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TOTALITY AND INFINITY—NATIONALISM AND THE FACE:

An Ethnographic Exploration in the Republic of Turkey and State of Israel

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Conversation, shouts, and laughter filled the atmosphere of the non-profit in downtown Haifa as I sat in the side office to hear Karim's thoughts. [1,2] As with almost every conversation I had the privilege of sharing with religious and ethnic minorities in Turkey and Israel, I was confronted with harsh, shocking realities. Karim is a masterful storyteller, and relayed his Palestinian family's tumultuous history in the State of Israel with many smiles and creative flair, yet serious sobriety. His tone took a dark shift as he said:

> This is true in Israel. Everyone is your enemy unless he is of 'your kind.' It's a sick, racist mentality. You can't call it anything different than that. The more that you live in Israel, the more you understand the truth is not nice. It is what it is…it could be nice for some. And Israel is a racist, sick country. And our mentalities…we are raised like that.[3]

Stories like this surfaced in a myriad of ways among Kurds, Greeks, and Armenians in Turkey and Arabs in Israel. This theme of nationalistic fervor, fear, and boundaries colored our conversations, and sometimes left me feeling despondent in light of the stark barriers that are erected between people: be they religious, ethnic, or nationality, that serve to stifle those who don't fit the prevailing definitions of power, safety, and being. Yet, in the midst of these interviews, something beautifully and remarkably human began to glimmer.

In this paper, I will argue that the historical roots and current manifestations of secular and religious nationalism in the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel

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[1] I chose not to name the non-profit in order to maintain the privacy of individuals.
[2] All the names used in this paper are pseudonyms, unless referencing public figures. While choosing pseudonyms, I made sure that the names reflected the culture of individuals in using Arab, Armenian, and Kurdish names.
[3] Ethnographic Interview 2016.

are well understood in light of Emmanuel Levinas' concept of totality. Furthermore, as discovered through ethnographic research I collected concerning the lived experiences of ethnic and religious minorities in these nations, I will posit that the best response to these all-encompassing, exclusive worldviews is found in the reality of the human face, as conceptualized by Levinas in connection with his notion of infinity. I will support this claim in seven steps.

In the first section, I will explore the roots and development of modern Turkish nationalism, focusing on its ties to a fragmented imperial past. Second, I will elucidate the long, scarred history of the Jewish people and their path to embracing Zionism, and how this ideology manifests itself today in the Jewish State. Third, I will offer an introduction to Emmanuel Levinas' philosophy of totality and infinity, which will color the analysis of my ethnographic fieldwork. Fourth, my ethnographic methodology will be shared in order to further sharpen the context given to the final two sections. Fifth, I will analyze my fieldwork in light of Levinas' notion of totality, in which I will work to show that the prevailing nationalistic assumptions in both contexts are well conceptualized with the language he utilizes. Sixth, my interviews will be further explored with Levinas' concept of infinity, which is localized in the human face, and begin to offer a solution to the nationalistic totalities that so dominate both locales. Finally, I will endeavor to tie these sections together and offer concluding thoughts concerning my ethnographic data and our world that is so characterized by totalistic boundaries, and the potential Levinas' philosophy possesses to articulate and address such pervasive boundaries.

Section 1.

Turkish Nationalism: Vatan and a Fragmented Imperial Past

Perhaps the most important word in the Turkish language concerning the unity and cohesion of Turkish society is "vatan." It has Arabic roots that signify the place of one's birth, and can be translated into English as "homeland." However, this direct translation is extremely lacking, as it, "refers not only to the national territory but also to major political and legal concepts…including citizen (*vatandaş*), patriotism (*vatanseverlik*), heimatlos (*vatansız*), high treason (*vatana ihanet*), and traitor to homeland (*vatan haini*)."[4] It is a far-reaching, multi-faceted word that has carried many different meanings in the last few centuries. In this section, I will argue that modern Turkish nationalism (both secular and religious strains) rose from the ashes of a fragmented imperial past, and has resulted in the creation of a state that is incredibly patriotic, passionate, and, in some cases, xenophobic and violent in its protection of the "pure," albeit constructed vatan that belongs to the Turkish Nation.

While vatan is now central in Turkish thought, the oldest Ottoman ideas viewed the world through the lens of the "ummah," that is, the people of the Islamic faith.[5] This primarily theological understanding of life, community, and the empire was all encompassing. In fact, Islamic jurists defined the world in two pieces, one called the Abode of Islam and the other the Place of War.[6] The Abode of Islam is fairly easy to grasp, as it is defined as any place where the Islamic faith and law prevail. The Abode of War refers to a place where Islamic jurisprudence and

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[4] Behlül Özkan, *From the Abode of Islam to the Turkish Vatan* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 2.

[5] Ibid., 13.

[6] Ibid., 13-14.

practice doesn't reign as "war," a word that can be problematic to understand historically, especially concerning modern conceptions of the Islamic faith as inherently violent. However, Özkan likens it to the Cold war bloc, where armies were always maintained in case of conflict, but vital trade and interactions continue in the absence of confrontation. In fact, instead of accepting the relations between the Abode of Islam and the rest as an incessant warfare, Ottomans acknowledged the existence of an alternative political and religious order on the other side of the frontier.[7] In short, for most of its existence, the Ottoman Empire was primarily an empire ruled by a Sultan who sat in the throne by divine right, and the concept of a "nation-state" was non-existent.

However, the French Revolution and its "vocabulary of liberty, equality, and fraternity" changed the social landscape of Europe and much of the world after the end of the 18th century.[8] The Ottoman Empire was no exception. The French word "patrie," created to indicate the loyalty, value, and total love for homeland was translated to "vatan" in Turkish, and the idea of love for country and nationality was born. In 1839, Sultan Mahmud II died, and the Tanzimat (The Reforms) period began.[9] This was a time full of crises for the Imperial Power, such as the Egyptian conflict (1839-1841), Crimean War (1854-1856), and Russo-Turkish War (1877-1878).[10] The empire's power was beginning to dwindle, and in this season of uncertainty, Ottoman patriotism was born. Namık Kemal, who is known in Turkey

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[7] Ibid., 14
[8] Ibid., 27.
[9] Carter Vaughn Findley. *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism, and Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 77.
[10] Ibid., 76.

as the "'poet of the vatan'...transformed the meaning from a feeling of belonging to a birthplace into a feeling of loyalty toward a sacred territory."[11] He was one of the key thinkers of the Young Ottomans, a patriotic movement that sought to unite all constituents of the Ottoman Empire under the Imperial Vatan, either through the "Unity of the Elements" (focused on all ethnic religious groups) or 'Unity of Islam," which were used interchangeably. Although prevailing patriotic rhetoric and thought were localized around the empire, this period also saw the intellectual Ali Suavi first explore the "concept of Turkishness." He is now considered by some to be the first Turkish nationalist.[12] This slight, yet important shift ought not be missed— the vatan was first beginning to move from the concept of empire to ethnicity.

In 1889, the Ottoman Unity Society was born (renamed the Committee of Union and Progress [CUP] in 1895) during a time of renewed Imperial power under Sultan Abdülhamid. It was a collection of leading intellectuals who possessed differing ideologies but shared a common enemy in the reigning autocratic sultan. After Armenian rebellions and further conflict in Anatolian provinces between 1894 and 1896, the CUP published *Vatan Tehlikede* (Vatan is in Danger), in which the "Armenian question" was that "which put state, nation, and 600 year old honor in danger," and subsequently called for "all Ottomans," to act to "save their vatan" by demanding the sultan reinstate the Parliament, which would promote equality between Muslims and Christians.[13] In the mind of the CUP, this reintroduction of Parliamentary governance would help unify the diverse groups of the empire.

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[11] Özkan, *Abode of Islam,* 39.
[12] Ibid., 42.
[13] Ibid., 46-47.

