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**Analysis of Strides for Peace in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict with the Application of
Theories by Butler and Buber**

An Honors Thesis in Religion Submitted to a Committee of the Following: Dr. A.K. Anderson,
Religion; Dr. Jed Anderson, Middle East and North African Studies; Dr. Trina Jones, Religion;

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by

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Abstract

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, social norms, media pressures and government policies promote division and fear of the other. This constructed understanding of the other often prohibits relationship and harvests fears that lead to perpetuated violence and injustice in the region. However, two organizations, the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, exist to combat the hatred and violence by promoting understanding across conflict divides. These two groups design spaces where individuals on opposing sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can foster relationships and develop more complete understandings of the other that contradict the polarized stereotypes promoted by their government and media. Using Martin Buber's theory of I-Thou and Judith Butler's theory of Performativity, it is clear that what these two groups accomplish is distinct and has lasting, positive impacts on the individuals affected by their work.

Introduction

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has evolved since the 19th and 20th centuries with many dimensions and warring parties, but two aspects of the conflict have remained constant: conflicting claims of territorial ownership and disputed national identity. The purpose of this analysis is to address the evolution of the conflict in terms of these two themes; how they persist; and commonalities between two specific peace efforts. These two peace efforts, the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, are distinctive in that they create spaces where individuals from both sides of the conflict can come together and address their political differences while learning to understand the other¹ and their common humanity.

Zionism² and Developing Palestinian Identity

The modern conflict between Israelis, Palestinians and other Arab nations has its roots in the 1897 World Zionist Organization conference in Switzerland, where Zionist leaders initially declared their interest in establishing Palestine as the home of the future Jewish state.³ Although a community of Palestinian Arabs was already situated in the territory under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, Zionists nonetheless declared their interest in the land. At the turn of the 19th century the land was inhabited by approximately 300,000 Palestinian Arabs and that number

¹ For the purpose of this paper, “the other” is defined as the person or group of a different ethnic identity and political persuasion than the subject of the sentence.

² For the purpose of this paper, “Zionism” is defined as the 19th and 20th century political movement that promoted the establishment of a Jewish homeland in the land of what is today Israel-Palestine.

³ Martin Bunton, *The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2013), xiii.

continued to grow with the substantial economic success the region experienced under the rule of Sultan Abdul Hamid.⁴

During the period of Sultan Hamid's rule, Zionists trickled into the Ottoman territory, motivated by the Zionist conference and growing Zionist fervor in European Jewish communities. The growing number of Jewish settlements sparked disagreement among the Palestinian Arabs in the region. Some profited from the land sales and thus welcomed the settlers, while others feared the Jewish immigrants would threaten and limit Palestinian political rights.⁵ Those opposed to Zionist settlement reacted by organizing groups such as the Palestinian Patriotic Society and the Ottoman Patriotic Society to prevent further settlement and land purchasing in the region.⁶

Conflicting Claims to Palestine: Promises from World War I

At the turn of the century, Palestinian Arabs were divided on their reactions to Jewish settlement; however, after World War I, Palestinian objection to Zionist settlements was much more widespread. During the war, Britain encouraged Arabs to revolt against the Turks in exchange for Arab independence in "the region between Persia to the East and the Mediterranean and the Red Sea to the West."⁷ However, after the end of the war, the British failed to deliver part of Palestine to the Arabs, despite the agreement. Further complicating claims to the land of

⁴ Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2009), 123.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 127.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

Palestine, Great Britain also issued the Balfour Declaration, which expressed British sympathy to the plight of the Jewish people and a desire for the Jews to have a homeland in Palestine.⁸

Realizing the opposing agreements, the League of Nations intervened by creating the Palestinian Mandate which divided the land in the region of what is today Israel and Palestine to “promote the well-being and development of the indigenous population.”⁹ The Palestinian Mandate set the stage for the evolution of Arab-Zionist relations between the two World Wars and the deterioration of relations between the two groups.

Relationship and Disillusion in the Midst of Conflict

At the beginning of the 1920s, while leaders of the Zionist and Palestinian movements ardently disagreed on claims to the land in what is today modern Israel and Palestine, individuals on both sides still shared in community. As Mark Tessler explains in his *History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*,

A final sign that encouraged some observers in the 1920s was the cordiality that often characterized interpersonal relations between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. There were personal friendships among leaders and intellectuals within each community. Also, it was common for Arabs and Jews in rural communities to visit one another, attending weddings, circumcisions, and so forth in each other’s villages. Even after renewed violence had broken out in 1929, such relationships did not entirely disappear¹⁰

⁸ Ibid., 146.

⁹ Ibid., 158.

¹⁰ Ibid., 183.

However, despite any initial relationship between Israelis and Palestinians, identities developed that projected the idea of Israelis and Palestinians as enemies to the other and polarized communities in the region. The Zionist stance on land, immigration and jobs hardened and excluded Palestinians. At the same time, the Palestinians' pride in their country's development and fear for their national survival heightened, resulting in the breakdown of community cohesion that existed in the early twenties.¹¹

The result of the dissolution of Israeli and Palestinian rapport after the 1920s was long lasting. As relationships dissolved into mistrust and hatred, the identity of the Israeli and Palestinian began to develop independently of the other, though both still existed on the same land. According to Tessler,

The evolution of [the political community of the Arabs and that of the Jews] was to a considerable degree influenced by the threat it perceived in the other, but the two national units became increasingly unconnected on those dimensions that might have created common economic interests or a partially shared identity as citizens of Palestine.¹²

The once, if not compatible, coexisting political communities ceased to cooperate and functioned independently of one another, though still both sharing the same land.

Relations digressed further between Israel and Palestine after the passage of the partition resolution by the United Nations General Assembly in November of 1947.¹³ The resolution proposed three separate states: a non-contiguous Arab State, a Jewish State covering 56% of the

¹¹ Ibid., 183.

¹² Ibid., 184.

¹³ Ibid., 261.

proposed territory and a Permanent Trusteeship in the city of Jerusalem governed by the United Nations.¹⁴ The Palestinians did not support the United Nations partition of the land, arguing “that Palestine was an integral part of the Arab world and that from the beginning its indigenous inhabitants had opposed the creation in their country of a Jewish national home.”¹⁵ However, the partition was approved, and so on November 30, 1947 war erupted in Palestine and was waged by the Palestinians and other Arab nations against Israel.¹⁶ The fighting finally ended in 1949 and new boundaries were established that expanded the Jewish State, removed the Permanent Trusteeship over Jerusalem, and significantly shrank the Arab State, leaving the two remaining regions under Arab control to Jordan and Egypt.

Since Israeli independence in 1949, relations between Israel, Palestine and the surrounding Arab nations have been tenuous and in flux. The narrative of this territory has been one of repetitive cycles involving wars, intifadas, peace agreements, and then renewed violence. Affairs between the Israelis and Palestinians in particular have been at the very best fragile and at their worst violent and doused in intense hatred.

Relationship in the Modern Conflict

Today, the violence persists and the communities remain largely disconnected; one result of this disconnection has been a vacuum of communication among individuals – one that has been filled with the narratives of the media and government. Media and government ownership of identity portrayal can, in part, be explained by the tendency of disputing parties to avoid the

¹⁴ Ibid., 259

¹⁵ Ibid., 259.

¹⁶ Ibid., 261.

other out of fear and mistrust. Another reason, however, is strategic. Palestinians, Arabs and Israelis have designed policies in the conflict that force this mistrust, separation and division as a way to achieve state or political success. For example, Israel has developed and maintained an Iron Wall policy with the goal of achieving long-term peace and land retention. The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has conducted two Intifadas, and is arguably now leading a third, while also maintaining a campaign for Boycott Divestment Sanctions, promoting violence, and purposely alienating the other as a means to realizing political recognition.¹⁷

These political strategies of violence and alienation are not always conducive to civilian security and the repercussions of these policies have lasting effects on the livelihood of Israelis, Palestinians and Arabs. In effect, citizens of the Arab and Israeli nations have developed deep mistrust for individuals in the opposing party, equating the identity and intent of the other to the harmful policies promoted by the Israeli and Palestinian governments.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the two national identities are not separated by definitive, clear boundaries, but rather by messy and disagreed upon borders. As a result, Arab, Palestinian, and Israeli mistrust of the other is even more detrimental because the “other” is not a distant presence, but rather often the literal neighbor of the Arab, Palestinian or Israeli; the groups are separated only by a literal or figurative wall. Since national boundaries are so disputed, those of

¹⁷ While I recognize that Israel and Palestine are not the only nations involved in the conflict over Israel’s statehood and claims to the territory that is today Israel, I have chosen to focus my analysis uniquely on Israel and Palestine so as to more deeply examine the effects of the conflict on the individuals in the disputed region. There are additional dimensions to the conflict which I do not address in this introduction and throughout my analysis. However, in order to focus on the two conflicting narratives of territorial ownership and rights to national identity, I have strategically chosen to refrain from including detailed information on the additional players in the conflict.

opposing national identities are often living in the same community, operating alongside, but in conflict with, one another.

