

*Brothers and Underdogs:
The Palestinian Experience as Understood in Latin America*

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The Israeli-Palestinian conflict¹, often used as a symbol of the Middle East's never-ending violence, resistance to peace, and mosaic of ethnicities and cultures, is not a new conflict by any means. Indeed, it is the kind of conflict that weakens humanity's faith in peace the longer it drags out. However, this does not mean we should become increasingly insensitive to the dynamics of the conflict or to the people it concerns the more years pass; instead, we should seek out new perspectives to understanding the conflict and its effects on the Palestinian nation. These perspectives may take on the form of different cultural, national, and academic expressions, but one that I believe has not been sufficiently discussed is the Latin American perspective of the conflict. Although international politics have only recently recognized Latin America's growing political, economic, and cultural global influence, Latin America has been coming out of the United States' 'backyard' shadow for some time now. As the United States has been turning its attention to the Middle East in the past two decades, Latin America has taken the opportunity to increase trade with China and other Asian nations in the Pacific Alliance.² Other countries, such as India and Iran, have seen value in Latin America's energy and military assets and are strengthening their ties in places like Venezuela, while Russia in 2008 teamed up with Brazil and the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas.³ Brazil itself is now considered a major powerhouse and has joined the group of nations globally referred to as the 'BRIC' countries, along with Russia, India, and China. Although this does not mean the end of U.S. influence, Latin America is expanding its alliances, and the world is taking note.

¹ Throughout the rest of the paper, I will refer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in an abbreviated manner as the Palestinian conflict. I will also write under the assumption that the reader is familiar with the basic political, historical, social, and cultural facts of the Palestinian conflict.

² Patricia Rey Mallén, "Latin America Increases Relations With China: What Does That Mean For The US?" *International Business Times*, June 28, 2013, accessed December 10, 2013 <http://www.ibtimes.com/latin-america-increases-relations-china-what-does-mean-us-1317981>.

³ Shlomo Ben-Ami, "Is the US Losing Latin America?" *Project Syndicate*, June 5, 2013, accessed December 10, 2013, <http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/the-new-nature-of-us-influence-in-latin-america-by-shlomo-ben-ami>.

Latin America is not a monolithic region by any means: it is home to energetic youth movements, a robust sense of nationalism, a variety of economic systems, a rich political history, and a proud cultural heritage. It is a region with a diverse demographic and it experiences a substantial amount of internal and external migration. All of these regional dynamics make Latin America an exciting and necessary place through which to gauge understanding of Palestine and its conflict, and it is necessary to the integrity of any good discussion to include all existing perspectives. The Palestinian conflict is not an issue that is insulated from the rest of the Middle East—because of factors such as immigration, regional politics, and sectarian divides, its effects influence the entirety of the Middle East, and by extension, the world. Central to the Palestinian identity is the struggle for liberation and the assertion of a *Palestinian* sovereignty—not anyone else's. This makes it impossible to discuss the Palestinian experience without recognizing that the Palestinian conflict is at the heart of the matter. No matter what ethnicity, all Middle Easterners—in the homeland or in diaspora—recognize the enormous influence of the Palestinian conflict and believe that a solution must be made for the wellbeing of the entire region. Because of this, I believe there is an urgent need to look at the Palestinian conflict in a global context, and specifically a Latin American one, and that there will continue to be such a need until an effective solution is reached.

Additionally, the regions of Latin America and the Middle East nicely complement one another. Latin America has several unique connections to the Middle East that has allowed it to develop a different approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than the traditional Western⁴ view. Not only did the Moorish invasion of Spain in the fifteenth century carry Middle Eastern culture

⁴ Because the term 'Western' can mean any number of vague ideas, 'Western' throughout this paper will be used to refer to the position of the United States and its allies towards the Palestinian conflict that include, among other things: a refusal to recognize Palestine as a nation-state; a belief in continuing Israeli policies and practices, including those in violation of international law, for the purposes of Israeli national security; and other discourses and practices that justify Israel's discriminatory policies and practices towards people of Palestinian origin.

into the Iberian Peninsula and later, the New World through Christopher Columbus⁵, but significant Middle Eastern communities thrive throughout Latin America. Historically, Latin America and the Middle East have both gone through periods of subordination, independence, and nation-building due to centuries of colonialism at the hands of the world's premier powers, although well-developed and sovereign civilizations existed before European contact. In fact, Chicano organizer Manuel Criollo traces the shared history of these two regions vis-à-vis the Western powers in his article, "Palestinian and Chicano Peoples Share a History of Resistance to Colonialism, Racism, and Imperialism," because he believes "our histories and destiny are intertwined. [It is a] critical aspect of understanding that our own liberation is tied to the liberation of Palestine and the liberation of oppressed peoples and nations around the world."⁶

Using historical facts, Criollo proves that centuries of colonial rule have tied these two regions together, but now resistance will be what unites them. The Palestinians were controlled by the Ottomans only to be directly transferred to British rule in the 19th century, during which the Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate of Palestine allowed their land to be manipulated for the Zionist project. At the same time, Mexico was colonized by the Spanish Empire, and when it achieved independence, found a new threat in the United States to the north. The development of the U.S. and British empires subjected Mexico to the idea of Manifest Destiny, the Mexican-American War, and exploitation of Mexican labor and resources. Meanwhile, Britain's increased role in the Middle East disrupted not only Palestine but also Egypt and Greater Syria and eventually facilitated Jewish immigration to Palestine. In more recent times, Operation Wetback deported more than one million Mexicans and Mexican

⁵ Rodrigo Canovas, *Literatura de inmigrantes árabes y judíos en Chile y México* (Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana Vervuert, 2011), 141.

⁶ Manuel Criollo, "Palestinian and Chicano Peoples Share a History of Resistance to Colonization, Racism, and Imperialism," *American Quarterly* 62 (2010): 854.

Americans in the mid-1900s, and since Israel's creation as a nation-state in 1948, the region has suffered numerous wars, uprisings (known as an *intifada* in Arabic), refugee crises, and harmful and illegal discriminatory policies against its Palestinian population.