However, this seemingly democratic, egalitarian stance covered a sinister ideology. Therefore, a few words about the history of minorities (especially Armenians), in Turkey/the Ottoman Empire are warranted. Up until the dissolution of the empire in 1923, the millet system was the primary way the ruling elites related to minority communities. These "millets" reported to the empire, but were granted much autonomy under their own religious leaders and eventually became understood as religious, ethnic, and linguistic communities.[14] Imbalances between Christians and Muslims began with the Anglo-Ottoman Commercial Convention of 1838, which "allowed foreign merchants to participate in internal trade."[15] This system benefitted Christian merchants in the Empire, for Europeans generally chose to do business with them, resulting in the elimination of Muslim merchants. This disparity further solidified and "increased national awareness and exacerbated religious and ethnic tensions with grave consequences in the future."[16, 17]

The phrase pioneered in *Vatan Tehlikede*, "save the vatan," became one of the central ideas of the Young Turks, the group that overthrew the sultanate in 1908 and reinstated the constitution that had been removed by Sultan Abdülhamid in 1876. Tensions between Ottoman Muslims and Armenians continued to boil throughout the rise of the Young Turks and, as a result, some members introduced the idea of the systematic "ethnoreligious homogenization" and "population and resettlement policy" of the Armenians (and other minorities), in the name of

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[14] Samim Akgönül. *Muslim Minorities , Volume 13: Minority Concept in the Turkish Context: Practices and Perceptions in Turkey, Greece, and France* (Brill, 2013), 69.
[15] Özkan, *Abode of Islam,* 35.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 28.

reinstating a "Turkish" identity and purifying the vatan. Taner Akçam writes, "During the First World War the Ottoman authorities, having sustained a punishing sequence of military defeats, came to fear the imminent loss of the empire's entire territory, with the horrendous possibility that the reform agreement of February 1914 would be implemented. "[18] That agreement, made between the Ottoman Empire and Russia before the war, had established the Armenian right to "participate on an equal basis in the local administration" in eastern Turkey. It was an agreement that, upon signing, all parties involved, "knew…(would be) the beginning of an independent Armenian state."[19]

Then, after the disastrous defeat of Ottoman forces at the hands of Russia at Sarıkamış (1915) in World War I, "the Ottomans increasingly saw themselves beset by dangers from all sides," which led to a sinister rise of propaganda falsely blaming Armenian revolts, treachery, and betrayal for their increasing failures.[20] This, among other allegations and coupled with the historical plans of the "homogenization" of the land resulted in the internal displacement, expulsion, or annihilation of one third of Anatolia's 17.5 million people (largely Armenians) between 1913 and 1918.[21] This violence created an Armenian diaspora and left deep scars on the psyche of this important minority community. Furthermore, these themes of Armenian treachery and deception carry on today in media, politics, and even education.

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[18] Taner Akçam. *Young Turks' Crimes Against Humanity: The Armenian Genocide and Ethnic Cleansing in the Ottoman Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), xvii.
[19] Ibid., xviii.
[20] Ibid., 158-159.
[21] Ibid., 29-30.

Undergirded by works like "Three Political Ways" by Yusuf Akçura (published in 1904), which has been called the "Manifesto of Turkish Nationalism," and which trumpeted Turkism as the best, yet nascent, political alternative to Ottomanism and Islamism, people began to look to "nationalist ideologies, which aimed to create national territories, (which) were much more powerful than imperial patriotism in creating physical boundaries, to unite and divide space and mental boundaries and to separate 'us' from 'them.'"[22] In the late 1910s after the Empire's defeat in World War I, Mustafa Kemal and the national liberation movement he spearheaded mixed concepts like "Ottoman vatan" with "national borders," and created a "national Ottoman unity that was geographically limited to Anatolia and did not have any imperial ambitions."[23]

Until 1921, Kemal, hereafter called Atatürk, preferred to use more inclusive phrases like "people in Turkey" when giving public addresses. However, his rhetoric narrowed at that time, with him moving towards ethnic nationalism and making the claim, "Turkey belongs to the Turks," in August 1921.[24] Furthermore, "no place" was found for Christian groups, namely Armenians and Greeks, in this understanding of Turkish identity.[25] In 1923, the Republic of Turkey was founded, and a nationalistic, secular Kemalist ideology took hold of this young nation steered by their charismatic leader, whose visage is still ubiquitous in Turkish public places, signature is plastered on cars and in human flesh, and name is illegal to copy or blaspheme.

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[22] Özkan, *Abode of Islam,* 51, 57.
[23] Ibid., 90.
[24] Ibid., 94-95.
[25] Ibid., 90.

Today, Turkish nationalism colors the collective mindset of the Republic. In 2008, the headlines in Turkey told a unique story. Twenty high school students from central Turkey had painted a Turkish flag (all red with a white sickle moon and star in the center) with their own blood, and presented it to Turkey's top military chief, General Yaşar Büyükanıt, to commemorate the deaths of twelve soldiers killed two months previously in clashes with Kurdish separatist PKK fighters. They also presented a petition to "please take us immediately as soldiers." He then responded, "This is the kind of nation we are. We are a great nation. Truly our martyrs have died for a holy purpose. That holy purpose is to protect the country we live in as one and undivided."[26]

Modern Turkey is characterized by "emphasis on blood, purity, boundaries, and honor…the link between being Turkish and being Muslim; a substratum of militarism, hostility, suspicion, and authoritarianism; and a heightened discourse of fear and polarization of society." This polarization is brought on by the rise of new "heterodox forms of nationalism" that privilege Muslim identity over the Kemalist concepts of race and blood as national solidarity.[27] These disagreements, although important and central in political discourse, still assume Turkish identity as preeminent. Furthermore, Akçam holds that the "roots of the problems with which Turkey grapples today stretch back to the establishment of the Republic of Turkey in the early 1920s…(which) derive from its Ottoman inheritance.[28] Therefore, Turkey is haunted by its lost imperial past as well as grappling with what it means

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[26] Jenny White. *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 1.
[27] Ibid., 3.
[28] Akçam, *From Empire to Republic,* 11.

to be "Turkish" in light of it, thereby creating a society that presents nuanced, complex problems for its historically ancient minority communities.

These problems and ideologies that intersect and compete with each other combine to create an environment of deep suspicion and fear. Some Turks fear that foreign anthropologists are seeking to undermine "Turkishness" through Turkey's "Armenian, Christian, and other minorities (like the Kurds) and through missionaries…" a fear that is combatted by manipulating "anthropology, history, and linguistics" to create a national identity. For example, one man at an anthropological conference claimed that (due to "similarities" in shared words) the ancient Sumerian language is actually Turkish, no other people groups have lived in Anatolia besides Turks, and the famous Byzantine cathedral of Hagia Sophia contained no Greek writing, only Turkish.[29]

The military is also caught up in the ideology that "defines Turkey as a singular, unitary nation that is under continual threat from within and without." [30] In short, very few can be trusted, both inside and outside the Republic's borders. One Turkish officer who desired to explain nationalism mused, "A real nationalist believes that Turkey should be completely independent…Turks are a special people…There has always been Turkishness, from the beginning of history."[31] In his mind, education is the key to the fullest realization of this truth. Historically, Turkish education at every level has embraced this very belief, with, for instance, geography textbooks that refuse to acknowledge the existence of Kurds in Turkey, spin

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[29] White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks,* 57.
[30] Ibid., 59.
[31] Ibid., 60.

narratives to laud Turkey as central in world politics and placement (surrounded by enemies) which justifies a strong military, and with one textbook making the spurious claim that 99% of Turkey's population is Turkish Muslim.[32] The same officer quoted above finished his exposition of nationalism with this statement, "Turkishness is enough."[33] This mentality of a single-minded identity as superior and sufficient colors military, politics, religion, and education, and permeates the sentiment of many individuals in the Turkish vatan.

Despite all these prejudices and fears, Turks exhibit a kind of nostalgia for an idealized past where multiculturalism flourished and people of differing faiths lived peacefully side-by-side. Still, "as demonstrated in polls and in people's choices of lifestyle—many Turks appear to desire distance in their daily lives from those who are different."[34] Furthermore, despite the reality that, as put forth by an Armenian Priest I interviewed, "If we sit next to each other, you will not (be able to tell) who is Greek, who is Armenian, who is Jewish, (and) who is Turkish, for we all are belonging to Anatolia,"[35] in 2008 an opposition politician announced that President Gül's mother was Armenian and he therefore, because of his "ethnic origins," is unable to "represent all Turks equally." He responded with a public statement defending both parents' lines as "Muslim" and "Turk," and filed a lawsuit against the politician, all the while praising Turkey's diversity and equality among its citizens.[36] This example, among the others discussed, reveals that difference is, as a whole,

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[32] Özkan, *Abode of Islam,* 141-143.
[33] White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks,* 60.
[34] Ibid., 113.
[35] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015.
[36] White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks,* 91.

mistrusted, feared, and even shunned in the name of pure blood and the national

Vatan. A vatan that has become a singular entity bequeathed to and owned by a

poorly-defined, incredibly ambiguous, yet viciously defended construct of

"Turkishness" that drives the national conscience of this (once-imperial) rapidly

polarizing state.