Israelis and Palestinians do not coexist where there are blended Israeli-Palestinian communities. According to Ben Sales, a writer for the *Times of Israel*, Jews and Palestinians attend different schools; Palestinians, and more broadly Arabs, are a very small minority in the Israeli government and are rarely represented as voices for Israeli television or news. Sales reports that despite laws which prohibit segregation, Israelis and Palestinians often refuse to, or are prohibited from, coexisting in the most basic sense. He cites a report by the Israel Broadcast Authority which claims that “several hospitals practice de facto [*sic*] segregation of maternity rooms—placing Jews with Jews and Arabs with Arabs,”¹⁸ despite the fact that this separation is illegal. Such behaviors and practices have developed because of the growing tensions and deepening mistrust of the other. Since the two groups live side by side, the negative effects of the conflict and the policies acutely effect the everyday life of the two groups in more specific ways than if the warring parties were to be distinctly separated from one another.

While the Iron Wall policy and the Intifadas are successful in terms of preserving the interests of their respective nations, they are detrimental to Israeli and Palestinian citizens because they promote hate-filled tensions and division between Arabs, Palestinians and Israelis who are literal neighbors. Thus, these policies endanger the lives of the very people they are ostensibly protecting by encouraging hatred and violence toward the other.

¹⁸ Ben Sales, “Four ways Jews and Arabs live apart in Israeli Society,” *The Times of Israel* (Jerusalem), April 13, 2016, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/four-ways-jews-and-arabs-live-apart-in-israeli-society/>.

Incited by the rhetoric and actions of their nation, individuals are driven to independent action, whether this be perpetuating community segregation or literal violence. It is in this context that the Abrahamic Reunion, an interfaith peace organization, and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, a prestigious orchestra composed of Israelis, Palestinians and Arabs, were created and have evolved. These two organizations have developed methods for bridging divides in the conflict-ridden climate of Israel and Palestine by creating spaces for communities with polarized identities to know one another.

In the midst of such a divisive and polarizing conflict, the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra fashion an alternative way for Arabs, Israelis and Palestinians to know one another. The spaces they create are especially significant because they combat the acrimonious rhetoric and understanding of the other that has developed and evolved in this region since the dissolution of amicable relationships between Israelis, Palestinians and Arabs after 1929. The two organizations have gone against the social trend of isolation and discord in the region by designing a social space where there are no walls or divides, but rather spaces for communication and understanding. In the contentious environment of the conflict, these spaces are unique and worthy of examination because of their ability to provide members with a sense of hope for peace in their homeland.

The Abrahamic Reunion

The Abrahamic Reunion promotes peace in Israel and Palestine through faith-based action. An interfaith organization, the Reunion represents the voices of Druze, Jews, Muslims and Christians and calls on them to live out their faith together, uniting under the common theme of God's transcendent love for humanity and for the earth. The Abrahamic Reunion promotes the sharing of religious experiences which allow for individuals of different religious, ethnic and

national identities to know each other and their universal inherent worth. Leaders and members of the Reunion gather monthly, and sometimes more often, to speak to one another about their faith traditions, show and observe their religious rituals to one another, and pray together for peace in Israel and Palestine. What is more, Reunion members gather publically in order to show their unity to others, as well as their hope that resolution and understanding are possible.

The Abrahamic Reunion began after two Americans, Andrea Blanch and Howard Nelson, united Israeli and Palestinian peacemakers of diverse faiths at the Parliament of World Religions in 2004. There, Blanch and Nelson planned a shared workshop amongst various faith leaders in Israel and Palestine with the goal of finding common ground and expressing calls for peace.¹⁹ The workshop was a success in that people were so moved by the potential of their unity and the impact it could have on the conflict, they decided to reorganize the following year in Istanbul. There, a year later, the group officially created the Abrahamic Reunion with the goal of “[bringing] the voice of the religious leaders of Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Druze communities to be heard as a force for rebuilding trust between our religious communities.”²⁰

The Abrahamic Reunion Model of Interfaith Engagement

The Abrahamic Reunion operates on the premise that shared religious experience, as well as engagement of faithful people with those of other faiths, can occur without anyone’s having to sacrifice their own religious values. To understand the Abrahamic Reunion and how it allows for the sharing of religious experience, it is important to know the theological perspective from

¹⁹ "CRT History," *Center for Religious Tolerance*, accessed November 28, 2015, <http://www.c-r-t.org/about-history.php>.

²⁰ "The Abrahamic Reunion CC," *United Religions Initiative*, accessed October 25, 2015, https://www.uri.org/cooperation_circles/detail/abrahamicreunion.

which faithful people can engage with those of other faiths without sacrificing their religious values. What theological perspective, then, might undergird the Abrahamic Reunion, making it possible for it to facilitate interfaith prayer, engagement, and action to impact individuals in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

Diana Eck's model of interfaith engagement, expressed particularly in *Encountering God*, provides a useful tool for deconstructing the Abrahamic Reunion's theological framework. Though her model focuses on interfaith relations in America, Eck's categories and definitions are applicable to analyzing understandings of Interfaith Engagement in a broad sense and the perspectives of individuals participating in the Abrahamic Reunion's various interfaith events.

In Chapter 7 of *Encountering God*, Eck identifies and explores three types of attitude toward other faiths: exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Theological exclusivism, according to Eck, necessitates the belief in one truth: "The exclusivist, whether Christian, Jewish or Muslim, feels no qualms in speaking about 'our God' or speaking about 'the truth'"²¹ In Eck's view, the theological exclusivist in any faith believes their faith tradition proclaims the one and only truth. The exclusivist, she claims, would denounce any divine claims by another faith tradition, not recognizing truth beyond their own religious tradition.

A theological inclusivist, on the other hand, understands God as universal, but recognizes the superiority of the truth in their own faith tradition. According to Eck, "Whether it is Christian, Hindu, or Muslim inclusivism, this bent of mind is mostly benign toward other traditions or faiths. The inclusivist does not exclude or condemn others...an inclusivist uses his

²¹ Diana L. Eck, "Is Our God Listening?" *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1993) 178.

or her own language and conception – God’s universal love, for the Christian, or perhaps Krishna’s omnipresence and omnipotence, for the Hindu – as a way of understanding the other, but would insist that, realistically, we can only understand the world in and through the language and the symbols we have in our own traditions.”²² An inclusivist, then, recognizes the universality of their truth and their unique understanding of God through their own tradition. An inclusivist, she contends, uses their personal religious background to explain all faiths, putting all other faiths under the umbrella of their personal religious tradition’s doctrine. While recognizing the validity of other religious groups, the inclusivist still places their faith tradition above all others.

Conversely, a theologically pluralistic individual recognizes the complexity of the religious landscape and the need for engagement. Eck identifies the theologically plural interfaith perspective as “an interpretation of plurality, an evaluation of religious and cultural diversity... the ability to make a home for oneself and one’s neighbors in that multifaceted reality”²³ To Eck, the theologically plural perspective necessitates a commitment to one’s own tradition while recognizing the value and distinct uniqueness of other faiths. Eck denounces claims that theological pluralists relativize the distinct boundaries between faith traditions, arguing instead that “the theological task [of a pluralist]... is to create the space and the means for the encounter of commitments, not to neutralize all commitment.”²⁴ Unlike inclusivists, who engage with different faiths while recognizing their tradition’s superiority, pluralists engage with other faiths

²² Ibid., 183.

²³ Ibid., 191.

²⁴ Ibid., 195.

while recognizing the complexity of difference and the legitimacy of their own theological claims, in addition to those of other religious backgrounds.

Application of Eck's model to the Abrahamic Reunion reveals that the Reunion incorporates all three attitudinal categories in its unity. The interfaith engagement model of the Abrahamic Reunion does not necessitate a theological perspective on the truth of another's religion, but rather incorporates all theological perspectives, only necessitating the belief in peace and understanding as a core tenet of one's own faith for its members.

