THE POLITICS OF VULNERABILITY AND THE SCHOOL FOR PEACE: INSIGHTS FROM BUTLER, MERLEAU-PONTY, AND FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY

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In a November 12, 2023 article, journalist Timothée Boutry interviewed residents of the town of Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salem about their experiences and perspectives following the October 7, 2023 attack on Israel by Islamist group Hamas, and subsequent beginning of the Israeli "total siege" on the Gaza strip—a siege that, at the time of this writing, is well into its fourth month. With a name that translates as "Oasis of Peace," Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salem is a village founded in 1970 halfway between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv/Jaffa, as a democratic experiment in which Jews and Palestinians would live, educate, and govern themselves together. Comprised as of 2023 of 70 families, half Palestinian and half Jewish, Palestinian and Jewish children are educated together in both Arabic and Hebrew, and the town government is led in rotation by a Palestinian and a Jewish mayor.[1] With Israeli Defense Force (IDF) fighter planes *en route* to Gaza audible overhead, Roi Silberberg, Jewish resident and current director of the town's School for Peace, spoke to the intense trauma suffered by both Jews and Palestinians in the wake of October 7:

> Everybody has been traumatized, but the two societies have been traumatized in different ways. The Palestinians are victims in Gaza, and victims of increased racism in society and of campaigns for their expulsion in the West Bank. While on the Jewish side, [Hamas's] actions and the loss of confidence in the State [of Israel] to protect them have provoked an existential crisis. (Boutry 2023; my translation)

Acknowledging these deep collective traumas, Palestinian resident Noor Abu-Ras expressed despair at the actions of Hamas: "I'm obviously not tied to Hamas's actions, but I think that the Palestinians need to collectively ask themselves the question: Is this how I want to obtain the liberation of my people?" (Boutry 2023, my translation). Silberberg followed with his criticisms of the Israeli response: "The solution [to the conflict between Israel and

[1] See Wahat Al-Salem-Neve Shalom (2023); Rabah Halabi (2004); Zerger Nathan (2007).

Palestine] will never be military. It will only be by promoting peace, equality, justice, and solidarity that we will obtain security" (Boutry 2023; my translation).

This scene dramatically brings into view much of what is at stake in Judith Butler's sustained exploration of vulnerability as a potent concept for a liberatory and just global politics. While fighter planes fly overhead, on their way to rain months of enormous death and destruction on a captive population in response to a half-day vicious campaign of murder, rape, and kidnapping, neighbors and colleagues from two ethnic groups talk to one another about the traumas of their collective histories, the violent betrayals of their political representatives, and their fears and hopes for the future.

On the one hand, we have enacted (by Hamas and the IDF) violent reactions to a situation of extreme mutual—though unequally distributed—vulnerability. Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank live in situations of ongoing physical restriction, material dispossession, political oppression, and existential insecurity on account of a long history of the denial of their existence and aspiration as a national group on the part of the state of Israel, beginning with the *Naqba* of 1948. Jews in Israel live in a state that receives enormous financial, military, and ideological support from the United States and other major Western powers, but that is haunted by a long history of anti-Semitic violence most horrifyingly enacted in the Nazi Holocaust in the years preceding the official founding of the state of Israel by Britain, and invoked again and again in the words and deeds of prominent representatives of Israel's Arab "enemies," who, in the case of the Palestinian people, are themselves the victims of seventy-five years of European-and American-backed Israeli colonialism. As Judith Butler (2010) argues in *Frames of War*, with both Hamas and the IDF we have violent attempts to devastate the vulnerability of the Other while enacting a stance of invulnerable sovereignty for oneself. Such a psychological response is always possible, Butler argues, when we come face to face with our own and others' vulnerability.

On the other hand, with Silberberg and Abu-Ras and other residents of Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salem, we see enacted a shared human grappling with a situation of mutual—though distinctly differentiated—trauma, as well as a shared situation of mutual hope for democratic and peaceful new ways of living together. This grappling and this hope are not without their intense vulnerabilities and difficulties; residents of the town reported that since October 7, in Boutry's words, "fear set in; we sensed that something was broken," but that nevertheless, they recognized that "it's up to us to find the means to maintain faith in our project, but we know it will take time" (2023; my translation). We see here, in the contexts of multigenerational relationships developed over many years and a radical democratic commitment to equality and peace, a very different response to shared vulnerability than that enacted by militant and state violence.

This paper explores what it might look like concretely to acknowledge shared human vulnerability as "the basis for global political community," as Butler calls for in *Precarious Life* (2004, xiii). Part one offers a phenomenological account of the lived experience of vulnerability as a relational and, in Maurice Merleau-Ponty's words, "intercorporeal" affair. I argue here, with Butler and Merleau-Ponty, that our relations with both intimate and distant others precede and never cease to inform our identities as individual selves, such that who "I" am is inextricably bound up with the embodied experiences and

perspectives of others. I argue further that we can (vulnerably) embrace or (violently) reject this inherent vulnerability at the level of perception itself, with distinct ethical and political implications. Part two—the theoretical core of this paper—takes up Butler's argument that vulnerability should be understood not as an attribute of a particular subject or group, but rather as a feature of social relations themselves.[2] My specific intervention here is to argue that Butler's understanding of vulnerability as both a universal condition and as differentially distributed across intertwined social relations can be fruitfully understood through the framework of family systems theory, which empirically studies the specific manners in which our behaviors as individuals (and groups) *are what they are* only in virtue of their participation in larger interpersonal (and political) systems. Part Three explores the political significance of the insights of family systems theory through a study of the "encounters" between Jews and Palestinians staged by the School for Peace (SFP), founded in 1979 in Neve Shalom-Wahat al-Salem. We shall see that difficult and vulnerable dialogue with those with whom our experiences and identities are systematically intertwined can enable us to become perceptually alive to our own and others' existential indeterminacy— to our open-ended identities as vulnerable and dialogically in-the-making—rather than to violently eschew this relational vulnerability. Such dialogical perceptual development, in the words of SFP facilitator Rabah Halabi, has the power "to unravel and then reconstruct participants' identities" so as to "permit the option of building a more just and humane society"—one rooted in shared human vulnerability rather than vain and jealous attempts at group sovereignty (2004, 70, 8).