Although Mexico is just one example of the greater Latin American experience, these colonial social structures are important to understand because they play an active role in the fragmentation of societies there today. The legacies of racism, exploitation, and hegemony are present not just in the political and economic structures of both regions, but in the way their citizens regard each other and in the way academic discourse and information dissemination about these two regions are conducted globally. And although the Middle East and the greater 'Orient' were the focus of Edward Said's classical work, Latin America also deals with the effects of being 'othered' as a result of the exoticization of its peoples and cultures.⁷ Like the Middle East, the Latin America's intellectual and cultural contributions are often ignored, ascribed less importance, or coopted by the West.

Given the potential of these historical and contemporary parallels to create a foundation for congruence and not contradiction between the two regions, I wanted to identify the specific dynamics in Latin America that would support a sympathetic perspective of the Palestinian conflict. There is no doubt that influential Middle Eastern, especially Palestinian, communities in Latin America contribute to supporting the pro-Palestinian side of the conflict, so I looked into the Syrian-Lebanese community in Brazil, the Lebanese community in Mexico, the diverse Arab community in Argentina, and the Palestinian communities in Chile and Honduras. I have found that they do contribute to pro-Palestinian sentiments, but that they are not as categorically 'Arab' as I thought—they have constructed their own identities that are not exclusively Latin American or Middle Eastern. I also wanted to be sensitive to the growing Christian evangelical movements

⁷ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

in Brazil and Guatemala and whether these typically pro-Israel movements have had an opposite response to the conflict than my hypothesis for the whole region. I found that they have, as I suspected, and will explain the details further on. The walls around the West Bank and along the U.S.-Mexico border provide yet another significant physical and symbolic manifestation of the shared colonialism and discrimination between the two regions, but also for shared resistance and community, once they are used as spaces for artistic expression. Because I am interested in identifying and understanding the holistic Latin American perspective, I looked at the perceptions of and responses to the conflict throughout Latin America at both the national/governmental level and the popular level. For understanding the national perspective I referred to official state press releases and declarations and the voting records of several Latin American countries at the United Nations meetings when Israeli statehood was being debated and voted on. To understand the popular level, I discussed popular resistance movements and trends within how revolutionary politics are practiced in both regions, politically conscious music and artists, and international soccer games as spaces for resistance. Given all my research, I believe the historical parallels of colonialism and discrimination between Latin America and Palestine specifically, and the evidence of cultural subordination between the two regions more generally, create a unique bond which allows the former to regard the Palestinian conflict in a manner that reflects solidarity rather than aggression.

In order to understand Latin America's modern-day perspective, it is essential to understand its intersection with the Middle Eastern through the physical intermingling of their peoples. Since the time of the Ottoman Empire, Arabs,⁸ often (pejoratively) misnamed Turks because of the political situation, have been immigrating to Latin America for political, religious,

⁸ Although Arab in its original use refers to a specific ethnic group, throughout this paper it will be used interchangeably with 'Middle Eastern' to refer to any Arabic-speaking community, with the exception of Jewish populations.

and economic reasons. In her article “Palestinians in Central America: From Temporary Emigrants to a Permanent Diaspora,” historian Manzar Foroohar agrees with most scholars that the “general economic decline of the Ottoman Empire,” famine, and objections to forced enlistment in the military caused people to flee.⁹ Literary scholar Rodrigo Cánovas believes that Christian persecution under an Islamic political system was also a critical factor, and although Foroohar states that she does not see enough historical evidence to support this, it is well documented that early Arab, and specifically Palestinian, immigrants to the region were almost exclusively Christian. Even today, Christian Arabs tend to be more open than their Muslim brothers to Western culture and education, which historians argue create an easier transition to Latin America and its traditionally Catholic culture. About this trend Foroohar agrees, stating “that because of religious identification Christians tended to immigrate to Western countries where they thought they could more easily blend in, whereas Muslims preferred to go to Egypt, which was enjoying an economic boom at that time.”¹⁰ In fact, this religious compatibility has led to what Cánovas describes as an amicable Catholic-Orthodox syncretism.¹¹

To be sure, the different national Arab communities—the most prominent being the Palestinian, Syrian, and Lebanese—have settled all over Latin America. For the purposes of this paper, the Middle Eastern communities in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Honduras, and Chile will be discussed, the first three briefly and the latter two more thoroughly as sites for specifically *Palestinian* communities. Indeed, several Middle Easterners besides Palestinians have reached monumental status in Latin America, such as Mexico’s prominent businessman, Carlos Slim Helú, who is of Lebanese descent and was ranked the second richest man in the world by

⁹ Manzar Foroohar, “Palestinians in Central America: From Temporary Emigrants to a Permanent Diaspora,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* XI (2011): 7.

¹⁰ Foroohar, “Palestinians in Central America,” 8.

¹¹ Cánovas, *Literatura de inmigrantes árabes y judíos*, 174.

Forbes,¹² and ex-President Carlos Menem of Argentina, who has Syrian ancestry and is recognized as symbolizing potential for better acceptance of Arab communities in historically exclusionary Argentina.¹³ It is important to look at different Middle Eastern communities, not just Palestinian, in order to understand how they as integrated members of Latin American societies help shape the region's perception and response to Palestine.

Brazil's major cities, especially São Paulo, are home to significant Syrian-Lebanese communities: today, the country is home to an estimated six to ten million people of Syrian and Lebanese descent.¹⁴ Most of this immigration occurred before 1970 and Brazilianist and literary scholar Robert Moser attributes it to the same political reasons as Foroohar and Cánovas, as well as to the success of economic neoliberalism in Brazil by the 1970s.¹⁵ Latin Americanist John Tofik Karam believes that being Arab in Brazil is its own ethnic construction, different from purely Arab or purely Brazilian,¹⁶ similar to how historian Theresa Alfaro-Velcamp believes "the construction of Lebaneseness has been unique in Mexico and how immigrant homeland memory may depart from homeland reality."¹⁷ This is significant to our discussion of the Palestinian conflict in Latin America because, based on the unique ethnic Arab identities constructed in Brazil and Mexico, the response of these communities to the conflict must reflect their position as members of two regions, both with a colonial history. Arguably, they will derive sympathy and solidarity for the Middle East by not only tracing their heritage there, but also by

¹² "World's Most Powerful People," *Forbes*, accessed November 16, 2013, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/carlos-slim-helu/>.