One important aspect of the Abrahamic Reunion is prayer. Though theological understandings of the universality of God are important in worship, especially shared worship, the Abrahamic Reunion creates worship space that allows for all theological perspectives to participate. At some events attendees pray together, but even during communal prayer, all prayers are offered separately by each religious group, honoring the perspectives of even the theologically exclusive interfaith participants.

For example, at an event in Tabgha at the Church of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes, members of the Abrahamic Reunion "joined hands held high in two circles, the inner circle women, the outer circle men, in a powerful healing prayer of unity and solidarity with [their] Benedictine friends...Rev. Daniel Aqleh from Bethlehem, Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, and [Rodef Shalom] Eliyahu [McLean], then each offered prayers for healing and peace."²⁵ While united in the circle together, the different religious leaders offered their own faith-based prayer separately, respecting their distinct theological differences. Praying in this manner did not

²⁵ "Tabgha - Prayers At The Burned Monastery - Event Report - Abrahamic Reunion," *Abrahamic Reunion*, September 8, 2015, accessed December 7, 2015, <http://www.abrahamicreunion.org/tabgha-aug2015/>.

necessitate persons of other faiths to contribute to the prayer or sacrifice their beliefs, but rather provided other religious individuals the opportunity to observe the passion for unity and peace expressed by those praying while standing in unity.

As illustrated in this example of shared prayer, the Abrahamic Reunion strives to create interfaith worship through individualizing and dividing experiences along faith lines, while also preserving space for unity and observation. In creating space for religious peoples to gather and pray individually in accordance with their own tradition, yet still united together, the Reunion promotes understanding of the practices and prayers of the other without forcing members to compromise their own theological perspectives. Moreover, through shared prayer and passion, the Abrahamic Reunion creates a faith-based context for peace in the Holy Land. From diverse theological perspectives, members of the Abrahamic Reunion and attendees at their various events are able to interact, witness, experience, and share religious identity with others of other faith backgrounds through an understanding of their own tradition's encouragement of peace and dignity for all.

Peacemakers and their Instrumental Role in the Abrahamic Reunion

Today, the Abrahamic Reunion is composed of twenty-one peacemakers from across the Middle East and North Africa who come together to host events for Palestinians and Israelis, impacting hundreds of individuals affected by the conflict. These leaders include figures such as Ibtisam Mahameed and Rabbinit Hadassah Froman. Mahameed, a Muslim from Israel, founded Women Reborn, an Arab women's empowerment organization. Her work has gained such prominence that she was awarded the title of an "Unsung Hero of Compassion" by His Holiness

the Dalai Lama.²⁶ Froman, wife of deceased settler Rabbi Menachem Froman, strives for peace between Muslims and Jews in West Bank settlements as a leader for the non-profit Friends of Roots. She is also speaks regularly for peace gatherings in Israel.²⁷

Two of the most notable peacemakers in the Abrahamic Reunion are Rodef Shalom Eliyahu Mclean and Sheikh Ghassan Manasra who serve as co-coordinators for the organization. Mclean, an American Israeli Orthodox Jew and tour guide for dual narrative tours in Hebron, and Manasra, an ordained Qadiri Sufi Sheikh who founded the Lights of Peace Center in Nazareth and directs the Islamic Cultural Center in Nazareth, coordinate events across borders for the Abrahamic Reunion.²⁸ As co-coordinators, the two unite Israelis and Palestinians through gatherings in Israel and the West Bank, organizing meals, worship gatherings and community walks.²⁹ In addition to the standard events, the two also coordinate Abrahamic Reunion appearances at places of recent conflict to show their unity while also gathering for the cultivation of personal relationship and deeper understanding of their neighbors.

Abrahamic Reunion Gatherings

Abrahamic Reunion events attract from one hundred to two hundred Palestinians and Israelis and take place in a variety of forms. At the most basic level, the organization holds monthly meetings which include “an interfaith dinner, discourse and prayer, and a public walk together

²⁶ “Peacemakers: The Abrahamic Reunion,” *Abrahamic Reunion*, accessed December 7, 2015, <https://www.abrahamicreunion.org/peacemakers/>.

²⁷ “Rabbinit Hadassah Froman,” *Abrahamic Reunion*, accessed April 20, 2015, <https://www.abrahamicreunion.org/peacemakers/rabbinit-hadassah-froman>.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ “Peacemakers: The Abrahamic Reunion,” *Abrahamic Reunion*, accessed December 7, 2015, <https://www.abrahamicreunion.org/peacemakers/>.

through the town.”³⁰ Other events include peace hugs, cross-border prayer services, scriptural sharing meetings, faith-based meals, and worship space visits. The Abrahamic Reunion keeps an extensive blog on their events, not only recording specific details of each gathering, but also sharing important messages and impressions from each event in an effort to share their unity to a broader audience. Furthermore, there is a sampling of news articles and opinion pieces featuring the organization published throughout Israeli and Palestinian news sources, raising visibility of the organization’s work amidst the conflict between the two nations.

However, while aiming to spread the narrative of interfaith peace between Israelis and Palestinians of diverse faith backgrounds through events, the Abrahamic Reunion has a variety of challenges that prevent its expansion. Notably, the Abrahamic Reunion has significant financial needs. The events cost individually up to \$10,000 each since the Israeli government requires a permit for every Palestinian who visits Israel, no matter the duration of their stay.³¹ Furthermore, Palestinians must request permits far in advance and even after filing requests may still be denied access to the country³². The permit process poses not only a financial burden on the Abrahamic Reunion, since the organization pays for each permit, but also creates a significant challenge for their success, as the Abrahamic Reunion mission necessitates a Palestinian presence to share the narrative of interfaith peace among Israelis and Palestinians. According to coordinator Eliyahu McLean, “we get more requests for permits than people we can take on our journeys...and we haven’t been granted permits for the people in Gaza that want

³⁰ "The Abrahamic Reunion CC," *United Religions Initiative*, accessed October 25, 2015, https://www.uri.org/cooperation_circles/detail/abrahamicrounion.

³¹David Less et al., "12 Peacemakers of Abrahamic Faiths of the Holy Land," (presentation, Parliament of the World Religions, Salt Lake City, October 18, 2015).

³² Ibid.

to come with us.”³³ Even when the organization is able to obtain permits for Palestinians, the permits only last for one day with strict curfews that limit the extent of Abrahamic Reunion events.³⁴

Despite these financial and bureaucratic challenges, the Abrahamic Reunion continues to organize journeys and gatherings. Their events are daring, emotive, and deeply relevant. For example, in August of 2015 the Abrahamic Reunion gathered at the Tabgha Church of Multiplication in Tiberius. This site was chosen because it had been recently attacked by arsonists. United in diverse faiths, activists in the Abrahamic Reunion visited the church, where they were hosted by the Benedictine priest, Father Mathias Karl.³⁵ Throughout the meeting, various religious leaders and followers offered their condolences and their passion for justice to the priest. One notable exchange that was highlighted in the Reunion blog took place between Father Karl and Rabbi Mordechai Zeller. According to the report, Rabbi Zeller noted the similarity between the story of the multiplication of fishes and loaves and the compassion had by interfaith leaders. He remarked on the multiplication of fear caused by the arsonist, but also on his belief that justice, love and compassion can also multiply and “satisfy thousands of people who are angry, sad and ever so hungry for the good of the world.”³⁶

³³ Chris Miller, "Upper Galilee Peace Journey Report - April 30th 2015," *Abrahamic Reunion*, May 2, 2015, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://www.abrahamicreunion.org/upper-galilee-peace-journey-report-april-30th-2015/>.

³⁴ David Less et al., "12 Peacemakers of Abrahamic Faiths of the Holy Land," (presentation, Parliament of the World Religions, Salt Lake City, October 18, 2015).