I. INTERCORPOREAL VULNERABILITY AND THE NORMATIVE NATURE OF PERCEPTION

In his lecture course, "The Child's Relations with Others," Merleau-Ponty (1964) discusses a study conducted by psychologist Else Frenkel-Brunswick (1949) in the wake of World War II on the phenomenon of "psychological rigidity." Psychological rigidity—a phenomenon that admits of degrees and to which we are all likely prone to some extent—is defined as

> the attitude of the subject who replies to any question with black-and-white answers; who gives replies that are curt and lacking in any shading; who also is generally ill disposed, when examining an object or a person, to recognize in them any clashing traits; and who continually tries, in his remarks, to arrive at a simple, categorical, and summary view. (101)

Frenkel-Brunswick's study found that psychologically rigid individuals commonly also displayed perceptual rigidity. When shown an image of a dog that gradually transitioned into an image of a cat, they would be unable to "see" the change, holding on to the elusive stability of the initial image (105). Frenkel-Brunswick's study also found correlations between an individual's psychological rigidity and their political views. While psychological

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[2] Compare to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's argument that we should understand vulnerability to reside not "in" the body of the individual, but in its "fit" or "misfit" with the world (2011, 600).

rigidity was most commonly accompanied by aggressively traditional, authoritarian, and racist political views—views that, in Merleau-Ponty's words, "rest on a myth and can thus be explained only by a psychological mechanism" (1964, 107)— it could also manifest itself in a rigidly liberal political attitude, "which consists in thinking that all men are *identical*" (106; emphasis in original). What both an authoritarian and a rigidly liberal attitude have in common is less a content than a style intolerant of the ambiguity and indeterminacy— of the contextual, dynamic, and often contradictory nature—of things and people in the perceptual field. As we shall see in a moment, such "intolerance for ambiguity" can also manifest itself in a certain style of militant leftism, too.

Exemplary of the phenomenon of psychological rigidity are political clichés and stereotypes that serve to obfuscate, rather than to phenomenologically disclose, the complexity and dynamism of human existence. Consider the term *terrorism.* According to historian of religion Karen Armstrong (2015), the phenomenon is often defined as "the deliberate use of violence, or threat of its use, against innocent people, with the aim of intimidating them specifically or others into a course of action they would not otherwise take." However, as Armstrong argues, this definition of terrorism "could also be said of some forms of conventional warfare," and, indeed, "there is general scholarly agreement that some of the largest-scale acts of terrorizing violence against civilians have been carried out by states rather than by independent groups or individuals." Despite this definitional indeterminacy, Armstrong argues that the term "terrorism" is deployed as "one of the most powerful terms of abuse in the English language, and the most censorious way of characterizing any violent act" (343). In the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the term *terrorism* has generally been reserved in the mainstream media in Israel and the "West" for the actions of Palestinians—not only militants but also individuals engaged in explicitly non-violent uprisings—rather than for the actions of the Israeli state, despite the fact that the latter is responsible for far greater numbers of deaths, kidnappings and indefinite detentions, and general levels of daily insecurity for Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank than any Palestinian militants could ever hope to effect in return. Indeed, for many in Israel and "the West" the word "terrorism" is evocative of stereotypical images associated with Islam and the Arab world—long beards, headscarves—despite the majority of terrorist attacks being carried out by secularists and non-Muslims, and for overtly political rather than religious reasons (Welch 2016, 120–21).[3] Thus rather than helping us to grapple with the actual terms of a multifaceted and unjust political reality, the term *terrorism* always already "frames," in Butler's words, the world in the psychologically-rigid manner of "us" *versus* "them," "good guys" *versus* "bad guys," "security" *versus* "terror" (2010, 5–12).[4]

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[3] A study of every suicide attack since 1980, for example, shows that suicide bombing has *in every case* been a political response of a people with few military means to the military occupation of a dominant world power. See Armstrong (2015, 363).

[4] See also Jacqueline Rose (2004). This psychologically-rigid attitude is exemplified in George W. Bush's (2021) address to Congress and the American people, in which he declared: "Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists." In Israel since the October 7 Hamas attacks, this same logic has been deployed with regards to those criticizing the Israeli siege on Gaza, or even to those who are perceived to not condemn the October 7 attacks forcefully enough. See Jackie Northam (2024).

From the other side, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the term *freedom fighter* similarly advances a psychologically-rigid stereotype. This term has been widely deployed in the wake of the October 7 attacks by many who subscribe to, in Ben Lorber's words, "a particularly strident kind of decolonial politics, born of rage at decades of entrenched oppression of Palestinians, which has so far proven stubbornly unresponsive to nonviolent resistance or moral appeals to equality" (2023). Assigning such one-dimensionally positive stereotypes to a militant Islamist group like Hamas, with its extreme conservative social positions and the "crude anti-Semitism" (in Rashid Khalidi's words) of its charter, is to reduce a morally and politically complex situation into a standoff between (in Lorber's words again) always justified and liberatory resistance, on the one hand, and a uniform category of oppressors, on the other (Khalidi 2020, 210, 220; Lorber 2023). In this context, terms like *invader, occupier* or *oppressor* can be deployed in a similarly dehumanizing way as the term *terrorist*: they can work not just to name condemnable political and military practices, but rather to frame the entire Jewish Israeli population into a homogeneous, black-and-white identity.

Psychologically-rigid perception is politically problematic in two, interrelated senses. First, it denies the vulnerable, open-ended, and dynamic nature of human existence in favor of static, stereotypical images, which in turn helps to "frame" some individuals and groups as subjectable to violence in ways that others are not. Second, it denies the perceiver's own implication in, and hence responsibility for, how others are enabled to appear in the world of perception—and, in turn, how the perceiver is able to apperceive their own vulnerable and dynamic existence. Let us explore each of these points in turn.