¹³ Theresa Alfaro Velcamp, "The Historiography of Arab Immigration to Argentina: The Intersection of the Imaginary and the Real Country," *Immigrants & Minorities* 16 (1997): 240.

¹⁴ John Tofik Karam, *Another Arabesque: Syrian-Lebanese Ethnicity in Neoliberal Brazil* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2007), 10.

¹⁵ Banning Eyre, "The Lebanese Diaspora in Brazil," *Afropop Worldwide*, accessed November 16, 2013, <http://www.afropop.org/wp/14153/robert-moser-the-lebanese-diaspora-in-brazil/>.

¹⁶ Karam, *Another Arabesque*, 3.

¹⁷ Teresa Alfaro-Velcamp, *So Far from Allah, So Close to Mexico: Middle Eastern Immigrants in Modern Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 24.

understanding ‘otherness’ in their new home as early subjects of discrimination in Latin America. As Alfaro-Velcamp explains, “Middle Eastern immigrants became Mexican citizens, yet some constructed a parallel loyalty to Lebanon.”¹⁸ This suggests that although Arab immigrants either assimilated or positioned themselves as superior foreigners in order to explain their entrepreneurial success,¹⁹ there remained links between their new life of prosperity and security and the life they left behind. Furthermore, as they became more integrated into their new home, they understood ‘otherness’ as it relates to Latin Americans on the world stage.

In her essay, “The Historiography of Arab Immigration to Argentina: The Intersection of the Imaginary and the Real Country,” Alfaro-Velcamp agrees with the aforementioned scholars on the key motives for mainly Syrian and Lebanese immigration.²⁰ However, although the Argentine immigration policies of the time were discriminatory, seeking people that would strengthen national values of “Catholicism, Latinity, paternalism, family, and order,” they allowed for Christian Arabs to just barely squeeze through.²¹ They did not fit the ideal European model, nor were they non-white. One can understand them as second-best immigrants, sometimes placed above Jews, and definitely above Arab Muslims, who did come and were sometimes prized for the business ventures as long as they ultimately fit the Argentine idea of the melting pot.²²

There is a direct causation between Middle Eastern communities in Argentina and the nation’s December 2010 recognition of Palestine as an independent state with pre-1967 borders,

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid, 21-24.

²⁰ Although Argentina is known for its significant Jewish population, its influence and the influence of any Jewish or Zionist political lobbies in Argentina are unfortunately outside of the scope of this paper.

²¹ Alfaro Velcamp, “Arab Immigration to Argentina,” 231.

²² Alfaro Velcamp “Arab Immigration to Argentina,” 231-232.

despite being home to Latin America's largest Jewish community.²³ This recognition followed Palestinian diplomats lobbying various South American governments, including Chile, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Guyana, Paraguay, and Brazil. The president of the state of Palestine Mahmoud Abbas himself lobbied the Argentine government during a 2009 tour. But although Argentina's and other Mercosur members' recognition of Palestine (like Brazil and Uruguay) are attributed to political and economic interests, Argentina's view that it itself also is the underdog in international politics today strengthens its decision to support Palestine. Argentine President Cristina Fernandez used her country's position in the UN Security Council in August 2013 to criticize the power dynamic of the council, where only the five permanent members have veto power, reflecting post-World War II international relations.²⁴ As opposed to regional bodies, the Security Council's permanent members can make decisions without unanimity; indeed, the Palestinian petition to be admitted as a full member to the UN was blocked by the United States in the Security Council in September 2011.²⁵ This is a personal concern for Argentina because of its interest in the Falkland Islands, or the Malvinas, "which Argentina claims Britain has illegally occupied since 1833."²⁶ Furthermore, the stalled Israeli-Palestinian talks reflect the British-Argentine talks that have been called for but have yet to take place²⁷. Thus, not only are demographic factors at work in Argentine-Palestinian solidarity, but Argentine regional conflicts reflect similar legacies of colonialism and provide understanding for national situations like Palestine's.

²³ Juan Forero, "Support For Palestinian Statehood Splits Argentines," *NPR*, February 17, 2011, accessed November 18, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/17/133805619/support-for-palestinian-statehood-splits-argentines>.

²⁴ "Argentina president takes aim at UN vetoes against Palestinians," *The Times of Israel*, August 7, 2013, accessed November 18, 2013, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/argentina-president-takes-aim-at-un-vetoes-against-palestinians/>.

²⁵ "Solid Latam support for Palestine 'observer status' vote at the UN," *MercoPress*, November 30, 2012, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://en.mercopress.com/2012/11/30/solid-latam-support-for-palestine-observer-status-vote-at-the-un>.

²⁶ "Argentina president takes aim."

²⁷ *Ibid.*

As we focus on the Palestinian community in Latin America more specifically, we turn to two nations: Honduras, as San Pedro Sula has the first record of Palestinian immigration to Central America,²⁸ and Chile, as the home to the largest Palestinian community outside of the Middle East today.²⁹ Foroohar states, consistent with several scholars about different nations, that Honduras, like Argentina, was not necessarily the intended destination of Arab immigrants—the United States was. They were at first victims of the immigration process when their journey abruptly ended at Latin American ports, but later familial and social networks began to draw them to the continent. Like the economic prosperity enjoyed under Porfirio Díaz in Mexico, and under neoliberal policies in Brazil, the Palestinians in the early 1900s were able to fill a void in the relatively new Honduran market economy by creating small businesses and filling the merchant class.³⁰ Combined with progressive national immigration policies, by 1920 Palestinians made up 95 percent of the Arab merchants in San Pedro Sula. By the next decade they controlled the city's two most important textile factories and Palestinian family businesses were included in the list of the “twenty-five most important economic groups in the 1980s.”³¹ Again, because of their successful integration, it is important to look at the Palestinian community as Latin American and how that syncretism affects their perspective to the Palestinian conflict.