³⁵ "Tabgha - Prayers at the Burned Monastery," *Abrahamic Reunion*, September 8, 2015, accessed December 7, 2015, <http://www.abrahamicreunion.org/tabgha-aug2015/>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

This event was so moving that it inspired a South African Israeli Jewish student, Aharon Friedland, to write about his experience in the *Times of Israel*. In this article, Friedland argues for religious peace, speaking to an audience of Jews as he justifies and demands peace in light of his interpretation of Jewish sacred texts. He notes the support of other religious leaders from Jewish, Christian and Sikh traditions, contextualizing his experience in the Abrahamic Reunion event at the Tabgha Church of Multiplication. Friedland's primary argument is that "[religious leaders] can strengthen our love of God, and therefore of each other, with common goals and visions, not despite our differences, but because of our differences."³⁷ Uniting in difference, Friedland believes, "shows the world that here are people determined to defeat this cancer of religious violence and hatred."³⁸

Friedland presents his argument from a theological understanding of God's call in sacred texts and from an acceptance of the engagement of other faith groups.³⁹ His presentation accompanies other articles, texts and arguments circulated by the Abrahamic Reunion that call for peaceful engagement in the midst of religious conflict. Friedland argues that any religious person, regardless of their theological perspective, can participate in peaceful and powerful interfaith engagement.

Another recent and powerful Abrahamic Reunion gathering took place during Ramadan when an assembly of 140 Palestinians and religious Jews spent the day visiting the Church of the

³⁷ Aharon Friedland, "When Faith Flickers in Ancient Ruins," *The Times of Israel*, September 7, 2015, accessed November 16, 2015, <http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/when-faith-flickers-in-ancient-ruins/>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

Annunciation, the White Mosque, and Mary's Well.⁴⁰ After the tour, the participants gathered at the Lights of Peace Center, a Sufi community center in Nazareth, where attendees shared a Muslim Iftar meal together.⁴¹ During the meal, various members of the Abrahamic Reunion spoke, as described in the blog, and one particular story from this part of the event stood out from the rest. According to the Reunion blog, a member of the Abrahamic Reunion had died the morning of the event and a family of one of the lead peacemakers had been attacked with Molotov cocktails and rocks on a bus ride just a week before the gathering. Per the report, despite the two tragedies, peacemakers chose to attend the Abrahamic Reunion event nonetheless in order to have revenge on the hate by facilitating peace and reconciliation.⁴²

Notably, this tour and meal occurred after a recent riot in Nazareth and in the context of the war in Gaza. Thus, the Abrahamic Reunion's diverse and united presence was doubly important because it not only reinforced friendship and understanding amongst individuals in the group, but also demonstrated to witnesses that relationship is possible between Israelis and Palestinians.

Yet another large event occurred in the spring of 2015 at Mount Gerizim where over 120 people from Palestine, Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and Hebron joined with locals from the Nablus area at a community center.⁴³ There, the group heard from local leaders and government officials about the need for hope and unity in the midst of the conflict. After the talks concluded,

⁴⁰ Rodef Shalom Eliyahu McLean, and Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, "Nazareth Interfaith Tour and Ramadan Iftar Meal," *Abrahamic Reunion*, July 22, 2014, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://www.abrahamicreunion.org/nazareth-interfaith-tour-and-ramadan-iftar-meal/>.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Rodef Shalom Eliyahu McLean, and Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, "Multi-faith Hanukah Celebration in the West Bank," *Abrahamic Reunion*, April 7, 2015, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://www.abrahamicreunion.org/multi-faith-hanukah-celebration-in-the-west-bank/>.

the attendees divided into smaller circles of conversation where they learned about each person's religious tradition. At the end of the event, attendees traveled to a Jewish synagogue for prayers and the lighting ceremony. During this portion of the day, Christian and Muslim leaders were able to speak on the similarity between this Jewish custom and practices in their own faiths.⁴⁴

Still, another notable event sponsored by the Abrahamic Reunion took place in February 2015 when the organization hosted an interfaith journey on TuBishvat, a holiday involving a meal to celebrate the Jewish New Year for trees. The Jews served as hosts to their religious neighbors at this event, explaining the significance of the meal to Jewish, Christian and Muslim members of the Reunion. According to a blog post on the event, Rabbi Mordechai spoke at the gathering on his religious call to peace, proclaiming, "Though we all praise our father in heaven, TuBishvat reminds us of our need to honor the land, which is like our mother. Instead of fighting over who this lands belong to, our responsibility is to the land, to heal the earth."⁴⁵ His words echo similar statements made by other religious leaders and attendees at Abrahamic Reunion events. From his statement and others, it is clear the Abrahamic Reunion unifies around the idea of sharing personal faith identity with religious neighbors to demonstrate a personal desire for peace among all people and for the homeland they all see as sacred.

The Abrahamic Reunion functions as a bridge between the divides created by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Using interfaith engagement as its method, the Abrahamic Reunion models that friendship across national, ethnic and religious lines is not only possible, but can be meaningful and successful. In a climate of ignorance, hate and violence, the Abrahamic Reunion

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ "Feb 4th Kfar Kamma & TuBishvat Shabat Peace Journey in the Galilee," *Abrahamic Reunion*, April 7, 2015, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://www.abrahamicreunion.org/feb-4th-kfar-kamma-tubishvat-shabat-peace-journey-in-the-galilee/>.

provides an outlet for peace that impacts the experience of citizens and transforms individual understanding of the other.

The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra

Like the Abrahamic Reunion, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is an organization that creates spaces in which connection among individuals can flourish and lessen the stifling impact of conflicting national identities. While the Abrahamic Reunion focuses on the areas of philosophical and theological overlap among faith traditions, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is a pan-Arab orchestra that promotes peace and understanding of the other in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through musical performance. The orchestra creates spaces for Israelis and Arabs to build relationships and foster understandings that challenge the hate-filled stereotypes of the other that so often dominate local media, politics and propaganda.⁴⁶

Founders: Daniel Barenboim and Edward Said

The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra was founded in 1999 by Edward Said, a revolutionary Palestinian scholar, and Daniel Barenboim, a world-renowned Israeli musician. Even though he died in 2003, Edward Said is still known for his deep impact on modern academia. Born in Palestine, raised in Cairo, and a student in the United States, Said attended Princeton and Harvard before becoming a professor at Columbia University.⁴⁷ Though he taught English and Comparative Literature, Said is known for his contributions to Middle Eastern studies. His book *Orientalism* was ground-breaking in academia and shaped the perception of

⁴⁶ “West-Eastern Divan Orchestra,” *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.west-eastern-divan.org/>.

⁴⁷ “Edward Said: American professor and literary critic,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, July 31, 2014, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Edward-Said>.

Western studies of the Middle East. Beyond his acclaim as a professor and author, Said was a supporter of the Palestinian cause and promoter for peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His desire for peace, combined with his relationship with Daniel Barenboim, led to his co-founding of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra.

His friend Daniel Barenboim is an Argentinian-Israeli known for his illustrious musical career. Barenboim began studying piano at the age of five and nursed his love for music throughout his childhood.⁴⁸ At the age of eleven, Barenboim had already performed with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Throughout his childhood, he also performed at such distinguished concert venues as Carnegie Hall and with such notable groups as the New York Philharmonic, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra Manchester and the Orchestre de la Société du Conservatoire.⁴⁹ As a young adult, Barenboim transitioned from piano to conducting. In this new role he conducted the Berlin Philharmonic, the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and the Deutsche Opera. After developing a friendship with Edward Said, Barenboim also became conductor and director of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. In recent years he has supplemented his performance career with speaking engagements around the world.⁵⁰

Barenboim and Said met for the first time in 1992 at a London hotel.⁵¹ While staying at the same hotel, the two happened across each other one afternoon in the lobby. Said, having just read Barenboim's book, recognized the musician and introduced himself. Though from opposite

⁴⁸ "Daniel Barenboim," *Daniel Barenboim*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://danielbarenboim.com/about/>

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Daniel Barenboim, Edward Said, 2002, interview by Scott Simon, *National Public Radio*, December 28, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/programs/wesat/transcripts/2002/dec/021228.simon2.html>.

political sides, the two hit it off and met multiple times throughout their stay in London, discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and their love of music. The two had different political opinions on the conflict, but were passionately united on a desire for “total freedom and equality between Israelis and Palestinians.”⁵² After their stay in London the two remained in contact, developing a deep friendship which resulted in the creation of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra.⁵³

History of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra

In 1999 Barenboim and Said decided to emulate their unique friendship as a model in order to promote peace and understanding between Israelis, Palestinians and other Arabs. Relying on their extensive musical skill, the two organized the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra as “an alternative way to address the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”⁵⁴ While from different sides of the conflict, the two agreed there was a serious misrepresentation of the other in the midst of the conflict and a need for the respect of Palestinian and Israeli political rights that was not being met. From this platform of understanding, they created the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra with the “hope to replace ignorance with education, knowledge and understanding; to humanize the other to imagine a better future.”⁵⁵

⁵² “West-Eastern Divan Orchestra,” *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.west-eastern-divan.org/>.