First, psychologically-rigid perception denies human vulnerability. Human identity, on both the personal and political levels, does not enjoy clear-cut borders that "serve to delimit and define," to "close in and close off," in Edward S. Casey's words (2017, 15). Butler's understanding of vulnerability in *Precarious Life* stresses the manner in which we are each "laid bare from the start," radically exposed to and shaped by others from before we could say "I" to begin with (2004, 31). Merleau-Ponty's concept of intercorporeality gives phenomenological evidence for this point.[5] From our earliest days as infants, there is an important sense in which our own experience is lived in relative indistinction from the experience of others. While growing up is the process of coming to gradually establish the boundaries between self and other, this process is never ultimately complete.[6] Unlike the borders we often rigidly imagine to separate self from other, the boundaries of the self "act to ground, to receive, and to open"; they connect us to others as much as they hold a dynamic line between us (Casey 2017, 15). A scene in Hala Alyan's (2017) novel *Salt Houses* dramatizes the porous, intercorporeal relationship between self and other. Alia Yousef, an elderly Palestinian woman suffering from dementia, observes her granddaughter soothing her crying child on the balcony of the old woman's Beirut apartment:

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[5] See Merleau-Ponty (1968, 143); Merleau-Ponty (2012, 368). Though Merleau-Ponty does not use the term "intercorporeality" in *Phenomenology of Perception*, his discussion of the manners in which the other's body can be given to me as "the completion of the system" already articulates the main idea of the term.

[6] See Merleau-Ponty (1964, 119, 135).

> There is a mewling sound and then silence, and Alia knows the baby has latched onto the breast, feels the phantom sensation in her own nipples, remembers strikingly that relief.
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> > The woman begins to sing, her voice husky.
> > "*Yalla tnam, yalla tnam.*"
>
> The words are familiar as water, as Alia's own hands, which lift now to her face, against her cheeks.
>
> > "*Yalla tnam, yalla tnam.*"
>
> The song alights within Alia, a remembering akin to joy. Her mother's garden, a courtyard somewhere in Kuwait, as she sang to a baby at her own breast. She sits in the dark, listening to the ancient, salvaged music. (Alyan 2017, 310)

We see in this scene how the bodily experience of others can be felt within one's own body, confusing the clear-cut boundaries between self and other. This kinship is experienced as the "anonymous" level of bodies in general, as we see in the manners in which the nipples of women who have breastfed might tingle in response to the sound of an infant's cry, even decades later.[7] It is also experienced in the highly personal, embodied memories of songs and places, as Alia's own experiences as a child and a mother, and of homes from Palestine to Kuwait to Jordan to Lebanon, are poignantly called forth upon hearing a family lullaby on her granddaughter's lips.

Much of what we live as our "own" embodied movements, emotions, desires, and actions are deeply and mimetically connected to those of others. Walking down the street in a small group toward a lunch restaurant in an unfamiliar city, I find myself "carried along" by the group, unaware of who is leading and who is following. In the absence of reflective notice or thought—I am quite engaged in conversation and not paying particular attention to where I am going—I stop when the others stop, go when they go, turn when they turn, our bodies forming a kind of intercorporeal form moving along the street.[8] Something similar occurs in experiences of "emotional contagion"; as Butler writes, affects "are never merely our own . . . but communicated from elsewhere" (2010, 50).[9] In *Salt Houses,* Alyan (2017) gives voice to an experience of affective contagion on the part of Alia's brother Mustafa, a young Palestinian man in the midst of a political awakening in the year leading up to the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. An admired *imam* has just told Mustafa the story of his family's expulsion from the fishing city of Haifa, and his sister's rape at the hands of a group of Israeli soldiers while her family was forced to watch, in the *Naqba* of 1948:

> A peculiar sensation skittered through Mustafa. His limbs tingled. That thing he'd read about in books: the moment when the world seems to sharpen, when colors and objects become vibrant, in focus. He could smell the torched streets, could see the young woman naked and bleeding. The glint of fish scales in the early light . . . "I want to help," he said. (Alyan 2017, 44)

[7] See Merleau-Ponty (2012, 86, 369).

[8] For an illuminating study of intercorporeality and imitation, see Kym Maclaren (2008).

[9] For a study of affective imitation in Merleau-Ponty, see Shiloh Whitney (2012).

Our own embodied experiences are passionately entangled with those of others, such that in powerful moments we can almost "smell" the scene recounted in the words of the other. Crossing the boundaries that simultaneously open me to and distinguish me from others, others' embodied experiences can be taken up as my own, as my own embodied experiences can take up a life outside of me in the world of others.

Such sympathetic attunement to the embodied experience of others has its counterpart in another form of intercorporeal experience. Consider the experience of partnered dancing. When my partner steps toward me, I must simultaneously step back; when he raises our clasped hands over our heads, I must simultaneously step under our raised arms for the twirl. Rather than my partner's movements calling forth symmetrical movements in me, as in the example of walking in a group, they call forth complementary movements. Something similar can be at play in more conflictual and alienating experiences of other people in what Jean-Paul Sartre calls "the look."[10] In *Salt Houses,* Alia's daughter and Mustafa's niece Souad, who emigrated to the United States after growing up in Kuwait in the wake of her family's exile from the West Bank city of Nablus following the 1967 war, is frozen in her tracks by the objectifying and demeaning eyes of white Americans following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center.

> During a trip to Texas once to visit a friend, she and Budur stopped at a gas station for cigarettes. Souad felt the clerks' gaze—two young Midwestern men, eyes like icepicks—on them the entire time. One of the men flung the change at her, several coins falling to the ground. Souad's fear was like a bell, waking her. As they were leaving, she caught the words *terrorist* and *bitch* and a burst of laughter. (Alyan 2017, 210)

Here, the normal embodied experience of being outside of herself, engaged in projects like buying cigarettes, is for Souad violently interrupted; in Frantz Fanon's words, "the body schema, attacked in several places, collapsed, giving way to an epidermal racial schema" (2008, 92). The look of the clerks is felt, so to speak, under the skin; it is an exercise of domination that calls forth, like a confrontational "dance," a complementary response of paralyzing self-consciousness and fear.

We see through these different examples of intercorporeality three deep ambiguities of vulnerability as a human condition identified by Butler. First, our intrinsic vulnerability opens us to what is best in human (co-)existence: to desire, love, connection, embodied continuity with past and future others, and (as we shall see further below) life-expanding and life-enriching transformation. At the same time, our intrinsic vulnerability exposes us to what is worst in human (co-)existence: to violence, degradation, and oppression.[11] The second ambiguity is the complement to the first. On the one hand, the vulnerability of the other is a necessary condition for our intimate connection to them, and the vulnerability of more distant others—others whom we will never meet—can inspire in us responses of care.

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[10] See Jean-Paul Sartre (1984, 301–03, 340–62). For an account of Merleau-Ponty's intercorporeality in terms of both "syncretic sociability" and "the look," see Scott Marratto (2020).

[11] See Butler (2004, 27).