Section 2.

Zionism: Suffering, Safety, and *Eretz Yisrael*

The late 19th century saw a rise in anti-Semitic rhetoric and action throughout Western Europe and Russia. Pogroms characterized the cold landscape of the land of the Tsar, and writings began to implicate and blame Jews in the climate of "economic uncertainty and social dislocation" that reigned in France.[37] One of the prevailing ideas among educated, socially affluent Jews was that of assimilation, which held that, with time and interaction, European nations would eventually embrace the Jewish minorities that lived within their borders.

One such Jew was a young man named Theodor Herzl, a well-known journalist and aspiring playwright who, "was typical of the successful and well-educated Jews of Western Europe, oriented toward, and highly integrated into, the society and culture of the Christian majority."[38] Yet, all was not well in his world. His faith in the possibility of assimilation fragmented slowly during his time reporting in Paris, and the Dreyfus trial in 1894 (in which a Jewish military captain was falsely convicted of treason, then proved innocent twelve years later) broke his already eroding hope. A few short days later he published *The Jewish State,* which became perhaps the most important work of the burgeoning Zionist movement. In it, he spoke on what he called the "Jewish Question," which he, "consider(ed)…neither a social or religious one (question)…(rather) a national question…" That is, the survival of the Jewish people, for Herzl, became located in the necessity for an

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[37] Mark Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 43-44.
[38] Ibid., 44.

autonomous Jewish State, one that could last as a place of refuge for Jews and "reach powerfully and beneficially for the good of humanity."[39]

That dream has now become a reality. The Jewish people have their place of "refuge" and a land to call home. However, as Steven Erlanger has put it, "Zionism was never the gentlest of ideologies," and the reverberations of that reality lives on in the entrenched, conflicted state of today: one that is plagued with questions of identity, democracy, race, and nation.[40]

Mark Tessler writes, "It is inadequate to describe the Jews as a religious group in the modern-day sense of the term. Like Muslims, they are more appropriately regarded as a national community of believers." That is, Jews are something far more than a religion. They are more than a race. Their "sense of peoplehood" is extremely well developed, inextricably bound up in their collective historical experience…"[41] They tie their roots to the land of Israel spanning back to the 13th century BCE with their conquering of the Canaanites, and were definitively scattered from it in the 1st and 2nd century CE after the Roman Empire's crushing responses to Jewish revolts in 70 and 135 CE created the Jewish diaspora. The history of the diaspora is long and nuanced, and for the sake of space I will reference David Vital's words concerning it: "the seemingly acceptable, 'non-Exhilic' exiles— such as that of Moorish and even Christian Spain where for long periods the Jews were a virtually integral part of civil society—all ended too in calamity and fresh

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[39] Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State.* Jewish Virtual Library, 1896 trans. from German by Sylvie D'Avigdor, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/herzl2.html.
[40] Steve Erlanger, "Who Are the True Heirs of Zionism?" *The New York Times.* Feb. 4, 2016.
[41] Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 7.

dispersion." In short, their memory is one of "a cyclical granting and withdrawal of the gifts of territory and sovereignty, and of concomitant lament and thanksgiving."[42]

Hope granted and hope crushed became the norm, and this collective suffering brewed messianic hope that resulted in a few movements to *Eretz Yisrael* (The Land of Israel) in the 17th and 18th centuries (mainly by "pious" mystic practitioners). Furthermore, an over-arching, more routinized hope could be seen in the Passover Seder recited by each Jew once a year which culminated with the words, "next year in Jerusalem," a kind of prayer, a longing, for a home in the midst of exile.[43] It is no surprise, then, with the rise secular nationalisms in Europe in the 19th century, intellectual and spiritual leaders, "saw a need for Jewish self-determination," that mirrored these ideological movements.[44] This hope, in light of the climate of rising anti-Semitism in the mid-to-late 1800s, caused many leading Jewish influencers to abandon hope of assimilation and look to an alternative answer: that of *Eretz Yisrael*.

Theodor Herzl and Ahad Ha'am, the former the father of "political Zionism" and the latter of "cultural Zionism," contributed (although often in disagreement with each other) to the belief that the Jewish people needed a homeland. As indicated by the name "cultural" Zionism, Ha'am believed that, "the heart of the people—that is the foundation on which the land will be regenerated. And the people is broken into fragments," meaning that, before the political state could be

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[42] David Vital, *The Origins of Zionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 5.
[43] Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 18-19.
[44] Ibid., 37.

established, the Jewish people must be re-made.[45] The culture needed a reformation before the land could be embraced. Herzl, however, embraced a different strain. He believed in a modern, almost secular society, saying, "We shall not revert to a lower stage but rise to a higher one. We shall not dwell in mud huts; we shall build new, more beautiful and more modern houses, and possess them in safety."[46]

Herzl's ideology and tireless advocacy eventually won out, and the years between the late 19th century and 1948 were characterized by activity. Thousands of Jewish immigrants moved to Palestine, concentrated in movements called *Aliya* which were motivated by Zionistic beliefs and escape from persecution. The Modern Hebrew language was pioneered by Eliezer Ben Yehuda and became the lingua franca of the immigrants in the *Yishuv* (settlements), despite fierce opposition from conservative rabbis who held that the Hebrew language was holy, and therefore should be limited to religious use.[47] Disagreement emerged among leaders of the Zionist movement concerning Palestine's indigenous Arab population, some already in the *Yishuv* advocating for integration, mutual learning, and collaboration, and others (generally still in Europe) viewing the Arab question as secondary or even holding separation from or removal of them as the best option.[48] Finally, the horrors of the Holocaust generated an international outcry to, in some way, aid a people who had been decimated by breathtaking systemic violence.

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[45] Ahad Ha'am, *The Wrong Way.* Jewish Virtual Library, 1889 trans. from Hebrew in 1912 by Leon Simon, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Zionism/wrongway.html.
[46] Walter Laquer, *A History of Zionism* (New York: Schocken Books, 1976), 86, quoted in Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 46.
[47] Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 67.
[48] Ibid., 135-137.

All of these events led to 1948, a year still lauded as "liberation" and "independence" by the majority of the Jewish population, and chillingly labeled "al-Nakba" (the Catastrophe) by the indigenous Arab population and, by extension, the Arab world. The Arabs had rejected two UN partition plans set forth leading up to the release of the British Mandate to the Jews on May 15, 1948, and when the day came, the Arab-Israeli War (which truly had begun in 1947 with the release of the Partition Plan) between the newly created State of Israel and multiple Arab states ensued. Numbers vary, but at the cessation of fighting in mid-1949, they generally hold 150,000 Arabs internally displaced within the newly formed State of Israel, as well as 600,000-700,000 refugees forced to places like the West Bank, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt.[49, 50]

Since that time, Israel-Palestine has been a place of almost-constant conflict. Land has been taken and lost. Intifadas (seasons of great unrest and fighting between Israeli forces and Palestinians) have characterized a suffocating society. Questions concerning the legitimacy of a "Jewish Democracy" and the reality of non-Jewish minorities loom in political discourse (both national and international). The construction of a still-unfinished "security barrier" began in 2002 that would serve to "prevent terrorists from entering Israel from the West Bank," but is also projected to swallow about 15 percent of the West Bank and even separate villages and farmers from their fields.[51] The Gaza Strip, called "the world's largest open-air prison" by Noam Chomsky, is plagued by toxic waste, poverty, lack of food, and poor

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[49]Ibid., 281.

[50] Benny Morris, *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1.

[51] Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 845-825.

access to medical care.[52] As well, there still remains an "ever unsolved question" according to Israeli scholar of law and politician Amnon Rubinstein, namely: "Will the new Hebrew nation, on regaining sovereignty in its land, forsake all claims to Jewish exclusivist tradition and become a nation like ever other nation?"[53] Today, when considering the divisiveness that characterizes the Jewish State, I believe this question could be answered in the negative.