⁵³ Daniel Barenboim, Edward Said, 2002, interview by Scott Simon, *National Public Radio*, December 28, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.npr.org/programs/wesat/transcripts/2002/dec/021228.simon2.html>.

⁵⁴ “West-Eastern Divan Orchestra,” *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.west-eastern-divan.org/>.

⁵⁵ “West-Eastern Divan Orchestra,” *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.west-eastern-divan.org/>.

The two decided to host the orchestra in Weimar, Germany, intentionally moving the orchestra away from the conflict zone in order to create a neutral space and provide members with a sense of hope. Historically, Weimar has been the site of both persecution and peace, having deep connections to the Holocaust and the Enlightenment. Said and Barenboim hoped the correlation between the two opposing historical movements would provide a sense of hope to members of the workshop orchestra for an enlightened and peaceful future.

Initially the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra was only meant to be a single workshop in Weimar, Germany. Their hope was that the workshop would create a space for friendships like their own to blossom, and at the very least would provide an opportunity for Arabs and Israelis to recognize the other's humanity.

However, after its first success in Germany, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra became a full-time organization. In 2001 the orchestra found permanent residence in Seville, Spain where the Spanish government of Andalusia provided a campus for the musical group. Said and Barenboim were attracted and pleased with the location because, like Weimar, Seville too had historical significance. The city is famed for its inclusion and acceptance of religious diversity, having "sustained coexistence among Muslims, Christians and Jews in Europe" for much of its history.⁵⁶ Since finding a permanent home in 2001, the organization has continued to grow, performing classics at notable music festivals around the world. In fact, this summer the group

⁵⁶ "West-Eastern Divan Orchestra," *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.west-eastern-divan.org/>.

will have yet another tour throughout Europe and Buenos Aires, performing at the Festival at the Teatra Colón, the Lucerne Festival and the Salzburg Festival.⁵⁷

Goals of the Orchestra

Beyond its focus on performance and training, the West-East Divan Orchestra seeks to create a space in which the likelihood of someone on one side of the conflict's humanizing someone on another side of the conflict is increased. In other words, the context of the orchestra introduces the Israelis to the humanity of the Arabs and vice-versa, in a nuanced, specific way. According to its founder and conductor, Daniel Barenboim, "[the orchestra] is a singular space in which human beings who are otherwise forcibly kept apart can come together to exchange ideas and views, learn about each other and, above all, listen to each other in a world that would otherwise keep them silent."⁵⁸

His program does not restrict conversation, dialogue and debate about the realities in the Middle East, specifically with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To prevent deep divides and dangerous discord, however, Barenboim initially focuses on the music, teaching his students to relate to their neighbors through the common work before creating space for other conversation.

Political Opinions in the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra

The West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is successful because it creates a space for musicians to come together and honor something that has deep resonance for them, regardless of their

⁵⁷ "Divan Orchestra announces 2016 summer tour," *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra*, January 8, 2016, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.west-eastern-divan.org/news/divan-orchestra-announces-2016-summer-tour/>

⁵⁸ Clemency Burton-Hill, "West-Eastern Divan Orchestra: Uniting Arabs, Israelis," *BBC*, August 24, 2016, accessed February 17, 2016, <http://www.bbc.com/culture/story/20140822-music-uniting-arabs-and-israelis>.

ethnic identity: music. Arabs and Israelis can join the group and initially feel deep hatred or divisions toward their counterparts. However, because they do not have hatred for the goal of the orchestra, they are able to be more open to at least a temporary coexistence from the start. In an interview featured in the documentary *Knowledge is the Beginning*, which follows the creation and development of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, one member of the orchestra speaks about this coexistence by way of his relationship with a friend in the orchestra. When talking about the development of connections between members, the student says,

The first two days it was funny, you know, the people are playing differently, but now they are like a team. You know, they're playing together, they understand more, see.

The first day we sit down on the same desk. Now I know how he plays and he knows how the way I am so we actually have some connection when we are on the same stand.

So by the first day it wasn't like this, [but] now we understand each other better.⁵⁹

According to the student, playing together requires members to get to know one another, despite their differences, for the good of the team. Simply by spending time perfecting the music together, they learn to understand each other differently.

Yet, while the orchestra creates a space for understanding, there is still discord amongst members. In one scene of the film a student explains his perspective on how the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra will affect the peace process in the conflict:

I think they should, should make, continue this tradition and make this workshop every year...and they must continue it. Even, I'm sure, in two or maybe three years there will

⁵⁹ *Knowledge is the Beginning*, directed by Paul Smaczny (EuroArts Music, 2005), accessed January 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIK0jHI5HJA&list=PLexN0zZkT9sd9sblOHvaGNcdvaiLhUEE->.

be peace between Israel and all the Arab countries. Even in this case we have to continue to make this, this workshops, and just to bring people together.⁶⁰

However, just a few minutes after the student speaks, his friend has an angry outburst. The musician's friend, upset by his partner's peace predictions, responds, "Stop! Stop! Stop! I said, there's no such a thing to talk about peace. Please, music? Is that possible music? ... I don't participate!"⁶¹ Instead of arguing back, the fellow musician simply laughs the awkward outburst away. He appears to recognize that despite the disagreement on peace, he still feels a friendship for his partner.

While some musicians struggle with political differences, others find ways to talk about their views in a conversational way. At one point in *Knowledge is the Beginning*, students discuss the Israeli government's decision to build a wall to separate various borders with the Palestinians. Unlike the situation between the two friends mentioned above, these students disagree but continue to converse and leave space for each other to share opinions. They speak about whether the wall would be effective and what true implications it might have. One student argues, "the wall, it makes the problem much bigger," but another student disagrees: "it's so hard to tell if this wall is good and bad, I tell you honestly."⁶² Others weigh in, proposing, "the wall will not protect, but it makes it all wrong, all wrong" while still others respond, "imagine if you live in Israel, how can you protect yourself?"⁶³ Notably, after this discussion the students do not

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

react angrily, but simply acknowledge how much they learn about each other through these types of conversations.

Conversations about the war between Israel and Palestine do not always have such political undertones. One striking conversation featured in *Knowledge is the Beginning* takes place between two best friends, a young man and a young woman. The young woman explains to the interviewer that her best friend's father was in the same war as her own father, but on a different side. She speaks about how baffling it feels to her that their fathers fought, and yet her friend is so close to her now that he is her "brother."⁶⁴ Her love for her "brother" transcends her deep political convictions.

The orchestra's main goal is to use music to create a foundation from which conversations and understanding can take place.⁶⁵ Students are encouraged to share their ideas and their music so that they can learn to appreciate the humanity of the other. From the interviews shown in the documentary, it is clear this mission is achievable.

In addition to student conversation, leaders of the orchestra also speak on politics in the region to promote understanding. While Edward Said was alive, he spoke to the orchestra as a whole and encouraged them to think about their neighbors. Speaking from the position of teacher, he created a safe place for empathy and encouraged members to put themselves in the shoes of their Arab or Israeli counterparts. Additionally, he used his academic background to

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ "West-Eastern Divan Orchestra," *West-Eastern Divan Orchestra*, accessed February 12, 2016, <http://www.west-eastern-divan.org/>.

explain historical policy views on the conflict, encouraging members to think beyond their polarized political positions as well.

Dialogue is not limited to the orchestra. Daniel Barenboim has taken a vocal role as director to stand up against certain unjust policies. Specifically, Barenboim has developed a passion for speaking out against the injustices faced by the people of Ramallah on the West Bank. He denounced Israeli policies that hurt the citizens of the city. Burning with a desire to show his passion for justice in the city, and with the support of orchestra members, Barenboim organized a concert in Ramallah in 2005. There he spoke to the audience on his and the orchestra's belief:

It is our belief that the destinies of these two people, of the Palestinian people and the Israeli people, are inextricably linked. And therefore the welfare, sense of justice and happiness of one will inevitably be that of the other ... We aim for a change in the thinking of many people in this area, many people, that will begin to really think that we have here two people, not one, two people that have a very, very philosophical, psychological and historical link to this geographical part of the world. And that it is our duty, all of us, to find a way to live together. Because either we all kill each other, or we learn to share what there is to share. It is with this message that we have come to you today.⁶⁶

⁶⁶ EuroArtsChannel, "Daniel Barenboim's speech during the Ramallah Concert" (video), August 1, 2015, accessed January 26, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QGi3SHYFkSA>.