According to Cánovas, data from 1941 states that 51.1 percent of the Arab immigrants to Chile were Palestinians from one of two cities near Jerusalem: Beit Jala and Bethlehem. By 1982, Chile had 80,000 Palestinians, its Arab population comprising one percent of the total

²⁸ Foroohar, “Palestinians in Central America,” 8.

²⁹ Pascale Bonnefoy, “Latin American countries recognize Palestinian state,” *GlobalPost*, January 1, 2011, accessed November 2, 2013, <http://www.globalpost.com/dispatch/chile/101229/palestinian-state-latin-america-recognition>.

³⁰ Foroohar, “Palestinians in Central America,” 10.

³¹ *Ibid*, 12.

population of America.³² The powerful effect of this community is still felt today—current numbers report 400,000 Chileans of Palestinian descent—including by political leaders.³³ The January 2011 “Declaration by the Government of Chile regarding the recognition of the State of Palestine” recognizes both the Jewish and Palestinian communities in Chile and “their valuable contribution to the social, cultural, political, and economic development of the country...their complete integration” into Chilean society, and upholds the peaceful coexistence of both communities as an example of the fraternity that is hoped for the states of Israel and Palestine.³⁴

However, there are not only favorable Middle Eastern communities in Latin America—there are also growing populations of evangelical Christians who support Israeli statehood because of what is known as Christian Zionism. The religious connections between Judaism and Christianity lead many evangelical Christians to support Israel as the holy land and believe its existence as a state is necessary for the perfection of Christ’s return—notwithstanding the human rights violations in the Palestinian territories that any religion would condemn. One-third of the Guatemalan population is now evangelical, and Brazil, which has the largest number of Christians in Latin America, is seeing a similar rise in evangelical Christianity.³⁵ Religious scholar Yaakov Ariel says that Latin American Christian Zionism is part of a global movement that is growing in new places like Korea and joining places traditionally supportive of Christian Zionism like the United States.³⁶

³² Cánovas, *Literatura de inmigrantes árabes y judíos*, 164.

³³ “Solid Latam support for Palestine.”

³⁴ “Declaration of the Government of Chile regarding the recognition of the State of Palestine,” Government of Chile, January 7, 2011, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://wayback.archive-it.org/176/20130616195646/http://www.gob.cl/english/government-information/2011/01/07/declaration-by-the-government-of-chile-regarding-the-recognition-of-the-state-of-palestine.htm>.

³⁵ Chris Arsenault, “Evangelicals rise in Latin America,” *Al Jazeera English*, March 26, 2013, accessed November 19, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2012/03/201232593459332334.html>.

³⁶ Yaakov Ariel, “An Unexpected Alliance: Christian Zionism and its Historical Significance,” *Modern Judaism* 26.1 (2006): 81, accessed November 19, 2013, http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/modern_judaism/v026/26.1ariel.html.

New trends like the one mentioned above are critical to the future of the Latin American perspective towards Palestine because together Latin American nations create a powerful force in international bodies such as the United Nations and can work to tip the scales in their favor.

Edward Glick says in his book, *Latin America and the Palestine Problem*:

It has been said that “insofar as what might be described as the purely moral tone of the [United Nations]...the Latin Americans have been responsible for much that is characteristic of that tone”...[they] were foremost in the process by which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was eventually created...the Latin American delegations...have shown “zealous care for the interests of Arab refugees.”

Thus, it is important to understand Latin America’s role in voting on what the UN called the ‘Palestine question’ and Israeli statehood, starting in 1947. The Middle East’s primary concerns at the First Special Session of the Assembly were the end of the British mandate over Palestine and achieving an independent Palestinian state. Not a single Latin American country voted for the latter in the First Committee, and only El Salvador voted for a slightly different Polish proposal that was going on at the same time.³⁷ When the Second General Assembly met to discuss the Palestinian Partition Resolution, Peru and Panama were in favor.³⁸ However, even though at the time Argentina had the largest Jewish population in Latin America, it was not in favor of the divisive plan: “The Argentine Delegation...for racial reasons cannot raise this desire [to establish as many Jewish homes as necessary] to the extreme of violating the Charter by imposing by force the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine.”³⁹ Because there was growing support for Jewish statehood, Glick observes that while Latin American countries made up only one-third of the UN, they cast 40 percent of the votes in favor of Israel. Since this appears to be contradictory to his initial statements about Latin American empathy for Arab refugees and

³⁷ Edward Glick, *Latin America and the Palestine Problem*, (New York: Theodor Herzl Foundation, 1958), 47.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 79-80.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 86.

human rights, while reading through meeting minutes my best conclusion is that Latin American voting patterns were not necessarily predictable. Some countries have stayed consistent from the 1940s until today—such as Panama refusing Palestinian independence in 1947, and refusing to promote it to a non-member observer state in 2012⁴⁰—but other countries changed their votes mid-session, possibly hinting at the international pressure of the time or the urgent legacy of the Holocaust. Whatever the motives, we can conclude that the Latin American bloc was influential in the UN sessions of the 1940s, the same way that some of their favorable political stances today lead the world in correcting the Palestinian conflict.