There remains a strain of nationalistic thought that desires to maintain the integrity of Jewish culture and, by extension, racial purity. In December of 2015, Israel's Education Ministry moved to ban a novel entitled *Gader Haya* (*Borderlife*), which "describes a love story between an Israeli woman and a Palestinian man" from high schools throughout the country. The cited reason, according to the Ministry: "(the need to maintain) the identity and heritage of students in each sector" undergirded by the belief that "intimate relations between Jews and non-Jews threatens the separate identity." Furthermore, they stated, "young people of adolescent age don't have the systemic view that includes considerations involving maintaining the national-ethnic identity of the people and the significance of miscegenation."[54] This kind of ethnic separatism is promulgated by the "rabbinical establishment" in the State, which enforces "prohibitions and bans" on any marriage

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[52] Noam Chomsky, "My Visit to Gaza, the World's Largest Open-Air Prison." *Truthout.* November 9, 2012, http://www.truth-out.org/opinion/item/12635-noam-chomsky-my-visit-to-gaza-the-worlds-largest-open-air-prison.
[53] Amnon Rubenstein, *The Zionist Dream Revisited* (New York: Schocken Books, 1984), 34.
[54] Or Kashti, "Israel Bans Novel on Arab-Jewish Romance From Schools for 'Threatening Jewish Identity." *Haaretz.* December 31, 2015, http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.694620.

that is interfaith, interracial, or same-sex.[55] In short, the upholding of racial integrity

falls high on the list of some key political and religious figures, and thereby fosters

an environment that actively opposes romantic encounters across faiths and races.

Furthermore, rhetoric revolving around fear permeates much of Israeli

culture. Before the United Nations General Assembly in October of 2015, Israeli

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke concerning the nascent Iran Nuclear

deal, saying, "The UN should finally rid itself of the obsessive bashing of Israel," for

"Israel is civilization's front line in the battle against barbarism."[56] In short, the State

of Israel is surrounded by hostile, evil, backward powers that seek one thing only:

the eradication of the Jews and the destruction of "Western, democrat, and liberal

ideals." For Netanyahu, the potential enemies are not only outside of the State, but

also within. The day before elections in March of 2015, he issued a video message on

Facebook stating, "The right-wing government is in danger. Arab voters are going en

masse to polls. Left-wing NGOs are bringing them on buses…with your help and

with God's help, we will form a nationalist government that will protect the State of

Israel." This message was given in response to the Joint (Arab) list posting that ten

percent of Israeli Arabs had voted, up from three percent in the last elections.[57] This

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[55] Gershom Schocken, "The Jewish Ban on Intermarriage Has Become a Curse." *Haaretz.* August 29, 1985, http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/the-jewish-ban-on-intermarriage-has-become-a-curse-1.331931

[56] Benjamin Netanyahu, "I refuse to be silent: PM tells UN General Assembly." *The Jerusalem Post,* October 1, 2015, http://www.jpost.com/Israel-News/Politics-And-Diplomacy/Full-text-of-PM-Netanyahus-address-to-the-UN-General-Assembly-419717

[57] Lahav Harkov, "Netanyahu warns: the Left is busing Arabs to vote, the Right is in Danger." *The Jerusalem Post,* March 17, 2015, http://www.jpost.com/Israel-Elections/Netanyahu-warns-The-Left-is-busing-Arabs-to-vote-the-Right-is-in-danger-394176

near-constant tension characterizes much Israeli political discourse, and propagates

a culture of fear both of forces within and without the State of Israel. Protection

becomes preeminent, and violence can (and historically has) become what some

might call a "necessary evil."

The rise of radical religious Zionism has been epitomized by the settlement

enterprise. Bernard Avishai, author of "The Tragedy of Zion," has characterized

these "new" Zionists as viewing Palestinians, "as a distraction on the landscape that

will be eventually replaced."[58] These strains of nationalistic ideologies hold that the

Biblical borders (which include the West Bank and Gaza) given to the Israelites still

stand today, and therefore any person not of the "Children of Israel" must be

removed. As a result, many settlers are given to radical religious fervor, and have

been implicated in terrorist attacks. For example, settlers have been implicated in

the burning of a Palestinian home that killed three of its five residents (one of whom

was an 18 month-old) in the summer of 2015 and the subsequent wedding video

that surfaced December 2015 showing Orthodox youths dancing with guns and

knives while stabbing a picture of the same recently murdered toddler.[59] In short,

this ideology is one of no quarter, and is held by a sect of Israeli people whose

population is growing rapidly. More chillingly, a recent Pew Research Forum study

showed that, when Israel's Jewish population was asked "whether they strongly

agree, agree, disagree, or strongly disagree with the statement that 'Arabs should be

expelled or transferred from Israel,'" forty-eight percent of Israeli Jews answered

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[58] Steven Erlanger, "Who are the True Heirs of Zionism?" *The New York Times.*
[59] Chaim Levinson. "Video Shows Jewish Radicals Celebrating Wedding by Stabbing
Photo of Dawabsheh Baby." *Haaretz,* December 24, 2015,
http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/1.693528.

with strong or simple agreement. Religious Jewish groups exhibited a higher desire for expulsion, yet even non-religious circles responded thirty-six percent in favor of removing Arabs from Israel.[60] Therefore, these ideas of mistrust, fear, and even disdain of Arabs are rather common, and point to a deeply divided society over nationalistic, religious, and social lines.

In conclusion, the State of Israel truly is a deeply divided, nuanced, and fearful conglomeration of people, ideas, ideologies, nationalism(s), trauma, violence, and uncertainty. This fear, uncertainty, and memories (and current realities) of trauma lead to "both sides (of the conflict)…delegitimizing or even dehumanizing their adversary," thereby fostering division and sustaining violence.[61] Rubenstein's question of Zionism remains. What will its legacy be? Will the universal values once trumped by leading intellectuals characterize the Jewish State? Time will tell. However, nationalistic fervor, manifested in both secular and religious strains, now seems to rule the day.

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[60] Alan Cooperman, Neha Sahgal, and Anna Schiller. "Israel's Religiously Divided Society," *Pew Research Center,* March 8, 2016. 17.
[61] Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* xiv.

Section 3.

Emmanuel Levinas: Totality and Infinity

War has colored human history. Violence abounds in the pages of Holy Scriptures, ancient tales of heroism and treachery, and the headlines so breathtakingly efficient at heralding the latest tragedy. It deeply influenced Emmanuel Levinas, who spent years as a prisoner of war in Germany after capture in 1940. This time, already trying enough, was further impacted by fact that he was a Jew. He opens his seminal work, *Totality and Infinity,* with the claim, "Everyone will readily agree that it is of the highest importance to know whether we are not duped by morality."[62] That is the question of morality affects everyone. Can we trust our systems of morality? Do they even exist? Or, are there certain assumptions that we as humans make that necessitate a "morality" which, in some way, accepts some dark realities of our history as "necessary?"

Levinas is extremely concerned with morality. He is also extremely concerned with war, both in the literal sense and in the more figurative sense of an ongoing state of violence in society. He writes, "Does not lucidity, the mind's openness upon the true, consist in catching sight of the permanent possibility of war?" The thoughtful, clear-minded person is, therefore, obligate to acknowledge that war and violence is pervasive. It is permanently possible, and furthermore "the state of war suspends morality; it divests the eternal institutions and obligations of their eternity and rescinds ad interim the unconditional imperatives." The demands of war are all consuming, and take the power—the obligation—of morality and

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[62] Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity* (Hingham: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 21.

rescind it. It is thrown to the side, sacrificed on the altar of, "the art of foreseeing

war and winning it by every means," which Levinas calls politics. He goes as far as to

posit, "Politics is opposed to morality, as philosophy is to naiveté." In short, he is

strongly opposed to war, of politics, and the "very exercise of reason" that is

employed to uphold these historical ideals that so violate the very nature of

morality.[63]

War does not only concern the "powers that be," such as governments,

politics, and the like. The individual's being is also affected deeply by its disruptive

power:

> But violence does not consist so much in injuring and annihilating persons as
> in interrupting their continuity, making them play roles in which they no
> longer recognize themselves, making them betray not only commitments but
> their own substance, making them carry out actions that will destroy every
> possibility for action[64]

For Levinas, violence is a violation of what it means to be a being. Personhood is

disturbed by its interrupting infringement, and individuals lose their ability to

recognize their very selves in light of the moral suspension that is war. In fact, "Not

only modern war but every war employs arms that turn against those that wield

them." The cause is irrelevant. These "weapons" are destructive to all, and they are

by no means solely steel. They are wounds that penetrate deeply into the being, the

fiber, of the individual and disturb the "continuity" of their very personhood.

He then continues, "It (war) establishes an order from which no one can keep

his distance; nothing henceforth is exterior. War does not manifest exteriority and

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[63] Ibid., 21.
[64] Ibid.

the other as other; it destroys the identity of the same."[65] It is radically inward

looking. The other, the one with which you are fighting, is not you. You are you. They

are "them," and violence becomes the natural response to an encounter with said

"other."

