSIA [mailto:passia@passia.org]  
**Sent:** August 23, 2014 4:01 AM  
**To:** Lawrence Roche  
**Subject:** Re: permission to reprint maps in a master's thesis

Dear Mr. Lawrence,

Greetings from PASSIA!

Thank you for your interest in our maps collection, kindly note that we don't object to the use of the map as long you credit PASSIA as the source of information.

Regards,  
 Hind

On Fri, Aug 22, 2014 at 5:02 PM, Lawrence Roche wrote:

Dear Sir or Madam:

I am writing a thesis for a Master of Arts degree in theology and religious studies. The topic is liberation theology and resistance to the occupation. I would like to ask your permission to reprint the following maps from your website:

- Palestine under the British Mandate, 1923-1948  
[http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/1923-1948-british-mandate.html](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/1923-1948-british-mandate.html)
- Palestinian Villages Depopulated in 1948 and 1967  
[http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/Landownership.html](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/Landownership.html)
- The Divided City of Hebron, Following the Hebron Agreement, 1997  
[http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/Hebron-1997.html](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/Hebron-1997.html)
- West Bank Wall – Map 2006  
[http://www.passia.org/palestine\\_facts/MAPS/newpdf/WestBankWall.jpg](http://www.passia.org/palestine_facts/MAPS/newpdf/WestBankWall.jpg)

My faculty advisor is Dr. Magi Abdul-Masih at Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia. My thesis is for education purposes only and will not be published for profit.

Thank you for considering my request

*Lawrence Roche*



From If Americans Knew for Map 5:

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**From:** If Americans Knew [<mailto:contact@ifamericansknew.org>]  
**Sent:** August 29, 2014 6:19 AM  
**To:** Lawrence Roche  
**Subject:** Re: permission to reprint map in Masters Thesis

Greetings Lawrence,

Thank you for contacting us. Yes, you have our full permission to publish any and all of our material created by If Americans Knew.

I have attached the high resolution file of the Four Maps.

Thanks,

Monica

On Thu, Aug 28, 2014 at 8:13 AM, Lawrence Roche wrote:

Good afternoon,

I am writing a Master of Arts thesis in Palestinian Liberation Theology and I would like to ask for permission to reprint the map "Palestinian Loss of Land 1947 to Present" in my thesis. I will give credit to "If Americans Knew" in my thesis.

*Lawrence Roche*