Thus far the discussion has been largely historical, but the legacies of colonialism continue today, as do cultural demonstrations of resistance. Lest we believe that the similarities of colonialism are merely historical and its legacies between Latin America and the Middle East merely conceptual, the U.S.-Mexico border and the West Bank Barrier are concrete examples of these enduring divisions. Besides their physical reality, perhaps the most powerful visual and symbolic reminder of discrimination, inequality, and hegemony is a wall. The Israeli wall and its checkpoints, built in 2003, are rarely euphemized, but it is not as common to refer to the U.S.-Mexico border as a wall. However, once they are compared and one realizes that they create the same physical obstructions, it becomes appropriate to refer to them both as a wall. As sociologist Saskia Sassen discusses in her book *Guests and Aliens*, the term foreigner has changed over time from simply a designation to a threatening category and now the “coupling of state sovereignty and nationalism with border control [makes] the “foreigner” an outsider.”⁴¹ Both walls create firm definitions of nationalism and what it means to be a citizen of a place;

⁴⁰ United Nations General Assembly, *General Assembly Overwhelmingly Votes to Accord Palestine ‘Non-Member Observer State’ Status in United Nations*, November 29, 2012, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2012/ga11317.doc.htm>.

⁴¹ Saskia Sassen, *Guests and Aliens* (New York: The New York Press, 1999), 78.

both walls, because of who built them, loudly state an unbalanced power dynamic; and both walls contribute to the division of families, keep work out of reach, and keep people from access to healthcare, especially women.

As stated above, these walls are not just structures for conceptual divisions, but places where the obstruction has very real consequences, especially in terms of health and healthcare services. Although this phenomenon is a specific one, it happens in both the Israel-Palestine and U.S.-Mexico regions and allows for an understanding about divided places more generally. It has become cause for great alarm that pregnant Palestinian women are held up for hours at Israeli checkpoints for journeys that should normally take minutes. The delays cause complications in childbirth and often lead to deaths of the mothers and their babies. In fact, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a report in 2010⁴² investigating and condemning the phenomenon, and some believe Israel could be facing charges for crimes against humanity.⁴³ Along the U.S.-Mexico wall, the situation is interestingly reversed. Many citizens of the United States that live along the border, especially in Brownsville, Texas, are low-income and cannot afford medical services above the border. This has led to a migration of US citizens into Mexico for cheaper medical services, starting at least in the 1980s and continuing into the present day.⁴⁴ This phenomenon is especially important and timely as the United States is transforming its healthcare system and the government reevaluating its responsibility in providing these services under the Affordable Care Act. Because both walled regions share this same phenomenon, we

⁴² UN General Assembly, *Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the issue of Palestinian pregnant women giving birth at Israeli checkpoints*, January 21, 2010, accessed November 1, 2013, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/DB42057AFC92874E852576C40052D61E>.

⁴³ Aliyah Rehman, "Palestinian Women Are Being Forced to Give Birth At Israeli Military Checkpoints," *I Acknowledge Apartheid Exists*, September 15, 2013, accessed November 1, 2013, <http://www.apartheidexists.com/palestinian-women-are-being-forced-to-give-birth-at-israeli-military-checkpoints/>.

⁴⁴ Lisa Belkin, "Healthcare on the Border: Poor Go to Mexico," *The New York Times Archives*, October 17, 1988, accessed November 1, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1988/10/17/us/health-care-on-the-border-poor-go-to-mexico.html?pagewanted=print&src=pm>.

can understand the reinforcing of hegemony, division, and discrimination as characteristic of dividing walls rather than as coincidence. Both walls represent the subjugation of peoples in both regions, and contribute to the resistance movements created around them.

The West Bank Barrier and the U.S.-Mexico wall have both become areas for artistic resistance by international critics and locals alike. In 2005, the world famous clandestine British graffiti artist Banksy was found tagging the wall around the West Bank. He believes his graffiti cannot be illegal because the International Court of Justice has found the wall itself illegal, which Banksy believe “essentially turns Palestine into the world’s largest open-air prison.”⁴⁵ And as is common with visual art, it is not without controversy. While Banksy was thankful that an observer noticed his art was beautifying the wall, he was quickly corrected in his thinking: “We don’t want it to be beautiful. We hate this wall. Go home.”⁴⁶ There are Palestinian artists as well, like Khaled Jarrar, who is a sculptor, cinematographer, photographer, and painter that used to work as a presidential guard for Yasser Arafat. His art highlights the humiliation that an apartheid wall produces for those trying to cross, although he prefers his work to be understood as absurd human experiences rather than categorized as the work of another political Palestinian.

Similar things are happening with the U.S.-Mexico wall, although the medium of art used is different. For example, retired professor Consuelo Jimenez Underwood debuted her art piece in California called “Border-Landia,” a tapestry of flowers in the shape of the world’s continents bisected by a bright red, gaudy ‘border.’ Her argument is that the border region is its own space with its own culture U.S.-Mexican-indigenous culture, not just a place that is trying to keep these cultures separate. “The border is one land, always has been and always will... The people who

⁴⁵ Nigel Parry, “Well-known UK graffiti artist Banksy hacks the Wall,” *The Electronic Intifada*, September 2, 2005, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://electronicintifada.net/content/well-known-uk-graffiti-artist-banksy-hacks-wall/5733>.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

live there know it. The politicians and soldiers don't."⁴⁷ In the past couple of years, a group of artists from Arizona named the Border Bedazzlers have teamed up with Mexican children to paint the wall, and as of December 2012, they had colored about a mile of it. Their hope is that locals from all around living near the wall will decide to paint it, fostering community and changing a structure that intimidates children into "just a big jungle gym for them."⁴⁸

In seeing how critics, community members, artists, and intellectuals treat the walls between Israel-Palestine and the United States-Mexico, there is an understanding that no matter the specificities of each conflict, the effects are the same. Walls separate people and designate certain cultures and places inferior and threatening. But people succeed in searching for ways to make walls more than just physical structures, and when they become metaphors for human experiences they transcend space and bring peoples and regions closer together. Arguably, these separation walls are having the opposite effect than what their builders hoped for, because they are slowly but surely creating solidarity alongside separation.

This solidarity unfortunately does not exist solely among popular resistance movements in both regions, but is also enjoyed by the Israeli and Mexican governments over how to suppress these same resistance movements. The Israeli Defense Ministry and the Mexican Ministry of Public Security have cooperated by trading strategies to put down the Palestinian and Zapatista resistance movements, respectively, through "police, prisons, and effective use of technology."⁴⁹ The exchange has been mostly Israel sharing information, providing training, and

⁴⁷ Joe Rodriguez, "Artist weaves flowery tapestry of hope from thorny U.S.-Mexico border," *San Jose Mercury News*, October 29, 2013, accessed November 1, 2013, http://www.mercurynews.com/breaking-news/ci_24412624/artist-weaves-flowery-tapestry-hope-from-thorny-u.