How, however, does one arrive to an ideological stance that necessitates war

with the "other?" According to Levinas, "The visage of being that shows itself in war

is fixed in the concept of totality, which dominates Western philosophy."[66] This is a

strong statement—localizing the reality and horrors of war solely on this "concept

of totality" is sweeping, and perhaps too ambitious. What, therefore, is this totality?

His key claim is, "The meaning of individuals (invisible outside of this totality) is

derived from the totality. The unicity (oneness/unity) of each present is incessantly

sacrificed to a future appealed to bring forth its objective meaning."[67] A totality

swallows individuality. It defines the purpose and meaning of life. It demands

sacrifice in order to maintain its integrity. People become pieces of a whole that are

ultimately disposable for the sake of the totality. And, perhaps most important,

individuals outside the totality are rendered "invisible." Totalities erase persons

who are not part of the in-group. They define what it means to be worthy of worth,

and the rest are disposable.

Totalities define history. They bend it to fit the narrative that benefits the

group. Furthermore, they are insidiously invisible, for, "Individuals are reduced to

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[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 22.

[67] Ibid.

being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves."[68] They are

assumptions, "the way things are." Totalities carry a sense of finality, that any

argument levied against it is fundamentally flawed, or simply asking an

unintelligible question. Empire is dependent on them, as "the peace of empires

issued from war rests in war." And, at least according to Levinas, these strains of

thought, these totalities, "dominate Western philosophy."[69] John Wild writes of

Levinas' "totalizers" as those who, "seek power and control…strive for order and

system…(and) many examples of the former (totality) can be found in the history of

our Western thought."[70]

Levinas' response to such a totalistic viewpoint is rooted in the reality and

significance of the human face. For him, the face is a unique center of identity and

individuality, thereby rendering it the most revelatory part of a person. What

qualities could lead him to such a conclusion? First of all, it is important to notice

that the five senses are all located at or near the face. The mouth contains the

tongue, which tastes food that serves to bring people together. The ears pick up

notes of music and the voices of friends and loved ones. The nose catches the

wafting aromas of flowers in the spring. The face is sensitive to touch, and one of the

deepest expressions of human affection, the kiss, is felt in the lips. And, the diversely

colored eyes of individuals have become the theme of many a love song or poem,

spawning lines like, "Turn your eyes away from me, for they overwhelm me…" in the

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] John Wild, Introduction to *Totality and Infinity* (Hingham: Martinus Nijoff Publishers, 1979) 17.

Old Testament and "I can see the mysteries of God behind your beautiful brown eyes" in modern folk music.[71, 72]

Furthermore, research has shown that spontaneous human facial expressions of emotion (happiness, anger, and contempt) are universal and innate. They cross cultures and, surprisingly, are exactly the same in people born blind, who have no chance of acquiring them from others.[73] The face is also strongly tied in with one's individual identity. Masks are used to conceal one's visage, and thereby one's personhood. Alexandre Dumas' *The Vicomte of Bragelonne: Ten Years Later*, and its story of the Man in the Iron Mask, tells of a gross violation of an heir's right to the throne, where the means of subjugation and separation is forced masking. This revoking of the face violated the prince's very humanity. In short, there is a kind of universality in the identity and work of the face that transcends race, religion, nationality, and culture.

Therefore, Levinas' answer to all-pervasive totalities is localized in "another concept, the concept of *infinity*…(which is) needed to express this transcendence with regard to totality, non-encompassable within a totality and as primordial as totality."[74] Furthermore, Levinas' infinity is located in the human face, which is "present in its refusal to be contained…it cannot be comprehended, that is,

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[71] Song of Sol. 6:5a ESV.

[72] Ivan & Alyosha, "Don't Lose Your Love," *It's All Just Pretend.* (Dualtone Music Group, 2015).

[73] David Matsumoto and Bob Willingham, "Spontaneous Facial Expressions of Emotion of Congenitally and Noncongenitally Blind Individuals," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* (Vol. 96, 2009).

[74] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 23.

encompassed."[75] The human face is uncontainable. It cannot be bridled or subdued. In fact, since it is infinite, to experience the face is "to contain more than one's capacity (which) is to shatter at every moment." He acknowledges that this is a subjective approach, so the goal of his work is to therefore "present subjectivity as welcoming the Other, as hospitality; (for) in it the idea of infinity is consummated."[76]

The answers to totality, for Levinas, are located in the infinite heart of the Other. He therefore rejects Plato's famous maieutic method, where one is questioned until the answer, which lies within the self, is uncovered. He also rejects streams of thought (particularly religious ones) that seek to localize true meaning in a single place, person, or God. For, "To approach the Other in conversation is to welcome his expression…to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly; to have the idea of infinity…Teaching is not reducible to maieutics; it comes from the exterior and brings me to more than I can contain."[77] He introduces a kind of "pedagogy of the Other," which is rooted in what he calls, "radical exteriority," or openness to that which is different. This openness, in every way, undermines the all-encompassing nature of totality.

Levinas' thought is irreducibly married to morality and ethics. And, not surprisingly, his ethic is rooted in the "facing position, opposition par excellence, (which) can be only as a moral summons. This movement proceeds from the other. The idea of infinity, the infinitely more contained in the less, is concretely produced

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[75] Ibid., 194.
[76] Ibid., 27.
[77] Ibid., 52.

in a form of relation with the face."[78] The face, which, "resists possession, resists my powers," opens a "new dimension" for the beholder, where "the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge."[79, 80] Whereas the Other, for Levinas, is the "sole being I can wish to kill," the "epiphany of the face" possesses the "ethical resistance" to such insidious goals.[81] In fact, "the infinite paralyzes power by its infinite resistance to murder, which, firm and insurmountable, gleams in the face of the Other, in the total nudity of his defenseless eyes, in the nudity and absolute openness of the Transcendent."[82] The Other, localized in the authentic experience of the face, exercises a kind of power over the beholder. It is limiting, staying the hand of the murderer and calling the hand of the privileged to act in kindness and love. This limitation, however, is not suffocating. Rather:

> Thus in expression the being that imposes itself does not limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness…it is thus the irremissible weight of being that gives rise to my freedom. The ineluctable has no longer the inhumanity of the fateful, but the severe seriousness of goodness.[83]

True, authentic encounter of the face of the Other therefore brings responsibility. It makes demands, and "imposes itself" on the beholder. Yet, this imposition, according to Levinas, ought to be welcomed above all, for in ethical response to the face is found true freedom. The Face is an enabler of good, if only it is seen.

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[78] Ibid., 196.
[79] Ibid., 197.
[80] Ibid., 198.
[81] Ibid., 198-199.
[82] Ibid., 199.
[83] Ibid., 200.

John Wild states, "as Levinas points out, one answer is given by the totalizers who are satisfied with themselves and with the systems they can organize around themselves as they already are."[84] The answer is to stay. To remain within the safe bounds of the totality, where the Other is invisible, and meaning is formed around the group identity. Wild then contrasts "totalizers" with "infinitizers," who are "dissatisfied, and who strive for what is other than themselves." They see that the totality by no means encompasses all reality, Instead, one must be willing to "transcend (thoughts and feelings)…(where) the individual person becomes free and responsible not by fitting into a system but rather by fighting against it and by acting on his own."[85] Levinas himself writes:

> Between a philosophy of transcendence that situates elsewhere the true life to which man, escaping from here, would gain access in the privileged moments of liturgical, mystical elevation, or in dying—and a philosophy of immanence in which we would truly come into possession of being when every "other" (cause for war), encompassed by the same, would vanish at the end of history—we propose to describe, within the unfolding of terrestrial existence…a relationship with the other that does not result in a divine or human totality, that is not a totalization of history but the idea of infinity. Such a relationship is metaphysics itself.[86]

True life is, therefore, not to be found in a totality of human conception or divine exteriority, but in the "idea of infinity," which is a metaphysical reality that shatters expectations, demands ethical responses, and undermines the sweeping totalities that so seek to render the Other invisible and irrelevant. This is an all-encompassing reality, one that crosses culture and spans borders, supersedes religion and undermines conflict.

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[84] Wild, Introduction to *Totality and Infinity.* 17.
[85] Ibid., 18-19.
[86] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 52.