Using the united voices of Israelis, Palestinians, and other Arabs, he made a stand against the discrimination faced by residents of Ramallah and has since spoken even more broadly against the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territory.

Like the Abrahamic Reunion, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra creates a unique space in the conflict where friendships can blossom between people of disputing ethnic identities. Furthermore, within the confines of the orchestra, political disagreement can be discussed openly rather than being ignored, and individuals are able to come to a mutual respect, if not understanding. Through performance, the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra creates space for fellowship and understanding in the divisive Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Analysis

While the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra have obvious differences, they share a valuable similarity: an ability to facilitate members' deeper understandings of the other. Both functioning in the midst of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the two organizations have created spaces where Palestinians, Arabs and Israelis can gather without facing threats or discrimination. The two organizations create fertilized space that allows for the creation of relationships that flourish between the Israelis and Palestinians.

If one accepts, for the sake of argument, the premise that organizations like the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra create spaces with a distinct type of potential for interfaith peacemaking, figuring out what makes these spaces distinctive would be useful. What might it be, in other words, about these two groups that fosters the creation of physical and emotional spaces in which identity transformation can occur? The work of both Martin Buber, specifically *I and Thou*, and Judith Butler, in *Bodies that Matter*, produce useful

tools or beginning the process of deconstructing and examining the distinctive nature of these two groups.

Using Martin Buber's theory for understanding the world in I-It experiences and I-You relationships, it is clear that the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra create spaces where I-You relationships are more likely to occur and, consequently, hatred and misunderstanding of the other are more likely to disintegrate. Furthermore, Butler's theory on the creation of one's sexual identity can be applied to the evolution of I-It experiences and one's understanding of the other in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, especially within the two organizations.

Martin Buber's Theory

Martin Buber's theory of human interaction claims that one's understanding of the world is made up exclusively of experiences and relationships, what he labels as I-It experiences and I-You relationships.⁶⁷ Buber explains these two types of experiences and relationships in the form of the metaphorical word pairs of I-It and I-You. He uses these word pairs to establish the existence of the two ways of relating to the world: "Basic words do not state something that might exist outside them; by being spoken they establish a mode of existence".⁶⁸ In Buber's view, the I-It and I-You word pairs reflect how individuals experience their world.

According to Buber, I-It experiences represent individuals' experience of the world. I-It experiences represent relationships and experiences that are confined. Conversely, I-You

⁶⁷ In Walter Kauffman's translation of Martin Buber's *Ich-Du*, Kauffman translates Ich-Du to I and You, rather than its traditional English translation, I-Thou. He argues that I-You is a better translation than I-Thou because I-You implies spontaneity and authenticity within the relationship, whereas Thou is elevated and implies a stifling hierarchy (14,15). Keeping with Kauffman's interpretation, I will use the translation "I-You" in place of "I-Thou."

⁶⁸ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Touchstone Books, 1996), 9.

relationships represent uncontrolled, unplanned moments in time where all categories of understanding dissolve into a unity and a transcendent relationship spontaneously happens:

When [You] is spoken the speaker has no thing for his object. For where there is a thing, there is another thing. Every it is bounded by others; It exists only through being bounded by others. But when [You] is spoken, there is no thing. [You] has no bounds. When [You] is spoken, the speaker has no thing; he has indeed nothing. But he takes his stand in relation.⁶⁹

Buber contends that I-It experiences are limited to an experience of a finite individual by a finite, objectified other. However, I-You relationships are relationships between one individual and the infinite, non-objectified existence of the other.

Understanding Buber's I-It

I-It experiences are ways of learning, living, and growing in the world. Buber describes them as absorbing the surface of things in one's world:

It is said that man experiences his world. What does that mean? Man travels over the surface of things and experiences them. He extracts over the surface of things and experiences them. He extracts knowledge about their constitution from them: he wins an experience from them. He experiences what belongs to things.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Martin Buber, "I and Thou," in *The Writings of Martin Buber 1950*, ed. Will Herberg (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 44.

⁷⁰ Martin Buber, "I and Thou," in *The Writings of Martin Buber 1950*, ed. Will Herberg (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 44.

According to Buber, I-It experiences are transactional exchanges, where the individual enters into an exchange with things in the world with a purpose.

One example of an I-It experience is a student's reading of Mark Tessler's *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* for a class on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In this instance, a student experiences the book and relates to the conflict via the author's explanation. The student learns about the history, and perhaps also about biases, in the evolution of the conflict. The student relates to the conflict through the book and, after finishing it, understands the conflict in terms of the strata set up by Tessler. From this relation, the student learns about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The student is then empowered with this knowledge of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and can apply Tessler's historical summary to other relevant I-It experiences.

Another example of an I-It experience is a relationship between an individual and a doctor. The individual goes to their doctor when sick or in need of a wellness check-up. The I-It experience is bound by an exchange of specific skills and needs, the doctor's expertise, and medical care of the patient and the patient's health. Like the relation between the student and Mark Tessler's book on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, the relationship is confined. Where the student's experience with the book was a limited exchange of knowledge on a particular subject, the relationship between patient and doctor is limited to the evaluation and treatment of an individual's health. There are categorical boundaries on the individual's experience within the I-It, predicated or built upon other edifices of I-It knowledge.

Understanding Buber's I-You Relationships

A significant difference between I-It experiences and I-You relationships revolves around the ability of an individual to control the exchange with the object, person or divine. Whereas in

I-It experiences the individual enters into the exchange knowingly and is fully aware of the possible extent of the I-It interaction, in the I-You relationship the individual has no control over whether and how the I-You bond occurs. The only control individuals have in the I-You relationship is their control over the preceding I-It experience and their ability to design an experience that creates literal and mental space for the appreciation of the It.

Further adding to the elusive nature of the I-You, according to Buber, I-You relationships only last until they are recognized by the individual experiencing them. Still, while the I-You relationship is temporary, its effects are lasting. After an I-You relationship occurs the experiencer can no longer understand the object of the I-You in the same manner. Their view is permanently transformed by the revelation.

I-You relationships happen out of I-It experiences. For example, when a biologist is studying the anatomy of the human heart, the biologist is experiencing the heart in an I-It fashion. Their goal is to study how the heart functions and the different parts that make it whole. In the I-It experience, they are looking at the heart solely through a biological and anatomical lens.

However, it may come to pass that, spontaneously, they see the heart in a more profound and complex sense. It is an uncontrollable occurrence: "The [you] meets me through grace--it is not found by seeking. But my speaking of the primary word to it is an act of my being, is indeed THE act of my being."⁷¹ The I-You occurs suddenly and transforms I-It an experience to a

⁷¹ Martin Buber, "I and Thou," in *The Writings of Martin Buber 1950*, ed. Will Herberg (New York: Meridian Books, 1960), 45.

relationship between the whole of the individual and the infinite You. According to Buber this is an I-You relationship.

For example, while studying the heart in the I-It framework, the biologist may be overcome with awe at the intersectionality of the heart's anatomy, its evolution, and its ability to so deeply affect the life and wellbeing of the body to which it is attached. They may suddenly see the heart as not only biological, but also spiritual, and may come to recognize the profound miracle of its whole being while acknowledging all they do not know.

Application of Buber's Theory to the Abrahamic Reunion and West-Eastern Divan Orchestra

The Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra seem to share the characteristic of trying to create or foster situations and spaces in which I-You relation is more likely to take place, where people can see each other in this full harmony, rather than just as representatives of one side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While finding documentation of specific I-You relationships within the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and Abrahamic Reunion is challenging since these events are spontaneous and personal and in such large groups often do not surface in written or video-documented form, evidence that I-You relationships have occurred can be seen in participants' documented reactions.

In the aforementioned clip featured in *Knowledge is the Beginning* that features a member of the orchestra explaining to the interviewer her astonishment that her friend's father was in the same war as her own father, but on the opposite side, there is evidence than an I-You

relationship might have taken place.⁷² As she speaks to the interviewer about her reaction to the revelation, she refers to her friend as her brother, emphasizing how emotionally close the two have become. As the interview comes to a close, she expresses astonishment at the polarized reality of this relationship with her friend and her father's violence to her friend's father.

Though this clip does not literally show an I-You relationship in the moment, it provides evidence that one occurred. The member of the orchestra demonstrates a profound awe at the intersectionality of these two realities and demonstrates an understanding of a deeper sense of reality. It is clear from his interview that the musician was so moved by the experience that she was unable to return to her previous way of understanding the other. After this experience, it appears, she realized the significance of relationship in understanding those on the other of the conflict, and as a result, her idea of the other shifted.