⁴⁸ Cindy Carcamo, "Artists brighten up U.S.-Mexico border fence," *Los Angeles Times*, December 23, 2012, accessed November 1, 2013, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/dec/23/nation/la-na-border-bedazzlers-20121223>.

⁴⁹ Linda Quiquix and Jimmy Johnson, "Israel-Mexico: Military Cooperation to Crush Zapatistas Liberation Movement," *BDSmovement.net*, May 21, 2013, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://www.bdsmovement.net/2013/israel-mexico-military-cooperation-to-crush-zapatistas-liberation-movement-11051>.

selling weaponry with Mexico, which it has been doing since the 1970s, although Israel has been sending weapons to Latin America since the 1950s.⁵⁰ Both governments continue to suppress these movements while making official declarations about national peace and stability in order to maintain control over their jurisdictions. This camaraderie between the Israeli and Mexican governments is invaluable to the analysis of what colors how the Palestinian conflict is perceived in Latin America. It demonstrates that there is a shared recognition between the governments of a threat to their power through the existence of resistance movements. It shows that their illusions of national peace and equality are being threatened, or else they would not be forced to retaliate, however clandestinely. It shows that ties between Latin America and the Middle East do not just exist at the popular level but also among those that create the unbalanced power dynamic. And perhaps most telling of all, “the military relationship between Israel and Mexico is how the Zapatistas themselves have long recognized their connection to the Palestinian struggle.”⁵¹ The Zapatistas do not find an enemy in a different culture or ethnicity but rather in their own people, because state officials hold different values about political and human rights, and find solidarity with the Palestinians who are also at odds with their own government. This military relationship between Israel and Mexico brings to light global ties regarding injustice rather than just regional ones.

Several writers, from academics to community organizers, understand the historical ties between Latin America and the Middle East resulting from a legacy of colonialism and its necessary offspring, racism. However, they are able to take it a step further and use these ties as a way to understand how occupation, violence, race relations, and divisions are framed and taught in academia today. When talking about regional conflicts, it is important to note how they

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

are talked about and why, because the language that is used matters. As the Canadian-Palestinian spoken word poet Rafeef Ziadah declares in one of her performances, “these are not two equal sides—occupier and occupied.”⁵² The language used to frame and explain a conflict is indicative of how the speaker understands the power dynamics of that conflict. Graduate Ethnic Studies student José Fusté does just that when he categorizes the victims of both walls as “bordered ‘others’” and explains the ability of the Western powers to label them as such by employing a racist discourse.⁵³ The policies of both the United States and Israel towards Mexicans and Palestinians, respectively, originate from how “Palestinian and Latina/o border crossers are represented as significant threats to the well-being and integrity of both nation-states.”⁵⁴ The concept of the wall is central here, as a nation-state is constructed by clearly delineating a space and relegating those outside of that space as a non-citizen at best or a threat at worst. Although that is a discussion about citizenship and belonging, Fusté maintains that the exclusion remains the same throughout changing contexts, including ones that are more racialized. He believes that the U.S. War on Terror (beginning in 2001 after the September 11 attacks) unofficially moved Arab-Americans from the white racial category (Middle Easterners and North Africans in the United States are officially considered White/Caucasian, regardless of how they self-identify) to the nonwhite category, and that change in race also changed their perception from harmless to threatening.⁵⁵ The same can be said for the status of Mexicans from contact in colonial times until today. By referring to them back then as uncivilized people from Indian country, and today as invaders, the United States, like Israel, is able to create enemies out of people that are

⁵² Rafeef Ziadah, “We Teach Life, Sir”, YouTube video, 4:39, posted by “sternechenproductions,” November 13, 2011, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aKucPh9xHtM>.

⁵³ José Fusté, “Containing Bordered “Others” in La Frontera and Gaza: Comparative Lessons on Racializing Discourses and State Violence,” *American Quarterly* 62 (2010): 811.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 812.

different, especially those believed to be of a different race. As Fusté so eloquently summarizes it, “this, after all, is why racializing discourses emerged in the first place: to justify conquest and slavery via the dehumanization of the red and black “other”.”⁵⁶ And he is right. Slavery existed before racism, and a specifically anti-black racism only occurred for the purposes of justifying the African slave trade—before that time, slavery was based on subjugating peoples of different ethnicities and/or cultures than oneself. Because Mexicans (and Latinas/os more generally) and Palestinians (and Arabs more generally) have been placed into threatening racialized categories, they can be dehumanized. This common experience of being ‘othered’ is no doubt able to make the popular Latin American perspective more sympathetic to the racializing component of the Palestinian conflict. And if this sympathy turns into action, votes, and mass mobilization—the way it has in the case of Chile and Argentina—“what began as a wave of support for Palestine from Latin America may turn into a global, unstoppable diplomatic tsunami,” as anonymous Israeli diplomatic sources fear.⁵⁷ In short, this solidarity could, and may already be beginning to turn the tide against Israeli hegemony and other oppressive regimes worldwide.

Walls and occupation are not only present in the nations of Palestine and Mexico, or conceptually among groupings of people, but also in academic discourse. The same way that intellectuals and university professors of these regions of the world recognize that the creation of ‘Middle East Studies’ and ‘Latin American Studies’ came out of an imperialist context, there exists an understanding that education about these regions is lacking or biased. One does not have to look further than the defunding of Chicano Studies in Arizona schools because it is considered ‘un-American’. Graduate Ethnic Studies student Martha Vanessa Saldívar

⁵⁶ Ibid, 818.