In conclusion, Levinas' answer to totalities that inevitably lead to war is the human face. The authentic encounter. As a result, the greatest success of the totalizers would be to "limit the infinite," that is, keep faces from ever meeting. No encounter, no shattering. The totality maintains its integrity, and the Other ceases to exist, thereby allowing violence, murder, and finally war. The "epiphany of the face" is, therefore, of utmost importance. Life, infinity, and the realization of the "experience par excellence" that can be found only in the Other, hangs in the balance. [87]

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[87] Ibid., 196.

Section 4.

Methodology

In the fall and winter of 2015-2016, I conducted ethnographic field research in and among ethnic and religious minority communities in Istanbul, Turkey and Haifa, Israel.[88] The goal of this project was to discover if (and if so, how) interpersonal interactions serve to reshape, undermine, or even shatter the conceptions people possess of the "other," a relation that is often one "of power, of domination, (and) of varying degrees of a complex hegemony."[89] I chose to focus on the minority experience, for they are almost constantly made aware of their status, are in steady contact with people of the "majority culture," and often-times are the voices least heard because of the dominating influences around them.

I collected eighteen semi-structured interviews, each from about 45 minutes to an hour long, and agreed to strict privacy of each individual who participated.[90] The key demographics were:

- Seven interviews in Istanbul
    - Six Armenians (Four female, two male)
        - Teachers, Priest, and Doctor
    - One Kurdish male
        - Tour coordinator
- Ten interviews in Haifa
    - All Israeli Arab citizens of the State of Israel (Seven female, three male)
        - Teachers, workers at local non-profit
        - Six were students at the University of Haifa

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[88] For Wofford College IRB Approval, see Appendix A.
[89] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1978), 5.
[90] For semi-structured interview questions, see Appendix B.

LOCATIONS AND DEMOGRAPHICS:

Istanbul, Turkey:

Istanbul is a bustling modern city of approximately 14 million people. It is rich in history, and is unique in its cultural mosaic. Most Armenians (40,000-70,000), Greeks (2,000-3,000), and Jews (17,400) that remain in Turkey reside within its limits. I lived in an apartment in the neighborhood of Tarlabaşı, and made most of my contacts in the Armenian community through a priest I met during an academic trip with Wofford College in January 2015. I met other minorities, such as Kurds and Syrians, through contacts with local churches. In total, I spent a month in Istanbul in the fall of 2015.

Haifa, Israel:

Haifa is the third largest city in the State of Israel, and is the largest in the north. Within its limits, there are approximately 277,000 people. It is lauded as one of the few "mixed cities" in Israel, with an Arab minority making up about 10% of the total population, largely localized in the lower city (Haifa is built up Mt. Carmel) in neighborhoods like Wadi Nisnas, Halisa, and Abbas. During my time in Israel, I studied at the University of Haifa and interned at a local non-profit, and I met all my Arab interviewees through contacts established at these locations. In total, I spent four months in the State of Israel and the Palestinian West Bank.

Section 5.

Nationalism as Totality

Istanbul:

The air was thick with smog and sunlight, and the backpack I carried helped accentuate the growing dark spot on my back (of which I was painfully aware). This was one of my first interviews, arranged by the Armenian priest whom I had met a few days before, and the man with whom I was to speak, named Goryoun, works in the medical field. I had met him during my first visit to Istanbul when he spoke to our Wofford group about the state of minorities in modern-day Turkish politics. I was anticipating this meeting mightily—at that time, he had struck me before with his humorous, genial demeanor, and his serious knowledge of history and the state of the Armenian (and other) minority community. I knew I stood to learn much from him.

I finally located the building after passing it a couple of times, and made my way off the bustling streets of Istanbul up a flight of stairs, praying that my sweat-stained shirt would not be an immediate turnoff. After a few minutes of waiting in the (thankfully) air-conditioned office, I sat down with Goryoun and his curious assistant (some of these topics she was interested to explore for the first time as well) over Turkish tea in its famous hourglass-shaped glasses, and a lighthearted, yet soberly illuminatory, conversation began:

> *I grew up in Istanbul, but my ancestors are from middle Anatolia. My parents could not speak Armenian, couldn't go to an Armenian school. I believed that my grandparents couldn't either, until one day I heard my grandmother speak our mother tongue. I was shocked, "why did you not teach my mother or me?" Her response, "We did not want your mother to have an accent." It was a strategy to be in Turkey. Propaganda forbade the speaking of our language, and they chose to raise their children so that they would not be betrayed as*

Armenian. Furthermore, when I was growing up, Armenian history was banned by the board of education. Things have changed, but slowly.

He continued on to describe some divisive definitions and realities in the Republic of Turkey as it stands:

Today, Christians and Muslims are identified on their identity cards. This is a way for discrimination, for the police can use that and oftentimes tie Christians in with the United States and anti-Turkish ideas. People think that to be an Armenian is not very good, and (Armenians) are therefore encouraged to change. To change yourself to "be Turk," assimilated. There exists an idea of the "Ideal Turk," which is made up of a special race, which is also Sunni (but weak) Islam. There is also a fake history, and people have begun to be aware (of it). However, recently fighting has broken out in the east again. Someone in the government said, "it is probably not a Kurd, but an Armenian," (essentially saying) "Kurds could not do this, only the 'bad society,' which are Armenians, could do something like that. (It is an) Armenian trick." It is shameful for the government to turn people (like this).[91]

Haifa:

Near the end of my semester at Haifa, I was close to exhaustion. Class work

piled up, and last-minute interviews were at the forefront of my mind. My project had

taken me from the Bosphorus to the Mediterranean, and my next interviewee, a

teacher named Asma, had helped me process all the (many) nuances of the Israeli-

Palestinian conflict, the weight that I felt wherever I went, and the fear and stigma-

laced rhetoric that colored political and media discourse. Her story was one that I had

begun to piece together, but the opportunity to hear it in full was a prospect that both

excited and humbled me. I settled into the now-familiar office, where pictures of the

old city of Akka and other sights of what I had begun to call, "the Unholy Holy Land,"

adorned the walls:

(My Palestinian background) means to me that I was born to parents who came from Palestine, they were kicked out and my mother was able to go back

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[91] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015

to Jerusalem until '67, but after 1967 she wasn't. They are both considered refugees, so that comes with a certain experience having grown up in a home that was very bitter about the situation. For instance, I grew up hearing about the big home my grandfather owned [in Palestine], which is still standing. I did not see a picture of it until I was older and somebody in the family found a great picture. Everyone in the family now has an enlarged picture of that home in their living room.

I then steered the conversation towards Asma's lived experience as an Arab Palestinian citizen of the State of Israel. That is, if it is hard to be who she is where she resides. She continued, without missing a beat:

Of course it is hard (to be Palestinian in Israel). Just open the news. I don't have to open the news; I have Haaretz [a local news outlet] popping up on my iPhone. The parent of the guy who did the shooting the other day (in Tel Aviv) was now arrested. And another person is I don't know what...a soldier hurt in the West Bank. This is a very political place, and you can't get away from being Palestinian. It's very hard because it isn't a place that is sympathetic at all. At all, if you ask me. Just open the news every morning and listen to it in Hebrew and how they speak. Very very very unsympathetic. So it's very hard.[92]

Nationalism as Totality:

In the previous sections I have shown how nationalistic ideologies color the prevailing attitudes and discourses of both Turkey and Israel. They permeate media, literature, and politics. They influence the thought processes of individuals. Even though the rhetoric and "ends" of the belief may be disparate, nationalism is, in many ways, assumed. This fact became apparent in the interviews I conducted. Furthermore, when I began to delve into Emmanuel Levinas' *Totality and Infinity*, I began to see similarities between his concept of totality and Turkish nationalism/Zionism. Therefore, in this section, I will argue that nationalism understood through the lens of "totality" can help elucidate the core concepts and ends of such ideologies, and perhaps begin to help lead us to an answer to the boundaries that so characterize human language and interaction.

