

Description of Fieldwork & Proposal Query **Submitted by Aviva Joseph**

Introduction

“How do I rebuild my Home?” This question has preoccupied me for much of my life. I was born into a life deeply shaped by the long term effects of war. The house in which I lived in my early childhood, was built from bricks made out of the loud silence, which my father carried from the concentration camp at Dachau, and the silence made from the sheer terror my mother experienced in revolutionary Hungary. Following my father's dream to live in our Homeland, we immigrated to Israel but the heavy weight of my father's bi-polar disorder, and my brother's schizophrenia, combined with my mother's lack of Hebrew, profession, and money, shattered what was left of our sense of “Home.”

The only Home I was left with was made from memories and legacies of loss and displacement, and the land of Israel itself. I did everything I could to feel at home there. I studied the history and archeology of Israel intensely and became a tour-guide and teacher traveling throughout the country. Through these experiences I realized that creating Peace at Home, requires people getting to know each other through genuine relationships in community. I then worked for years leading seminars for people from different backgrounds (i.e. religious and secular Jews, Israeli and American Jewish teens) in a setting where a safe space for dialogue could happen. But with all these efforts to build and find Home, something was still missing. Although I was in my ‘Homeland’, I felt like a stranger in a foreign land.

I left Israel and came to California. Only from this distance, was I able to recognize that there was a whole aspect of the reality in Israel that I had ignored, rejected, and objectified: the Palestinian reality. The personal and collective life of the Palestinians was not part of my Israeli experience. Israel is the Homeland of the Jews; Palestine is the Homeland of the Palestinians; two statements, two competitive narratives/myths, two images and one land. Land, home, place, memory, and culture converge to create a state of tragic complexity swarming with trauma, fear, anger and apathy.

Thousands of Palestinian and Bedouin houses are demolished every year. Thousands of households are being destroyed by death or injury caused by violent acts. The land suffers from oil spills, lack of water and growing polluted landfills, in part due to political circumstances. I understand the destruction of houses/homes in Palestine as an expression of a cultural symptom communicating with the people of the land and all people, asking us to question our assumptions about homes and homelands. The Palestinian people, my neighbours, were known to me only as the dangerous ‘enemy’ to *our* Home but in this frame of mind, preoccupation with ownership, we have seen how the land, and Home, is failing. Both, the longing to return Home and the wish to get to know the ‘other’, two themes that closely interrelate, lie at the core of my fieldwork this summer. I am called to explore the images, meanings and relationships that people in Israel/Palestine associate with Home, Place, Land and ‘other’ and through this exploration, deepen an understanding for how Home can be created in Israel and shared without violence.

Proposed Project

The proposed fieldwork project involves my participation in a two-week summer camp through the Israeli Coalition Against House Demolitions (ICAHD). Jeff Helper, an American Anthropologist living in Israel for the past 30 years, established ICHAD in 2001. The idea for this

organization came from the Palestinians themselves, as Helper explains, “over the years, the Israeli peace movement has always set its own agenda for peace. We decided that we want to go out and ask the Palestinians how they thought we could be most effective in supporting their struggle for independence. One of the issues that the Palestinians suggested that was a very painful issue for the average person was the issue of house demolitions.” In a videotaped informal interview, Helper speaks about the goals of ICHAD. He says, “part of what we try to do, maybe, in our rebuilding, is to try to tell the Palestinians that we recognize not just your suffering, not just your rights but we recognize you as integral people here that have a right to be here and should be here and we acknowledge that. If there is anything that eventually will be a basis for reconciliation, it will be based on something like this.” The way in which ICHAD was formed and the goals it portrays are in alignment with Depth Psychological values such as, dialogue, recognition of ‘other’, listening to symptoms and engaging with the marginalized voices.

The two-week summer camp program brings together a group of Israelis, Palestinians and Internationals to work together to rebuild a previously demolished Palestinian house. The group will also get to go on critical tours of Jerusalem and the West Bank, and hear presentations and panels from key Palestinian and Israeli leaders. These and other programs “intend to foster learning, discussion, and friendship between Palestinians, Israelis, and internationals”. I will be a participant-observer in this group. I intend to conduct interviews with participants and community leaders, which will help me to listen in more deeply to their narratives and relationships with Home, Land and ‘other’. I believe that the people interviewed will also benefit by having a space for their stories to be shared and held. At the end of the two-week summer camp with ICAHD, I will stay in Israel for an additional month, to continue my engaged observations and participatory experiences in the area. These include joining an Israeli-Arab women’s circle and visiting organizations such as the Arava Institute for Environmental Studies.

There are several objectives to this work. First, getting to know the ‘other’ including the ‘other’ within me. Second, my active conscious and imaginal unconscious engagement with re-creating home and place in the present. Third, listening in to the individuals in the community (Israelis and Palestinians) who are themselves seeking to create and hold Home. It is my thesis that present engagement and partnered dialogue about Home brings a sense of shared responsibility.

In my understanding, taking responsibility requires three pieces: seeing, imagining and taking action. (1) Seeing involves becoming critically aware of the situation thus inviting a dialogue that challenges our worldviews. (2) Imagining is an invitation to engage our imaginal faculties in practices that allow a ‘third’ reality to become. (3) Taking action means taking the knowledge gained and putting it in practice that allows sustainable transformation to take place. My fieldwork addresses all three.

My hope is that by going through this process myself, I will grow to be able to support others in similar journeys. This might include leading tours in Israel/Palestine from a Depth Psychological perspective. By getting to look at Israel with a critical awareness, from a vantage point unfamiliar to me, I hope to gain a more expanded understanding of the area, which I then will present and discuss with others. I will be supporting the rebuilding of a home for people and with people I have never met. In this new territory there is great space for imagining and co-creating a peaceful future. This home, which will be a collaborative act of creation by Palestinians, Israelis and Internationals, symbolizes for me the emergence of a new psychic and physical structure that can hold a new understanding of Homes, Places and perhaps Homelands, as relational and inclusive instead of dissociative and exclusive.

Products

I will prepare a 30-page report that will include my experiences, information about the reality on the land, and an overall analysis of the process. This will form the basis for a public presentation and one peer-reviewed article. This material is intended as preliminary research that will serve as the basis for my dissertation research at Pacifica.

Budget

In order to make this fieldwork opportunity possible, I need to raise \$2,500. Out of this sum, \$1000 will be given to ICHAD, which uses the money to buy the materials necessary for the building of the house as well as to provide accommodations and meals for the participants. The rest, \$1500, will be used to cover part of the expenses associated with this trip.