On the other hand, the vulnerability of the other can just as well inspire in us rejection and violence.[12] This is especially the case when it comes to the vulnerability of persons and populations deemed less valuable—in Butler's terms, less "grievable"—than one's own person or group.[13] This point is intimately connected to a third ambiguity of vulnerability. While vulnerability on the one hand names a "universal" human condition shared by us all, it is on the other hand unequally distributed across populations and around the globe (Butler 2010, xxv, 14, 25). As we see in talk of "vulnerable populations," some groups are subject to death, injury, dislocation, starvation, and more in ways that others—for the most part, privileged groups in the "First World"—are not. The plight of so-called vulnerable populations may inspire in such "First World" individuals and groups responses of care—responses which more often than not take paternalistic forms of charity rather than responses committed to genuinely changing the dynamics of power that exploited and exacerbated the population's vulnerability to begin with—but they might just as well inspire responses of indifference, exploitation, and violence.[14]

Psychological rigidity is a key ingredient in the "framing" of some groups as more vulnerable and less grievable than others. Consider the gas station clerks' perceptual framing of Souad—and those seen to be Middle Eastern or Muslim more generally—as a "terrorist" and a "bitch" (2004, 32-38). As Butler argues in *Frames of War*,

> [f]orms of racism instituted and active at the level of perception tend to produce iconic versions of populations who are eminently grievable, and others whose loss is no loss, and who remain ungrievable. . . . The differential distribution of precarity is at once a material and a perceptual issue, since those whose lives are not "regarded" as potentially grievable, and hence valuable, are made to bear the burden of starvation, underemployment, legal disenfranchisement, and differential exposure to violence and death. . . . [S]uch perceptual categories are essential to the crafting of material reality. (2010, 24–25)

Psychologically-rigid perception "frames" others in static, stereotypical images that enables them to "not count," in a stroke denying the other's vulnerability (in its rich sense as a dynamic condition of intercorporeal openness), rendering the other "more" vulnerable to violence and exploitation, and denying one's own vulnerability as a perceiver.

Psychologically-rigid perception is thus politically problematic in a second sense: as well as objectifying the other in a way that enables the violent exploitation of their vulnerability, it works to deny the perceiver's own implication in the world of perception, and hence their own vulnerability at its hands. A principal insight of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception is that perception always takes the form of a figure or *Gestalt* within a meaningful context.[15] This figure never appears all at once, but always exceeds

[12] See Butler (2020, 27–66).

[13] See Butler (2004, 32–38).

[14] See Butler (2020, 68–102).

[15] See Merleau-Ponty (2012, 4, 17–18, 69–73, 354–57).

our perception *of* it, and always offers more to explore. Perception is always at work rendering temporarily determinate an inherently indeterminate and excessive perceptual field, allowing certain meanings to "take form" against a background of other possible meanings. The lullaby that Alia's granddaughter sings to her child does not exist statically, like a stone, but in its sonic unfolding opens a world, spanning geography and generations; the glint of fish scales speak to Mustafa of death, loss of home, and humiliation. Far from being a neutral recording of the world, any perceptual act thus creatively reveals something about the world *and* something about the one perceiving the world. Perception is always an "intentionality": it reveals (or "frames") something about a state of affairs in the shared world, while simultaneously revealing something about the affective experience, historical conditioning, and contemporary projects of the one perceiving (Butler 2012, 137–39).

In seeing Souad as the known quantity of "terrorist" and "bitch" rather than as a dynamic and excessive human existence, the gas station attendants draw upon the rich perceptual field in order to reduce it to shallow, stereotypical images. In so doing, they tacitly deny that this is what they are doing: their perception takes the meanings of the world as fixed and given, rather than grappling with their own perceptual involvement in how they appear. As the complement to rendering Souad and her ilk "injurable" because not "grievable," psychologically-rigid perception attempts to render the gas attendants impervious to the incursion of the other.

The gas station attendants tacitly deny that their perceptual experience is open to, impinged upon, and shaped by the perceptual experience of others: in their attempt to impose strict borders—rather than open boundaries—around the other, they build up walls around their own group identity. In part two, let us explore the manner in which vulnerability is not only an existential condition of all of our individual experiences, but a feature of human existence that is systematically articulated within and across groups, through an engagement with the work of family systems theory.

II. FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY AND THE SYSTEMATIC NATURE OF VULNERABILITY

The specifically political power of the concept of vulnerability lies, I think, precisely in its ambiguous nature: our own vulnerability opens us to relations of intimacy as well as harm; the vulnerability of others can inspire care as well as violence; and vulnerability is at once a shared existential condition and distributed unevenly between groups and populations that "count" and those that do not according to unequal structures of global power. Precisely because of these ambiguities, the concept of vulnerability both gives us some of the terms in which we can diagnose situations of political violence and injustice that exploit the vulnerability of some while safeguarding (and in crucial respects denying) the vulnerability of others, and gives us some of the terms in which we can begin to imagine political alternatives that dwell with, rather than exploit and deny, our shared vulnerability. However, as Ann Murphy (2012) argues and Butler (2010) themselves grapples with in *The Force of Non-Violence*, the concept of vulnerability on its own

proves somewhat lacking in helping us to imagine a political future that recognizes and protects, rather than denies and exploits, human vulnerability.[16] Family systems theory (FST) can help us to further flesh out what is at stake in recognizing vulnerability not as a property of (some) individuals, but as "a feature of social relations"; it can help us, in Butler's words, "theorize our interdependency" (2010, 201; 2004, xiii). With its concepts of multigenerational transmission, family narratives, symmetrical and complementary relationships, and feedback loops, FST gives us vocabulary by which to describe the ways in which our identities as individuals and groups are empirically and systematically bound together, in ways we often do not recognize. This allows us also to address Erinn Gilson's charge that Butler's work on vulnerability remains problematically abstract (2014, 61). Grappling with the way vulnerability plays out in concrete interpersonal and political situations allows us both to better understand the serious problems we face as individuals and as groups, and to begin to imagine how these problems might be addressed in and through mutually transformative dialogue with others.