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[92] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016

Totalities are, first and foremost, characterized by boundaries. Definitions of what it means to be "in" and "out" of the constructed identity. Nationalism (especially ethnic nationalism) is no different. As seen in the words of the Armenian doctor Goryoum, the "philosophy of the 'Ideal Turk...(which) tried to create a new society with a faked ideal...(is localized around a) special race, and (weak) Sunni Islam."[93] Fadwa, a student at the University of Haifa, when asked to define what "Palestinian" meant to her, said, "It means I don't belong to the flag of Israel. It is a Jewish state and I am not Jewish...I always have felt Palestinian, and never a part of the state of Israel."[94] The frustration at her exclusion from the national identity was felt in the forceful, urgent weight she gave her words. Another student, Nadir, when elucidating his antipathy towards making generalizations based on national and religious identities, stated, "(take) Jews, for example. Judaism is a religion and also a nationality."[95]

Emmanuel Levinas holds that a totality erases individuality in the pursuit of a unicity that maintains the integrity of the whole.[96] This lens can cast a new light when one considers the ethnic definitions of "Turkishness" and Zionism. These constructed identities, often rooted in collective (sometimes fabricated) historical experience, serve to build a homogenous understanding of race and religion. I am by no means making the claim that every Turkish nationalist or Zionist aims to eliminate those outside the bounds of their ideology, but that these beliefs tend to lead to the results revealed by the recent Pew research in Israel which indicated a

[93] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015.
[94] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2015.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 64.

forty-eight percent strong or simple agreement with the phrase, "Arabs should be expelled or transferred from Israel."[97] The nationalistic totality, when embraced, creates an environment where it is possible for individuals to be rendered "invisible outside of this totality."[98]

In light of these constructed boundaries, the theme of fear, besetting danger, and enemies "within and without" the national borders kept resurfacing in these conversations. One interviewee, Karim, a worker at a local nonprofit in Haifa, remarked:

> The people's mood in Israel is controlled by politics and the media. You can watch the news, it only speaks on one of two things: (1) The conflict, the internal Israeli-Palestinian conflict and (2) enemies outside, like Iran, Daesh (ISIS). All the "bad guys."[99]

He observed that this two-fold, yet remarkably singular focus served to shift the public conscience away from other problems like Israel's shaky economic situation and drastic rises in what he called "non-democratic values," instead rendering, "the only thing in focus is terror and more terror and more terror."[100] In Istanbul, a Turkish priest named Father Avedis remarked:

> Sometimes you feel bad because you notice that you are not accepted. You have that feeling sometimes…you will see that to use the name Armenian is to speak about "vital enemy," whereas none of the Armenians are engaged in such kinds of problems. Because there are some problems and someone wants to find a solution by inflection, by seeing Armenians as the enemies of this country…[101]

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[97] Cooperman et al. "Israel's Religiously Divided Society," 17.
[98] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 22.
[99] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015.

In both locations, therefore, those who don't fit the nationalistic totality become scapegoats when threats, whether real or perceived, arise. Furthermore, these real or perceived threats possess a unique power to unify, as observed by Karim, who said, "Americans felt more American when 9/11 happened…it (nationalism) was a unifying identity."[102]

As elucidated by Levinas, the "visage of being that shows itself in war" is rooted in the "concept of totality."[103] Conflict and fear create an atmosphere where one can never truly feel "safe." Enemies are constantly surrounding you, your family, and your way of life, and "war" becomes the only response to this existential threat. The nationalistic voice becomes louder, calling the groups to unify in light of these threat(s), and those that happen to fall outside of that specific definition of ethnicity, race, and religious/historical origin become objects of fear that can't be trusted. Another student, Nawal, reflected this reality in very straightforward terms when asked about the general perceptions Jews possess of Arabs according her experience, "Not trustworthy. Not at all. We don't care how nice you can be, you will never fit in with us and we will never like you."[104] This distrust of those that don't fit the definition of the nationalistic totality can result in violence, and even cause the totalizer to lash out against the wrong target, as observed by Nadir, "Many Jews think that all Arabs are out to get them. For instance with the incident…where they smashed a guy's face because they thought he was Arab but he was not. He was a

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[102] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016.
[103] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 22.
[104] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2015.

Mizrahi Jew, of Iraqi or Moroccan background. Just looking like an Arab is dangerous

here."[105]

These realities then lead to the beginning of an interesting discussion as to

how the totality of nationalistic fear and fervor is created and maintained according

to the lived experience of the minority community. One of the key examples that

surfaced in the interviews at both locations was education. Khalil, another worker at

the non-profit in Haifa, said of the education system in Israel:

> You see in Jewish schools that they always talk about Zionism, the Shoah, and
> so on. But, in the Arab schools you are not allowed to even talk about the
> Nakba, even though it happened to you and your relatives.[106]

Therefore, the national curriculum is often oriented towards the collective history of

the majority culture, even to the length of silencing the historical narrative related

to twenty percent of the state's population. I witnessed a poignant object lesson in

this disparity of language and narrative when walking with friends through a park

in the Hadar, a neighborhood halfway up Mount Carmel in Haifa. My eyes moved

toward a low-set black monument, and I froze. The words I read: "Haifa Liberation

1948" in English, Hebrew, and Arabic. This could not be farther from the

"catastrophe" (Nakba) that was 1948 to the Palestinian people, and provides a kind

of metaphor for the education system in the State of Israel as well.

Concerning the state of education in Turkey, I heard from a Kurdish man

named Seriyas:

> When you look at the Turkish education systems, it is an amazingly high
> nationalistic and racist curriculum that tells them that Greeks and Armenians

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[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.

> are the enemy...(in which they) teach the kids a one-sided false history to beware of those enemies that betrayed them[107]

In fact, Başak İnce shows that Turkish civic education throughout its history, as recent as 1980 to 2010, "define(s) the nation as a union of language, religion, race, history, and culture, where the orthodox understanding of religion especially has begun to be counted among the basic characteristics of the nation. By doing this, hatred against non-Muslim citizens and people belonging to different sects of Islam is supported." Furthermore, these textbooks are not characterized by critical thinking, and in all this "create a phobia of 'the enemy' in the minds of young people. Unlike in previous periods, however, the texts warn not only of external enemies but internal ones."[108] Goryoum pointed to this reality when he said:

> Recently fighting has broken out in the east again. Someone in the government said, "it is probably not a Kurd, but an Armenian," (essentially saying) "Kurds could not do this, only the 'bad society,' which are Armenians, could do something like that. (It is an) Armenian trick."[109]

Therefore, this kind of education structure helps foster an environment where tiny minorities like Armenians are labeled as "traitors" by a public that has likely never met them.

Once again, the notion of totality can help illustrate how these ideas form and flourish. John Wild writes, "It is this outwardly directed but self-centered totalistic thinking that organizes men and things into power systems, and gives us control over nature and other people."[110] The structure of education in both Turkey and

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[107] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015.

[108] Başak İnce. "Citizen education in Turkey: inclusive or exclusive," *Oxford Review of Education* 38, no. 2 (2012): 124.

[109] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015

[110] Wild, intro to *Totality and Infinity,* 17.

Israel reflect a nationalistic totality that is directed outwardly, that is, toward

perceived threats and difference, and addresses then either in obfuscation, altered

history, or even silence. This works to shape and orient the minds of youth toward

the identity believed superior and necessary for survival. Language becomes an

eraser or a sword, and power systems are put in place through words that maintain

control over the "other."

While at the University of Haifa conducting research, my eyes were opened to

an interesting reality. After a few months there, I had begun to learn the markers of

Jews and Arabs (e.g. olive-drab uniforms for Jews and Palestinian Kuffiyehs for

Arabs). During my walks to class, I started to observe that Jews and Arabs almost

never grouped or associated with each other. One of the interviewees, Nawal,

confirmed my suspicion.[111] In more interviews, two possibilities struck me as

"totality formers," as it were, in these young people: military service and the Hebrew

language.

As mentioned in sections one and two, military plays a unique role in the

formation and maintenance of the national identity in both states. However, my

interviews revealed some interesting differences in the military's influence on the

minority experience in both locales. The Turkish/Armenian example I will save until

the next section, and Israel-Palestine I will address here. When asked if she had any

Jewish friends, Nadia, a student at the University, said:

> No…some I guess I learn with. But, I don't have any common ground with
> any Jewish students here. (Our relationships) don't get very personal. Most

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[111] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2015.

are older, usually twenty-three to twenty-four, because they serve in the military, take time off after their service (before entering university)...[112]

Another student named Leila remarked, "(Jewish students) are *so* much older than us. They are twenty-five and older."[113]

Every Jew, both men and women, are obligated to serve in the military after high school graduation (thirty-two and twenty-four months, respectively).[114] Arabs (except for Druze), however, serve only on a volunteer basis, and generally opt out of military service for to do so is generally viewed as a deep betrayal to their people and the Palestinian cause. Also, Arabs and Jews both often take a "gap year" before entering university, with Arabs generally arriving on campus at the age of nineteen and Jews twenty-one and up. Therefore, the life experiences of these students sitting together in classes and eating in the same lunchroom are drastically different. Every Jewish student spent the last two years or more serving in the military: going through physical training, drill, and possibly working in violent areas of conflict between settlers and Palestinians in the occupied West Bank. Different stories are shared. Inside jokes, shared military language, and, as Nadia said, similar experiences within Jewish circles lowers the amount of "common ground" students from these two groups share.[115] This doesn't even take into account the antipathy many Arabs feel towards the military as a result of the occupation of the West Bank, frequent confrontations with Gaza, and the like. Therefore, the expressly

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[112] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2015
[113] Ibid., Emphasis added.
[114] "Army Service – Lengths of Service for Men and Women," *Nefesh B'Nefesh*. http://www.nbn.org.il/aliyahpedia/army-national-service/army-service-length-of-service-for-men-and-women/. Accessed 4/6/16.
[115] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2015

nationalistic military requirement in the State of Israel not only serves to separate

Jews and Arabs for a couple years of service, but also for years after in university

and beyond.