⁵⁷ Bonnefoy, “Latin American countries recognize Palestinian state.”

understands this phenomenon to be what she calls to be “an occupation of knowledge.”⁵⁸ She agrees that the “similarities between the [Palestinians and Mexicans] go beyond the physical; they bleed into the discursive.”⁵⁹ Education becomes, for all intents and purposes, another wall, and perhaps the most important one, because it manipulates what knowledge people have access to and adopt. According to Saldívar, the only solution is to mobilize just as one would against a physical wall and reclaim the territory that has been taken by this occupation of knowledge. Not only do these groups have to articulate for themselves the knowledge that they wish to see circulated, but they must espouse academic practice that is “comparative, interdisciplinary, and justice-centered.”⁶⁰ This is necessary for two reasons: not only does it undermine the rhetoric that nations like the United States and Israel use to justify their policies, but:

by making connections between seemingly separate phenomena such as Arab and Latino communities or the US.-Mexico border and the apartheid wall in Palestine, we can see more clearly the way similar discourses and the occupation of knowledge are utilized in settler colonial projects.⁶¹

Making these unorthodox comparisons not only creates a more well-developed resistance to exclusionary national rhetoric and practices, but it makes the intent of the neocolonial powers clearer. This is exactly what I hope to accomplish by drawing such parallels in this paper.

In addition to looking at the governmental and intellectual discussions and their role in the Latin American perspective, the popular level must be included. The movements that represent the voice of the people are considered by some to be the most genuine, or ‘real,’ response of any people to social and political issues. One of the most enduring effects of a region embroiled in war is the resistance movements that it can produce. Although Russia produced the

⁵⁸ Martha Vanessa Saldívar, “From Mexico to Palestine: An Occupation of Knowledge, a Mestizaje of Methods,” *American Quarterly* 62 (2010): 821.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 823.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 827.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 828.

original Vladimir [Lenin], Cuba is famous for producing a generation of young men named after the political intellectual and leader around the time of its revolution in 1959. And although communism, the defining political ideology of the left, was mostly developed in Europe against the system of capitalism, the New Left is attributed to men such as Che Guevara and Fidel Castro and the Latin American resistance movements they produced. Similarly in the Middle East, Palestinian resistance is held as the crown jewel of the Arab struggle. Following the example of countries like Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala in developing Marxist-Leninist guerrilla movements to achieve revolution, Palestinians recognize the value of leftist politics. And although Palestinians realize that not everyone is necessarily a Che supporter, those who chose to follow his model do so because of its strength as a guerrilla movement. In 2001, at the beginning of the second Palestinian intifada, a middle-aged man named Akram Abu Nada of Gaza City stated, “[Che] is not a model for all Palestinians, mostly the leftists. But who we are fighting in the Intifada relate to him...He was a revolutionary, and that is what we are doing now.”⁶² This demonstrates the popular mentality that revolutionary politics are the best choice for fighting Zionism. Street art that features Guevara numerous times links the spirit of his revolution with what the Palestinians are trying to accomplish today. A Gaza hotel manager named Osama Abu-Middain believes “Arab leaders could benefit from Che-style politics,” since all he sees from them is corruption and an inability to achieve any real change. The do-it-yourself attitude of revolutionary politics provides a way for the masses to feel they are actively solving the problem. In fact, they have become so popular that some Palestinians even honor Che by naming their children after him—the way Cubans did with Lenin. One Palestinian female

⁶² “Che Guevara: for some Palestinians an Intifada hero,” *GulfNews*, July 2, 2001, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://m.gulfnews.com/che-guevara-for-some-palestinians-an-intifada-hero-1.420195>.

journalist is named Jivara Budeiri, an Arabicized version of Che's last name.⁶³ The revolutionary struggle between the Latin America and Palestine is not just the result of globalization; the struggle has been internalized and integrated into Middle Eastern culture. There is no way to downplay the solidarity between the two regions that is found in the streets and among families.

Latin American musicians are vocal about popular resistance movements worldwide, and while they may focus their content on Puerto Rican statehood or the Zapatista uprisings in Chiapas, they make references to Palestine and draw parallels to South African apartheid, to which the Palestinian situation is commonly compared. For instance, Chilean-French rapper Ana Tijoux released her songs "Shock" and "1977" about the recent Chilean student uprisings and Pinochet's dictatorship, respectively, the latter being the cause for her family's exile to France for 13 years.⁶⁴ While performing at the La Peña Cultural Center in San Francisco in November 2013, the crowd was reported as attending largely for "Tijoux's political awareness—she touched on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict [and] the possibility for connection between poor people in all countries."⁶⁵ And at the May 2012 event Noche de Mujeres en Resistencia, Sandra Puentes of Puente Arizona, the organization with whom Tijoux organized the event, referenced the Palestinian uprisings and the role women have played in it, making it a holistically politically-conscious event.⁶⁶

Although not strictly a Latin American musician, Manu Chao's music is enjoyed all over the Latin America, including his song "Rainin' in Paradize," where he includes the Palestinian

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "Ana Tijoux: Addressing Global Unrest in Rhyme," *NPR*, February 10, 2012, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://www.npr.org/2012/02/11/146694189/ana-tijoux-addressing-global-unrest-in-rhyme>.

⁶⁵ "Baby Steps: Pregnant Ana Tijoux headlines at an evolving La Peña Cultural Center," *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, November 23, 2012, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://www.sfbg.com/noise/2012/11/23/baby-steps-pregnant-ana-tijoux-headlines-evolving-la-pe%C3%B1-cultural-center>.