FST views individuals as first-and-foremost elements within larger, dynamic systems of relations.[17] FST therapist Murray Bowen defines a system as a cluster of relations in which "a change in one part of the system is followed by compensatory change in another part of the system" (1978, 155). In W. H. Watson's words, "a system is more than the sum of its parts, and so the properties of a system cannot be predicted from an analysis of its constituent members" (2012, 185); on the contrary, the behavior of the constitutive members of a system can only be understood in the manner in which it "fits" into the dynamics of the larger system. Bowen (1978) describes his own recognition of this reality in terms of a perceptual *Gestalt* shift. In contrast to individual psychotherapy, which is to an important extent limited to the patient's own individual perspective, Bowen writes that "[a]fter having spent thousands of hours sitting with families, it became increasingly impossible to see a single person without 'seeing' his total family sitting like phantoms alongside him" (152). We are, so to speak, "haunted" by our relations with others, such that our own perceptions, behaviors, and understandings of things express, and in turn have an impact upon, the familial—and, I shall argue, the historical and political—dynamics of which we are a part.

A key concept of FST is the multigenerational transition process, which we can observe at play in a case study from the research of psychologist Dan Bar-On (1995), who with his students conducted open-ended interviews with Jewish Israeli survivors of the Second World War and their children and grandchildren. In the case in question, Bar-On (1995) and Noga Gil'ad interviewed Olga Anisevitch, who, after the death of her Jewish grandmother, mother, and younger sister in the Warsaw Ghetto and the anti-Semitic rejection and abuse on the part of her gentile father and his new family, set out alone on an arduous three-year journey to Israel at the age of fifteen. There, she married a survivor of Auschwitz, settled on a *moshav* (a cooperative agricultural community), and had three children. Bar-On and Gil'ad also interviewed Olga's adult daughter Dina, adult son Benny

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[16] See Murphy (2012, 65–84); Butler (2020, 27–66).

[17] On this, see Watson (2012, 185–87).

and sixteen-year-old granddaughter Orit. A particularly striking feature of these interviews is the systemic resonance between the biographies of mother Olga and daughter Dina. After suffering the loss of every one of her important family relationships and being forced to abandon her studies at the age of fifteen, Olga actively created a new life for herself in the newly independent state of Israel, throwing herself into farming and starting a new family. Though her biological father and brother were still alive in Poland, she did not speak of either to her children, who when asked were told that all of their grandparents were dead. Despite the vast differences in the interpersonal, social and economic circumstances in which she grew up, Dina's story echoes and reverberates with her mother's in a number of ways. She left home at the age of sixteen—just a year older than her mother had been when she was forced to set out on her own—but this time to begin post-secondary studies in education, rather than to have her education cut short. Like her mother, Dina displayed a "pioneering" spirit, helping to found a school in the new Israeli settlement of Lehavim.

Olga and Dina also shared a dominant narrative that interpreted the meaning both of their family and the place of the Holocaust in their lives. In parallel fashion to what we saw in our account of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception in part one, family systems therapist Michael White argues that family narratives give determinate form to inherently indeterminate and open-ended lived experience (1990, 14–15). The dominant family narrative of the Anisevitches—expressed in key points of the biographies of Olga and Dina—is one of heroic strength and redemption, and of a forward-looking embrace of the future that does not dwell on the past (Bar-On 1995, 183–86). This family narrative resonates with a dominant narrative in Israeli society in the 1940s and '50s of pioneering heroism—a narrative that went hand-in-hand with widespread shame about the Holocaust and denigration of its survivors (Rose 2005, 137–45; Bar-On 1995, 19). As Israeli society began to more explicitly reckon with the Holocaust in the 1970s and '80s, the Anisevitch family narrative incorporated the Holocaust into its own; as Bar-On and Gil'ad argue, Dina "grew up on the idea 'from Holocaust to redemption,' seeing the Holocaust as another form of Israeli heroism" (Bar-On 1995, 185). However, as White argues, family narratives can systematically conceal as much as they reveal, serving as the "life support" for problems endemic to the family system (White and Epston 1990, 3). White writes:

> [P]ersons experience problems . . . when the narratives in which they are "storying" their experience, and/or in which they are having their experience "storied" by others, do not sufficiently represent their lived experience . . . in these circumstances, there will be significant aspects of their experience that contradict these dominant narratives. (White and Epston 1990, 14-15)

The Anisevitch family narrative of forward-looking heroism begins to show cracks when Olga's brother shows up from Poland, and Dina learns for the first time that she has a living uncle and a Christian grandfather, and a certain gulf opens between Dina and her mother (Bar-On 1995, 175). Perhaps much of what was unsaid in the family narrative—the loss and the grief, the struggle and the terror—lurked in the fear of the dark that had plagued Dina

from childhood into her adult life: her "own" experience is expressive of larger family meanings that she can only partially understand (171).

While FST as theory and practice has for the most part been devoted to intragroup dynamics, its insights can be fruitfully applied to intergroup dynamics as well.[18] We often imagine political group identities (like our individual identities) to be bounded and autonomous, and we commonly locate problems (like individual neuroses) "in" other groups rather than in the larger systems of which they are a part, and thus having nothing to do with "us." However, in conflictual situations between groups the lived experience and behaviors of members of one group reveal themselves to be systematically linked to the experience and behavior of members of other groups (and vice versa). In the context of Israel-Palestine, we can see the manner in which a dominant Israeli narrative of heroism and overcoming is perpetually troubled by the Palestinian experience that is inevitably tied up with it, lurking on its margins. This perpetual troubling presents itself in microcosmic form in an exchange between Olga Anisevitch and her son Benny, in which the young man describes his experience serving in the IDF:

> *Benny.* Today, when I am called to the reserve army and I face the [First] Intifada, there are questions on my mind: On which side am I? On the side of the Jews or on the side of the cross holders? . . .
>
> *Olga, half listening, continues.* I made a promise when I was very hungry, in Warsaw, that if I ever had a home, no one would ever leave it hungry. I always kept this promise . . . There were years when a Bedouin boy used to come around and he was like one of us. The children saw that they are people just like us. It's possible, therefore, that the army, in order to ensure that this child will learn to protect himself, needs to tell him that other one is not exactly like him.
>
> *Benny.* I have a different idea. I really feel like a conqueror . . . It's simply disgraceful to behave like that. I walk around with a gun and I say: "Move over—to the right, to the left," and I can decide whether or not someone is going to die. What am I, God? But in the Second World War, people in my position were God. There is some kind of connection here, and I feel I carry two pictures in my head, one of the Second World War and one of the wars here. These pictures collide all the time, they come and go. It's very hard for me.
>
> *Olga, protesting.* I don't see it that way at all. (Bar-On 1995, 161-62)

The Anisevitch family narrative—and the larger Israeli narrative—of pioneering heroism has the murder, rape, displacement, and ongoing oppression of the Palestinians as its shadow; as Butler argues, we are constituted as much "by those whose deaths [we] disavow" as we are by "those [we] do grieve for" (2004, 46). The Jewish Israelis' responsibility for the Palestinian *Naqba* and their ongng oppression cannot be easily squared with either their avowed identity as colonial pioneers or their own recently and ambivalently embraced

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[18] See, for example, Bateson (1946).

history as victims of the Holocaust. While aspects of Benny's experience (and that of many Jewish Israelis) contradict his family's (and the larger national) narrative, Olga brushes his concerns aside, ambivalently acknowledging the humanity of an Arab child while proclaiming the necessity of treating the Palestinians as Other so that the Jewish "child" will "learn to protect himself."