However, though I-You's profundity is desired and its influence on one's understanding of the world intense, the I-It is no less valuable. I-You relationships are often facilitated by the I-Its preceding them. Furthermore, while I-It experiences do not necessarily always conclude with a transformative awe, the I's engagement with the It results in a growing understanding of the It.

Members of the Abrahamic Reunion gradually develop understanding of the other via the I-It. Individuals in the Reunion learn to appreciate the other, the It, and their humanity through their experiences with them. So too do members of West-Eastern Divan Orchestra learn to appreciate the other from their I-It experiences with fellow members. I-It experiences in the

⁷² *Knowledge is the Beginning*, directed by Paul Smaczny (EuroArts Music, 2005), accessed January 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIK0jH15HJA&list=PLexN0zZkT9sd9sblOHvaGNcdvaiLhUEE->.

context of the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra allow for individual productivity and growth.

Judith Butler's Theory

How, then, might the specific contexts of the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra affect the network of "Its" that interact, and the possibility of their evolving into moments of I-You relation? It is clear that, in the context of the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, I-It experiences can facilitate deep and profound changes in the I and allow for the I to more deeply understand the other. By applying Judith Butler's theory of performativity to Buber's theory of the I-It experience, one can better understand how the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra create spaces for transformative I-It experience, and even the possibility of momentary I-You relation.

In Judith Butler's theory of performativity, Butler argues that the performance of sexual identity occurs within a social space. According to Butler,

The forming, crafting, bearing, circulation, signification of that sexed body will not be a set of actions performed in compliance with the law; on the contrary, they will be a set of actions mobilized by the law, the citational accumulation and dissimulation of the law that produces material effects, the lived necessity of those effects as well as the lived contestation of that necessity.⁷³

In other words, one's sexual identity is constantly shaped within a community and by the citation, or by the label assigned, via social authority. Sexual identity, in Butler's view, is not

⁷³ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), xxi.

discovered and expressed by the individual, but rather is performed by society and the citational authorities within it that exercise their power through discourse.

According to Butler, this performance, or performativity, is “the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects that it names.”⁷⁴ Performance occurs in society, where members of society develop means for understanding identity. Butler explains her theory in terms of sex and the development of sexual identity based on norms promoted through social discourse:

Construction [of sexual identity] is neither a single act nor a causal process initiated by a subject and culminating in a set of fixed effects. Construction not only takes place in time, but is itself a temporal process which operates through the reiteration of norms.⁷⁵

Thus, according to Butler, we are inherently and continually shaped by the norms of our environment. She observes that characteristics we in society claim to be distinctly male or distinctly female are ones that we create ourselves, characteristics that do not apply to the body’s anatomy.

For example, the color pink’s being classified to young children as a “girl’s color,” whereas blue is classified as a “boys color,” is a socially-created idea. If children were to be raised in an environment where these categories were not accepted and reinforced constantly by their society, this duality would not exist and the association between girls and pink and boys and blue would be nonexistent. Children would develop identities not defined by the color

⁷⁴ Ibid., xii.

⁷⁵ Ibid., xix.

norms associated with their genitalia, but rather in conjunction with their individual identity, or more likely, other norms promoted by their society.

However, in environments where this categorical distinction still exists, children are raised to understand their sexuality in a system of duality and their identity in terms of what is male and what is female. They develop their identity around these societal norms.

This theory applies to identities within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra like it applies to the development of sexual identity. Israelis and Palestinians develop their individual identities in conjunction with the stereotypes promoted on either side of the conflict. Growing up in polarized environments where stereotypes are based on national identity and a perception of the other's wrongness that spans a spectrum of misunderstanding to an assumption of the other's inherent evil, Israelis learn to understand the other in terms of these fear-filled stereotypes.

In the film *Knowledge is the Beginning* on the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, one performer addresses the camera and cites her perception of the social influence on Israelis understanding of Palestinians:

What worries me so much is the distorted image the media is spreading around all the time about the Arab and Muslim world and the only thing we can do really about it is to try to get out of this shell we've been living in for so long and just show the world what we have got, you know, to do what we really are. Because you can't just sit anymore at

home anymore and let those great powers just tell their own version of the stories and of history.⁷⁶

According to the speaker, Israelis develop an understanding of their natural rightness via the media and other social pressures. Their society, in this case the government and media, creates the narrative for understanding the conflict. Israelis are shown the conflict in terms of the duality between right and wrong, just as Palestinians are show this duality in their own social context. Being shaped by their environment, the two sides develop a means for understanding themselves and the other that is independent of the actual personhood of the other, and simply formed by the norms designed by society.

Both the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra and the Abrahamic Reunion create new environments that promote different strata for understanding than the community environments in Israeli and Palestinian circles because they do not promote divisive binary norms. Instead, they encourage an open understanding based on individual personhood, rather than pre-existing group identity. In the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, this means they play music and actually perform in this new society of understanding, whereas in the Abrahamic Reunion the space is created through prayer and under the religious assumption of each individual's inherent worth as deemed by God and religious beliefs.

In the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, Palestinians, Arabs and Israelis are invited into the aforementioned structured space governed by two respective, universal truths. Once they choose to enter this social space, they join a social community built

⁷⁶ *Knowledge is the Beginning*, directed by Paul Smaczny (EuroArts Music, 2005), accessed January 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIK0jH15HJA&list=PLexN0zZkT9sd9sblOHvaGNcdvaiLhUEE->.

around a particularized performance. In the Abrahamic Reunion, this performance is prayer and the experiencing of faith tradition. In the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra the performance is literal musical performance, but also the performance of a new identity vis-à-vis the conflict.

As long as members are in the community, they are performing alongside one another while accepting the universal truth, or norm, that governs the space. Technically, members maintain their own convictions about the others in the group, but as they continue to perform, members come to understand their fellow religious peoples or musicians. This understanding conflicts with the understanding of the other that is promoted outside of the space, in the midst of the conflict. The outside understanding of the other portrays an image of the other as violent, wrong, evil or backwards. However, the in-group understanding opens up the possibility for the other to be understood as human.

As members continue to operate alongside fellow members in the sacred space, their understanding of the other that they developed in the conflict is reshaped. Through the performance of prayerful acts and the playing of music in these unique spaces, members develop new ways of understanding the other.

The Intersection of Theory and the Abrahamic Reunion and West-Eastern Divan Orchestra

It is clear there is a connection between the I-It of Buber's theory and Butler's theory of performativity. Buber's theory of the I-It claims one experiences the world, and from these experiences, grows and evolves. Though different from the I-You transformative relationship, the role of I-It experiences in one's life is to accomplish a purpose, most commonly to learn, grow, understand or evolve.

Butler's theory of performativity provides a means to understand the I-It experience through a sociological lens. Her explanation of the influence of social norms on the shaping of an individual's identity and understanding of another's identity explains, in social terms, the process of an I-It experience on the individual. Where Buber establishes what the I-It is, what significance it has on the individual, Butler's theory addresses how the I-It happens in very specific detail.

Application of Buber and Butler's Theory to the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra

Through the lens of Butler theory of performativity and Buber's I-It we can understand the transformative opportunity the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra provide. For example, the aforementioned Abrahamic Reunion trip to Mount Gerizim was an opportunity of developing transformative I-It experiences. Members were performing identities and experiencing new ways of understanding the other as they listened to local leaders and then met one another and discussed their respective religious traditions. By listening and sharing openly within the diverse group, members were able to experience a new reality of the other.⁷⁷ What is more, one could argue the Abrahamic Reunion also provided the opportunity for I-You relationship to occur in the religious service that followed. At the end of the event, new norms were established within the group for understanding difference.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Rodef Shalom Eliyahu McLean, and Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, "Multi-faith Hanukah Celebration in the West Bank," *Abrahamic Reunion*, April 7, 2015, accessed December 8, 2015, <http://www.abrahamicreunion.org/multi-faith-hanukah-celebration-in-the-west-bank/>.