⁶⁶ Anthony Sandoval, "Chilean MC Ana Tijoux to Celebrate Women With Puente Arizona This Weekend," *Phoenix New Times*, May 10, 2012, accessed September 24, 2013, http://blogs.phoenixnewtimes.com/uponsun/2012/05/puente_ana_tijoux_mothers_day.php.

struggle as an example of global injustice: “In Palestina/too much hypocrisy/this world go crazy/it’s no fatality [*sic*].”⁶⁷ Puerto Rican music duo Calle 13, known for being outspoken in their music and interviews about Latin American assassinations by the FBI and Puerto Rican statehood, use their medium as a way to discuss global issues as well. In the past, Calle 13 have used their Twitter account, @Calle13Oficial, to call for solidarity and condemn various instances of neo-imperialism worldwide. Just this month, several news sources reported that ‘Residente’ (the more public half of the duo) “sees similarities between the political situation of Palestinians and those of his own people.”⁶⁸ He sees the restriction of liberties imposed on both nations as variations of the same phenomenon: “[Puerto Rico] is a colony of the United States. Here you have the situation with Israel...it would be good to start building bridges between Palestine and Puerto Rico.”⁶⁹ From both examples it is clear that alliances between oppressed regions of the world are not just on the minds of politicians and diplomats. The present is a time when even cultural leaders will not shy away from pointing out the injustices that occur globally; moreover, Residente’s comparison demonstrates that they understand the systematic oppression that began in colonialism but continues today in its new forms. Therefore music, one of the most effective ways to disseminate ideas about social and political injustices, has been used to spread awareness about the Palestinian struggle even in Latin America. But they do not just stop at references—these artists frame the conflict as a parallel to the region’s own uprisings or at the very least tie them into recurring global injustices.

⁶⁷ Stefan Christoff, “Artists breaking the silence on Palestine,” *Rabble.ca*, October 4, 2010, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://rabble.ca/news/2010/10/artists-breaking-silence-palestine>.

⁶⁸ “Calle 13’s Residente: We Should ‘Start Building Bridges Between Palestine & Puerto Rico,’” *Billboard*, December 6, 2013, accessed December 12, 2013, http://www.billboard.com/articles/columns/latin-notas/5819685/calle-13s-residente-we-should-start-building-bridges-between?mobile_redirection=false#continue.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

Possibly the only hobby as popular as music in Latin America is soccer, and it is definitely just as capable, if not more, of reaching the masses. For decades now, soccer games have been spaces for teams and countries to demonstrate their solidarity with Palestine. Argentine footballer Diego Maradona first proclaimed his love for Palestinians in 1986 and continues to do so, claiming, “I support this nation’s cause, since I grew up on struggle and standing against injustice.” In 2012 he was recorded accepting and donning the Palestinian *kuffiyeh*, the black and white checkered scarf that is a symbol of Palestinian culture from fans.⁷⁰ Perhaps even more famously, the Brazilian footballer Cristiano Ronaldo refused to swap jerseys with Israeli players after the March 2012 World Cup Qualifier in Tel Aviv, which is a common symbol of sportsmanship. Although some people are unsure if it was a deliberately political move (Ronaldo was frustrated during the game and may have just stormed off), Palestinians are quick to see this as an act of support, especially in light of his pro-Palestinian actions in the past—he has donated large sums of money to Palestinian children and has also been seen wearing a *kuffiyeh*.⁷¹

However, sports politics are not without controversy. Although Maradona and Ronaldo got away with it, Marcelo Vieira of Real Madrid and the Brazilian national team was not so lucky in announcing his support for Palestinians. Two days after writing, “My heart with Palestinian now as they fighting with Israel,” [*sic*] on his official Facebook page, it was shut down.⁷² The official Real Madrid website justified this by saying Facebook administration received requests from Israelis to shut it down because it was inciting violence against the state.

⁷⁰ “Maradona: I’m number one fan of Palestinians,” *Ynetnews*, March 10, 2012, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4198896,00.html>.

⁷¹ Agnisheik Chatterji, “Cristiano Ronaldo “Snubs Israel Shirt Swap to Support Palestine [VIDEO],” *International Business Times*, March 25, 2013, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/articles/449952/20130325/cristiano-ronaldo-palestine-israel-real-madrid-swap.htm>.

⁷² “The Brazilian Marcelo Vieira, just another victim of Zionism,” *Palestinian Field Negro*, May 19, 2011, accessed September 24, 2013, <http://palestinianfieldnegro.wordpress.com/2011/05/19/the-brazilian-marcelo-vieira-just-another-victim-of-zionism/>.

And this was not an isolated incident—as Zionists pay attention to public announcements made about the conflict via social media, there have been over twenty Facebook pages shut down in one month because they have been hinting at a third Palestinian intifada, and trending hashtags remembering the 1948 *Nakba* (‘Day of the Catastrophe’) blocked on Twitter. These examples prove that sympathy and solidarity towards the Palestinian conflict exists even at the top cultural levels of Latin American society, and some, like Maradona, feel a deep brotherhood originating from shared experiences of struggle and resistance. It is important to keep up with these statements to understand the changing dynamic of the Palestinian conflict globally—here we can see that Zionist leaders are feeling threatened not only by national presidents but also by cultural idols.

There is no doubt that what I have discussed may only be a part of the Latin American perspective on Palestine and other global issues, but these sentiments are just as true as any other. Every relevant thought, expression of resistance, or academic research about this comparison is worth discussing because it rings true at least for the people that advocate for it, if not for the broader community it represents. And although I have used some very specific situations to argue for key similarities between Latin America and Palestine, I have tried to make much broader arguments about power. This research is not just about which concrete formation stands in the way of a woman who is about to give birth but cannot get to the hospital; it is also about how centuries of colonialism, exploitation, negative distinction, and ‘othering’ can only continue for so long before subjugated peoples begin to act. As we have seen, this action can be spontaneous or intentional; reactionary or organized; seen on the world stage or just in a concert hall; limited to one language or articulated in several; dispersed through academic journals or disseminated through Twitter handles. What is worth noting, besides how this resistance plays

out, is what people are saying, what has made them say it, and the implications of this expression in the coming years. It may be as simple as providing better healthcare to inhabitants in border regions, or evening out the academic and cultural playing field as Said would have liked. But it may also have much broader implications: it may end human rights abuses, the deaths of innocent children, and the liberties that are stripped away everyday from Latin Americans and Palestinians alike. Comparing places and peoples with similar experiences can only strengthen this fight and may be the best chance subalterned people have at shifting the tide of the future to their favor.

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