FST's concept of symmetrical and complementary relationships shed further light on the group experience and behavior of both Jews and Palestinians in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Anthropologist Gregory Bateson, whose cybernetic theory had a major impact on family systems theory, defines symmetrical relationship as those in which the behavior of one party elicits similar behavior in the second party (and vice versa); "[c]ommon examples of simple symmetrical relationship are armaments races, keeping up with the Joneses, athletic emulation, boxing matches, and the like" (1972, 323). We saw how symmetrical behavior can play out on an embodied level in our example of walking together in our discussion of intercorporeality in Part one. In contrast to symmetrical relationships, complementary relationships are those in which the behavior of one party elicits dissimilar but fitting behavior on the part of the other (and vice versa); "[c]ommon examples of complementary relationship are dominance-submission, sadism-masochism, nurturance-dependency, spectatorship-exhibitionism, and the like" (323). We saw how complementary behavior can play out on an embodied level in our example of partnered dancing in Part I. Symmetrical and complementary relationships show the FST concept of feedback loops in action. As Watson explains, "a feedback loop is a systemic process whereby one's behavior is influenced by the system's reactions to one's behavior" (2012, 185). In complementary relationships, for example, a masochistic response to sadistic behavior will evoke further sadistic behavior, which in turn evokes further masochistic behavior, and so on.

On a superficial level, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be framed as a symmetrical relationship, in which violence on the part of one party leads to retaliatory violence on the part of the other.[19] However, the deep asymmetries in these groups' respective situations set the stage for a complementary relationship between Jews and Palestinians. Butler's discussion of the interrelated posture of "sovereignty" and of "persecution" draw out the complementary relationship that we can see tacitly at play in Benny's account of his experience in the IDF (as well as, across the Atlantic, in the American gas station attendants' rigid perception of Souad as a "terrorist"). Butler writes on the stance of sovereignty:

> The sovereign subject poses as precisely not the one who is impinged upon by others, precisely not the one whose permanent and irreversible injurability forms the condition and horizon of its actions. Such a sovereign subject not only denies its own constitutive injurability but tries to relocate injurability in the other as the effect of doing injury to that other and exposing that other as, by definition, injurable. (2010, 178)

[19] See, for example, Johannes Haushofer et al. (2010).

In behaving as if he was "God," in Benny's words, the Israeli soldier effects this stance of sovereignty, eschewing his own vulnerability precisely by abusing the vulnerability of Palestinian "mortals." As Benny is aware, this was the obverse of what was done to his parents and Jewish ancestors by the Nazis during the Second World War. The posture of sovereignty is, in the case of the Israeli state (and of Olga), contradictorily entangled with what Butler calls the stance of persecution: "a recurrent or timeless feature of a cultural subject who is persecuted or injured by definition and irregardless of historical circumstances" (2010, 178). Butler writes:

> If a particular subject considers her- or himself to be by definition injured or indeed persecuted, then whatever acts of violence such a subject commits cannot register as "doing injury," since the subject who does them is, by definition, precluded from doing anything but suffering injury. (179)

The vulnerability of the Jewish people, devastatingly exploited by the Nazis during the Second World War, is denied in favor of a fantasy of Israeli sovereign impunity, which in turn wreaks havoc upon the vulnerability of the Palestinians. These crimes against the Palestinians are then denied via the Jewish people's exclusive claim to exceptional victimhood. For the first twenty or so years after the founding of Israel and the Palestinian *Naqba*—from 1948 to 1967—a widespread sense of inferiority and behaviors of fearful self-effacement on the part of Palestinian citizens of Israel complemented the stance of sovereign superiority—and exceptional victimhood— on the part of Jewish Israelis. This recurrent feedback loop began to be interrupted by the 1967 Yom Kippur War and the subsequent re-emergence of Palestinian nationalism, as Palestinian Israelis came back into regular contact with Palestinians living in the newly occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank.[20]

Returning to the case of the Anisevitch family, a crack in the family narrative of a pioneering heroism that has left the past behind comes in the person of Orit, Dina's daughter and Olga's granddaughter. Mother Olga and daughter Dina have between them what Salvador Minuchin (2012) calls a "diffuse" boundary; it is not always clear where the one ends and the other begins (41). Dina repeats key points from the dominant narrative of her mother as if they were her own—for example, the family motto is "don't think about what was in the past"—while at the same time speaking in a self-effacing manner when asked to tell her own life story (Bar-On 1995, 193). Without clear boundaries within the various subsystems of their families, individuals cannot achieve the degree of self-differentiation appropriate to mature adult life.[21] By contrast, Dina's sixteen-year-old daughter Orit displays the seeds of a notable individuality. The year before Bar-On's interview, Orit accompanied her grandmother on a trip to Poland. Orit describes visiting the town in which the adolescent Olga was rejected by her gentile father; she "could feel it in the air, what it was like." The teenage girl's interest in and sympathy with her grandmother's past

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[20] For more on this, see Halabi (2004, 188); Rashid Khalidi (2010, 177–210).