⁷⁸ "Yet another large event occurred in the spring of 2015 at Mount Grizim where over 120 people from Palestine, Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Hebron joined with habitants of the Nablus area at a community center.⁷⁸ There, the group heard from local leaders and government officials about the need for hope and unity in the midst of the conflict. After the talks concluded, the attendees divided into smaller circles of conversation where they learned about each person's religious tradition. At the end of the event, attendees traveled to a Jewish synagogue for prayers

The promotion of inclusive social norms in the Abrahamic Reunion is not limited to the Multi-faith Hanukah gathering in the West Bank. In fact, Abrahamic Reunion leader Sheikh Manasra also establishes these norms of experience and elaborates on the Abrahamic Reunion's mission of creating space for understanding in his most recent blog about the role of religious leadership. Addressing religious leadership and members of the Abrahamic Reunion, Manasra writes,

The verse of the Qu'ran says – ‘All people We created you from male and female, and We have made you nations and clans to know one another.’ It is God's will to for us to have deep internal and external knowledge of each other, to truly know one another, and through each other to know ourselves, and to know God – this *knowledge* is the center of our life. Through this knowledge we can create a new era and teach a new generation; then we will have a future that can hold and realize all of our dreams.⁷⁹

In Sheikh Manasra's call to Abrahamic Reunion members he establishes social norms like Judith Butler outlines in her theory of performativity. Using the context of God's word as revealed in the Muslim faith tradition, Manasra establishes the Abrahamic Reunion social norms as putting forth effort to know those who are different than oneself and one's community. Moreover, this call strikingly resembles Butler's theory of performance as Manasra's call to know the other necessitates the performance of meeting, learning and knowing one who is different from oneself.

and the lighting ceremony. During this portion of the day, Christian and Muslim leaders were able to speak on the similarity between this Jewish custom and practices in their own faiths.”

⁷⁹ Sheikh Ghassan Manasra, “Open Letter to the Religious Leadership of the Holy Land, and the World,” *Abrahamic Reunion*, January 6, 2016, accessed February 5, 2016, <http://www.abrahamicreunion.org/open-letter-to-the-religious-leadership-of-the-holy-land-and-the-world/>.

Sheikh Manasra's blog, through Buber's heuristic, could be seen as a call for members to develop I-It experiences with the other. Judith Butler's performativity describes Manasra's call to interfaith and inter-national action. Using the lens of Buber and Butler's theory, one can see how performing the social norms for which Manasra advocates enables the development of an I-It experience with the other in the context of the Abrahamic Reunion. In turn, these I-It experiences allow for the transformation of Abrahamic Reunion members' understanding of the other.

Relating Manasra's blog to Buber's theory, it appears Manasra identifies the equivalent of an I-It experience leading to an I-You relationship: "It is God's Will to for us to have deep internal and external knowledge of each other, to truly know one another, and through each other to know ourselves, and to know God"⁸⁰ Though Manasra does not specify the spontaneity or depth of the relationship with God, like that of Buber's I-You, he does emphasize that to know God, relatable to the I-You relationship, one must know the other, through what is equatable to an I-It experience.

Examples of the I-It experience and performativity shaping understandings of the other are also evident in the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra. Notably, in one scene of *Knowledge is the Beginning*, we see performativity in action as Palestinians and Israelis speak to each other calmly about a differing opinion on a new wall being built in Israel. The students experience one another and together, learn from one another. Though they continue to disagree, they all agree that they are transformed by one another and are shaped by their conversation and knowing one another, as illustrated in this overlapping conversation among a group of orchestra members:

⁸⁰ Ibid.

-But it's a good idea because now I know how you think, how you...
 -...ya you break this wall you know, you break the ice..."
 -...we know each other more, when we learn about each other. That's the really good thing. For example... I didn't know nothing about Lebanon and now he told me.⁸¹

The students inhabit Butler's idea of performativity and demonstrate the powerful potential of an I-It experience as they share how their understanding has been transformed by their relationship with the other.

Daniel Barenboim, the director of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, beautifully identifies this intersection of Buber and Butler's theory as he addresses his orchestra in one scene of *Knowledge is the Beginning*. In the scene, Barenboim remarks on the importance of their project together:

But somehow, when all of you come together one side almost enhances the other. This is, for me, the beauty of this project and I can only repeat to you Edward's words saying that this has really become the most important project in his life, and it is for me too. And I hope you will go back to your studies and your work, wherever you are, and keep all of this, what we lived through this summer in mind, because in the end nobody who has been through this Divan remains the same; it has really changed the life of everyone who has been here.⁸²

⁸¹ *Knowledge is the Beginning*, directed by Paul Smaczny (EuroArts Music, 2005), accessed January 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIK0jH15HJA&list=PLexN0zZkT9sd9sblOHvaGNcdvaiLhUEE->.

⁸² *Knowledge is the Beginning*, directed by Paul Smaczny (EuroArts Music, 2005), accessed January 16, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HIK0jH15HJA&list=PLexN0zZkT9sd9sblOHvaGNcdvaiLhUEE->.

Barenboim explains to the orchestra this idea of identity transformation from knowing the other that Buber and Butler theorize. He acknowledges the power of performing together and the effect such an experience has on the evolution of one's own identity and understanding of the other's. Finally, he acknowledges the permanence of the effect of an experience in the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, noting how the social norms established and performed in the orchestra can be lived and shared in the larger social environments of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Conclusion

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has created an extremely divisive climate in the region of Israel-Palestine. Since massive polarization after Israeli Independence, political relations on both sides of the conflict have been frequently reduced to violence and discord, and individual citizens are often left with warped perceptions of the identity of the other, formed primarily by their respective governments and media.

Arguably in the midst of a third intifada, there is little hope amongst people in the region for resolution or peace in the near future.⁸³ Attacks by Palestinians against Israeli citizens and harassment and excessive force by soldiers of the Israeli Defense Force continue to disrupt daily life in the region.⁸⁴ Though the international community continues to pressure the Israeli Government and Palestinian Authority to negotiate, little has stemmed from their efforts. Most recently, France organized a peace conference to take place May 30th, 2016 in Paris with the goal

⁸³ Gregg Carlestrom, "Can Anyone Prevent a Third Intifada?" *Foreign Policy*, October 14, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/14/can-anyone-prevent-a-third-intifada-israel-palestine/>.

⁸⁴ Diaa Hadid, "Israel names Palestinian as Bomber in Jerusalem Bus Attacks," *New York Times* (Bethlehem, West Bank), April 21, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/22/world/middleeast/israel-jerusalem-bus-bombing-palestinian-suspect.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2Fisrael&action=click&contentCollection=world®ion=stream&module=stream_unit&version=latest&contentPlacement=6&pgtype=collection&r=0.

of furthering Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. However, as of April 28th, 2016, Israel had refused to join the talks, advocating instead for direct negotiations with Palestine without preconditions.⁸⁵

The unique, grassroots peace efforts of the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra are minority movements in the region and perhaps have not yet had a significant effect on the political process. Though both do advocate various political solutions to the conflict, the Abrahamic Reunion and West-Eastern Divan Orchestra do not exercise their political voice. However, their work goes against the culture of violence in Israel and Palestine and inspires those affected by the conflict with hope, creating a new narrative to understand the other that combats the hate-filled narratives broadcast by political and media leaders on both sides of the conflict.

The Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra are unique and invaluable because the two are able to affect powerful change in individuals whose lives are defined by fear and the anticipation of aggression. They create another avenue for living in the conflict. Yet, if one looks at the broader conflict, there is still such a gross tension between Israelis and Palestinians. The Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra do not have much impact on the peace process and have little ability to persuade the governments of the two warring groups. Nevertheless, the space the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra create is still important because it impacts the daily lives of people who otherwise would live in even more terrorizing fear and would be fueled to hate and aggression

⁸⁵ Barak Ravid, "Israel Rejects French Initiative to Convene International Peace Conference," *Haaretz*, April 28, 2016, <http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.716857>.

because of the current climate. In such a terrible conflict, the small quantitative impact these two groups have is much more valuable when understood on the qualitative scale.

It could be useful to investigate what place the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra might have in the formal peace process and the shaping of resolution. Could the space they create be emulated to facilitate more widespread peace in Israel and Palestine by impacting those involved in the decision making processes on both sides? If so, how might this be possible? The transformative power of the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is apparent, and if that effect could to be emulated in a way that could directly improve relations between the two governments, it could have a potent effect on the conflict.

Still, while the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra have yet to significantly impact the policy makers on either side of the conflict, the powerful identity transformations both organizations facilitate provide a significant source of hope for affected individuals in the region. In the midst of the violence and oppression that define everyday life in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Abrahamic Reunion and the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra serve as beacons of hope for reconciliation in Israel and Palestine.

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