[21] See Bowen (1978, 161–65).

open up a concrete route for the old woman to grapple with this past in a new way; as we saw above, "a change in one part of the system is followed by compensatory change in another part of the system" (Bowen 1978, 155). Importantly, Orit's burgeoning individuality is not achieved through a holding herself apart from her family legacy, but precisely by grappling with this legacy on a relational, affective level. As Bowen argues, adults with high levels of individuation "are realistically aware of their dependence on their fellow man," and are "free to relax ego boundaries" without the fear of losing themselves (1978, 164). It is not despite, but rather through, our intercorporeal vulnerability that we can become most fully ourselves.[22]

FST enables us to articulate concretely the ways in which our shared human vulnerability is always developed differentially within larger familial, social, and political systems, and thus to "theorize our interdependency" as parents and children, brothers and sisters, Palestinians and Jewish Israelis, and so on. As I shall argue in part three, it is in vulnerability so understood that the concept's political potential lies: the point is not simply to recognize that we are all vulnerable—an important, but still rather generic, point— but rather to grapple with the empirical, systematic ways in which our vulnerabilities are intertwined one with the other in multigenerational, complementary, and cyclical manners that are always framed by competing group narratives. It is in the dynamic workings of systems, rather than "in" individuals, that our political problems first and foremost reside. If liberatory political transformation is to occur, it will be through changes in the whole system that in turn allows for compensatory—and sometimes surprising—changes in its individual elements. If Orit's sensitivity to her grandmother's past begins to break down the latter's defensive insistence on her own rigid borders, untouched by parents, her past, or the weight of history, and to allow instead for a new kind of reckoning with the devastation wrought by the Holocaust, might new ways of speaking across entrenched ethnic lines disrupt rigidified identities and patterns of behavior, opening routes—however tenuous— for both individual and collective transformation?

III. THE SCHOOL FOR PEACE AND THE POLITICAL POTENTIAL OF VULNERABILITY

The School for Peace (SFP) offers an example of how experimental changes in the larger system of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can begin to disrupt multigenerational and complementary patterns of behavior within and across groups, so as to allow new kinds of perceptions and behaviors—and new kinds of personal and political existences—to begin to take shape. With thousands of hours of experience leading "encounters" between Jews and Palestinians (as well as between warring groups in international contexts, such as Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland), SFP facilitators have identified a number of typical stages that occur in the dialogue between these two groups (Halabi 2004, 186-87). In what follows, I will draw on examples from two SFP encounters in the 1990s, led by Rabah Halabi and his colleagues: a four-day encounter between thirty Palestinian and thirty

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[22] I have developed this argument more fully in Laura McMahon (2024).

Jewish high school students at Wahat Al-Salem-Neve Shalom (the Jewish-Palestinian town described in this paper's introduction), and an eight-month long encounter between eight Arab Palestinian and eight Jewish university students at Tel Aviv university. Through these examples, we will see the ways in which long-entrenched complementary relationships of superiority and inferiority, oppressor and oppressed can be negotiated and, to some extent, transformed through difficult, perceptually creative, and systematically-related changes on the part of both groups.

A premise of the SFP is that the encounter groups enact a microcosm of the larger social and political reality in Israel-Palestine (Halabi 2004, 51–52). While it is always individuals that comprise the specific groups of Palestinians and Jews involved in the encounters, these individuals are deeply shaped by their group belonging, and the encounters invariably come to enact a dialogue not merely between individuals but between national groups (51). The SFP encounters thus provide unique opportunities through which to understand, and through which to experimentally transform, this intercultural dialogue. The seeds of this experimental transformation are there from the beginning in the SFP's organization of the encounter. For example, there are always equal numbers of Jewish and Arab participants, though Arab Palestinians make up only about twenty percent of the population within the official territory of Israel. And facilitators open the meetings in both Arabic and Hebrew, insisting throughout that both languages can be spoken (though in practice, the participants tend to default to Hebrew, as happens in Jewish-majority Israel more generally).[23]

Halabi and his colleagues report that at the beginning of encounters, there is often a "peculiar" atmosphere characterized by both nervousness and good will (2004, 101). For the teenagers, the first day of the encounter is spent getting to know one another on a personal level, with binational team-building competitions and other "ice breaking" activities, leading to a great deal of good will (101–03). When on the second day they are broken into groups and guided into talking about cultural and political topics, the atmosphere of good will quickly changes, and the binational groupings developed the day before quickly dissolve back into uninational camps. For the university students, where things are allowed to proceed more organically, this stage begins in about the third week of the semester. In this contentious atmosphere, a number of features of the power relations in Israel-Palestine enact themselves in microcosm. Among the high school students, Jewish participants tended to express a sense of cultural superiority. When discussing the relationships between men and women within Arab and Jewish culture, for example, the Jewish high school students identified themselves with modern, Western values and their Palestinian counterparts with traditional, (Middle) Eastern values; in the words of one Jewish girl, "We progressed and they didn't, that's all" (104). Though some of the Palestinian teenagers resisted this cultural classification—defending, as if for the sake of argument, traditional values—there was a general sense among both groups that if they were to live together in peace, it would be the Palestinian group that would need to change (104–05). We see in this dynamic the complementary relationships of superiority and inferiority typical of Jews and Palestinians for much of the early history of Israel.

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[23] On this, see Halabi (2004, 119–40).

However, this *status quo* of complementary strength and weakness, cultural superiority and inferiority, did not remain stable for long. Among the university students, the Palestinian group began to develop and enact a newfound position of strength: they spoke clearly and emphatically about the humiliation of living as a second-class citizen within Israel's official borders, the "disgrace" of the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank, the gross disparity in the distribution of national resources between Jewish and Palestinian towns and villages, and the injustice of the "right of return" for Jews anywhere in the world while Palestinians at home remain stateless (Halabi 2004, 65–66). This enactment of strength in dialogue with the Jewish students was unfamiliar and hence tenuous: Halabi and his colleagues report that the Palestinian university group "didn't wholly feel a connection to its newfound strength; sometimes it even drew back from this new situation, retreating to the cozier and more familiar refuge of being the weak and discriminated against" (77).[24] By holding their ground, however, the Palestinian group reversed the power relations typical of the larger external society.

Halabi and his colleagues observed two typical stages in the Jewish group's initial response to the display of strength of the Palestinian group. First, the Jewish group typically experiences acute distress. Jewish Israelis who identify themselves as politically liberal experience a gap between their self-conception and the image that the Palestinians reflect back to them. In the words of one of the Jewish university students,

> I feel sentimental towards my grandfather and grandmother's generation, who were pioneers, but on the other hand [there is] the price paid by another group. I wouldn't want to know that I had caused this. This touches on my identity as a human being, as a state. (67)

Next, the Jewish group typically deploys a number of tactics in an attempt to restore the balance of power characteristic of the *status quo* in Israel; "[t]here is a feeling that the conflict is a conflict of the zero-sum type" (107). One tactic is the attempt to steer the conversation away from politics; ignoring politics and focusing on interpersonal relationships can (as Merleau-Ponty says of the psychologically-rigid liberal) enable the fantasy that all human beings are identical rather than shaped, enabled, and disabled by unequal systems. A second tactic is to direct anger *at* the anger of the Palestinians; one of the Jewish high school students came away from a discussion in which Palestinians voiced pointed criticisms furious at "what they did to us" (108).[25] A third tactic is to delegitimize the urgent political concerns of the Palestinians by accusing them of merely "parroting" political slogans (69).[26] And a fourth tactic is to insist on the moral inferiority of Palestinians,

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[24] This temptation is an apt illustration of Butler's posture of persecution discussed above. See also Wendy Brown's analysis of this problem in terms of Nietzsche's *ressentiment* (1995, 52-76).

[25] See Audre Lorde (1981) on the ways in which the anger of the oppressed is used as a way to dismiss their rational and justified concerns.

[26] This tactic has been widespread since the October 7, 2023 Hamas attack, with defenders of Israel's siege on Gaza accusing those criticizing Israel and calling for a ceasefire as "parroting Hamas talking points" rather than making sincere and conscientious arguments. See, for example, Christine Mai-Duc (2023).

referring to "terrorist" attacks as demonstrations that they—unlike the Jewish Israelis—do not "value human life" (Halabi 2004, 107).

However, there is, commonly, a third stage in the Jewish response to Palestinian strength: what Halabi and his colleagues call "a different dialogue" (72). In the high school encounter, this shift is accomplished in large part through a political "simulation" game on the third day, in which groups must negotiate with one another on concrete political issues related to the future of Israeli security, education, symbols and representation, and the character of the state (110–13). In the university encounter, this shift occurs when the Jewish group begins to move "away from its fortified position and its acceptance of the change" in the balance of power that the Palestinian group has dictated earlier in the process, and begin to grapple with their position as "rulers" (72, 77). In both the high school and the university groups, this change takes the form of a *Gestalt* shift with regards to the issue of "grievability." One Jewish university student spoke of the hypocrisy of the Israeli media's attention to the deaths of Israeli soldiers in a recent helicopter tragedy, while the deaths of Palestinian children in the occupied territories was largely ignored; Jewish high school students agreed with their Palestinian counterparts that Israel's national day of mourning should commemorate "Arabs who have fallen as well as . . . fallen Israeli soldiers" (73, 112). There is a qualitative shift in the behavior of the Jewish group, who after their initial response of defensiveness and anger begin to grapple with their own political power, to listen sincerely to the grievances and criticisms of the Palestinians, and, in the words of one Jewish high school student, to acknowledge: "I don't know what I would do in their place. I don't know how I would be able to live and to put up with the conditions they have to live with" (116).[27] We can see in this "different dialogue" the way in which a change in one part of the system—here, the Palestinians' outspoken refusal of the inferior political and cultural position generally reserved for them in the larger society—leads to changes in another part of the system—to the Jews' questioning and beginning to relax their "fortified position" as "rulers."

One might object that, in a context of entrenched and vastly unequal power dynamics between Palestinians and Israelis, the SFP encounters place undue blame on Palestinian victims for their role in the perpetuation of their own oppression, and an undue burden on Palestinians to discover the means for their own liberation.[28] Should not blame be assigned where it is most clearly due, to the state of Israel as a settler colonial project, and to the vast human rights violations on the part of the state of Israel against Palestinians within its borders and stateless Palestinians in the occupied territories? (It is worth noting that this reverses the more common charge in Israel and the West that casts Arab "terrorists" as aggressors and Jewish Israeli civilians as victims). I think that it is possible—

[27] It is an expression of widespread psychological rigidity that British MP Jenny Tonge was fired from her front bench position for expressing similar words of political empathy for Palestinians in 2004. Rose (2004).

[28] This is, indeed, a principal feminist critique of FST. See Michele Bograd (1988), who argues that attending to the circular causality of feedback loops without a proper attention to entrenched political power relationships between men and women amounts to distributing responsibility for problems across the system rather than assigning responsibility where it is, sometimes, simply due—to an abusive husband or father, for example (Bograd 1988, 124).

and necessary—to simultaneously hold oppressive powers accountable for their actions, and seek to understand the complex dynamics that condition these actions.[29] To seek to understand the complex dynamics of an oppressive situation is not to distribute blame equally, but rather to articulate the concrete opportunities for, and challenges to, genuine change.

IV. CONCLUSION: THE UNRAVELING AND RECONSTRUCTION OF PERSONAL AND POLITICAL IDENTITIES

Liberatory political change will necessarily involve the difficult, vulnerable work of challenging psychologically-rigid perception—one's own as well as others'—that polarizes groups into "good" and "bad," "victim" and "perpetrator," in favor of grappling with the histories of intergenerational trauma that shape the vulnerable identities of both sides in complementary, intertwining manners. It also requires rejecting a rigid liberalism that attempts to "see" human beings as identical *qua* human. As Halabi puts it, the goal of the SFP encounters is not simply to overcome negative stereotypes and a history of intense oppression and conflict through the realization of interpersonal harmony, putting aside national differences to "have a plate of hummus together" (2004, 70). It is rather to engage in exercises of political discussion and political imagination head-on in such a way as "to unravel and then reconstruct participants' identities," so as to "permit the option of building a more just and humane society" (8). I have argued in this paper that our "identities" are systematically connected, not only within our kin groups but across political groups whose fates are ineluctably intertwined. If this is right, then it is in facing head on our mutual implication in one another's most intimate existences that our identities can be "unraveled" and then "reconstructed" in manners that are no loss, but rather expand and enrich who we are. We can catch a glimpse of such expansion and enrichment of identity in the fragile but determined coexistence of the residents of Wahat Al-Salem-Neve Shalom, in contrast to the murderous actions of the IDF and Hamas. As Butler (2020) writes in *The Force of Non-Violence*:

> Persistence in a condition of vulnerability proves to be its own kind of strength, distinguished from one that champions strength as the achievement of invulnerability . . . Sometimes continuing to exist in the vexation of social relations is the ultimate defeat of violent power. (201)

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[29] See Butler's closely related discussion of seeking to understand the conditions of the September 11, 2001 attacks (2004, 1–18).

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