Furthermore, as mentioned in section two, in the late 19th century Eliezar

Ben Yehuda championed and pioneered the Modern Hebrew language among the

Jewish immigrants to Palestine, which is now the first language of every Jew in

Israel.[116] It is therefore a foundational facet of the Zionist movement and, by

extension, the nationalistic totality of Israel. This is especially important in light of

Israel's Arab minority, whose first language is the Palestinian dialect of Arabic. After

commenting on the problem of military service, Nadia said, "I also find it very

difficult to express myself in Hebrew. It is hard to go deep. I don't deliberately limit

myself, but it just happens…I try and try, but there is a barrier."[117] It seems that her

experience is that of frustrated communication. Another student, Nur, commented,

"My relationship with the Jews in psychology class is not as strong because my

Hebrew is not strong. When I start to speak, I start muttering."[118] When asked if she

has Jewish friends, Leila answered:

> I don't have Jewish friends, because my Hebrew is too bad. Sometimes I think that the Jewish people don't interact with us because they feel there is a line between Arabs and Jews. I mean, they talk to you, and if they approach me and I am able to talk to them, then great. But, my Hebrew is bad. I'm really bad."[119]

In short, these three individuals found a readily made barrier to connection

localized in the Hebrew language. I was astonished at some of the Arab friends I

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[116] Tessler, *A History of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict,* 67.
[117] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2015.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

made who, at the age of nineteen, were fluent in Arabic, Hebrew, and English. Yet, most Palestinians were not confident in Hebrew. Also, it is rare to find a Jew who speaks Arabic. Furthermore, in conversation with Arabs I found that Jews who speak Arabic are often distrusted, for it is perceived (and a general reality) that the only reason a Jew in Israel learns Arabic is because they served in military intelligence. Therefore, the Modern Hebrew language, forged in the lived heartbeat of Zionism, has not only served to bolster the nationalistic totality of the Jewish State, but also widens and deepens the gaps between members of the totality and the ever-increasingly "invisible" other. [120]

Nationalism as Totality: Conclusion

In conclusion, Emmanuel Levinas' concept of totality sheds light on the lived experiences of ethnic and religious minorities in the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel (specifically Armenians and Arabs, respectively). The secular and religious nationalisms that so dominate political discourse, educational curriculum, media headlines, historical narrative, and so many other aspects of identity formation deeply influence the daily lives of minorities. They become the Other of the "totalizers…(those who) seek power and control…(and) strive for order and system" through the creation and maintenance of ideology where individuals that seek to fit the totality, "are reduced to being bearers of forces that command them unbeknown to themselves," and those outside the totality ultimately "vanish at the end of history," in respect to this singular, all-encompassing vision.[121,122,123] We turn

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[120] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 22.
[121] Wild, intro to *Totality and Infinity, 17.*
[122] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 21.

now to Levinas' answer to the problems and divisions created by the totality; the

infinite, as found in the human face.

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[123] Ibid., 52.

Section 6.

The Face: Inbreakings of the Infinite

Istanbul:

Our conversation continued on for an hour, spurred on by his assistant's intermittent inquiries and astounded reactions, and Goryoun's own gregarious personality. Tea abounded, laughter colored our language, and other people were called into or just stopped by the office to offer their stories. We seemed to have created a kind of "identity bubble" where all were able to discuss and question freely the backgrounds of each person, and the boundaries that color the Turkish mindset. I asked a probing question concerning his experiences as an Armenian in daily life, and he began:

> *I am a doctor and a teacher, I have no accent, and my name is easily confused with Turkish names. Therefore, I am generally not identified as Armenian right away. Furthermore, when I teach, I wear no cross that betrays my identity as an Armenian. Despite all this, when I interact with people, I do not hide who I am. When they learn, their first reaction is very interesting.*

He said, in a surprised voice for effect, "Oh, really?" Then, Goryoun moved his hands, placing one on top of the other, with a thick space of nothingness left between them and continued:

> *These two words are worth a thick book of social meanings and explanations. They mean that, "you are a good man, or you are a skilled man...how could it be?" For, to be an Armenian is to be worse than an enemy, it is used as a swearing word, (equated with) traitors.[124]*

Haifa:

As Asma's past began to unfold before my eyes, I could feel myself empathizing with her story. As I sat there, soaking in the responses I was hearing to my questions

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[124] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015

concerning personal identity, story, and struggle, I began to see just how deep one's

national and ethnic identity runs, and the power it possesses when instilled by family

and solidified through experience. After my question concerning her interactions or

friendships with Jews, something astounding unfolded before my eyes:

> *Definitely, loads and loads. I am surrounded by Jewish friends and I live among Jewish people. But I can't really talk about that unless really going further. Where I came from growing up in Libya and Egypt, there were no Jews. The Jews were only the enemy. They were only the Satan, horrible people who took our land and made us refugees….so I have been going through a really long process over the years. I have gone through a long process.*

She then carried me along the process that led her from Egypt, Libya, England, and

America to the chair in which she currently sat, a Palestinian professor in a Hebrew

university:

> *I can remember being unable to see a Star of David without cringing. I can remember going the other way when I was eighteen walking outside a department store in London after seeing a Jewish family with a kippa and all that. Just turning the other direction because I didn't want….I had a bodily reaction. Heart palpitating and such. I can't even explain what was happening to me. It wasn't hatred. I was just very upset. I can trace it back to 1986 when I was at Georgetown University for the summer and was in class with a student who was Israeli. Then the teacher asked us to write a paper about the Arab-Israeli conflict together. It was my worst nightmare. I don't know if I had interacted with Jews at that point. But definitely never an Israeli, a "worse Jew," as some might say. Yet, if I had never met him and realized that he is a father and I am a mother, to see that you can have coffee together and sit together, to connect…I began to see that the human needs to meet. I think one of the worst things to do is to put up walls. Walls only make people wonder what is on the other side and make stories about them. You need to meet them. People need to meet. People are thirsty, they are curious.*

Finally, she allowed me to see how these years and experience had culminated to

influence her day-to-day life in this deeply divisive place:

> *(All of this) doesn't mean that I don't react when some right-winged, strongly Zionist statements are made. But, I can also see the human being behind them…I have to live here with people of different opinions and political stances*

than me, so I have to keep working on expanding my heart to include all of them. It's a daily challenge.[125]

Inbreakings of the Infinite:

What can offer an answer to the deep-seated realities of the nationalistic totalities that so color the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel? They are pervasive, created and maintained through education, media, political discourse, language, military, rewritings of history, and more. In many ways, it seems like it would be easy to abandon hope, to resign to this reality that will, in the words of Levinas, render those outside of the totality as essentially invisible and thereby justify violence and oppression. However, in the midst of the totalities that were so present in the interviews I conducted, some "inbreakings of the face," as it were, rose to the surface. In short, despite all of the barriers that exist in these societies to prevent meetings, those key encounters do occur. And, they not only occur, but sometimes carry a kind of "infinite" power, of the same kind that Levinas speaks when he writes, "The face is present in its refusal to be contained."[126] The "uncontainable" nature of the face is the precise way to break the all-containing nature of totality, and viewing the interpersonal encounter with this language helps conceptualize and humanize the lived experiences of the people I met.

As I mentioned in the last section, early on my interviews in Istanbul revealed an interesting relationship between the Armenian minority and military service. Although the military is a powerful proponent of the nationalistic totality in Turkey, minorities like Greeks, Jews, Kurds, and Armenians are obligated to serve in

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[125] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016
[126] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 194.

the military after finishing high school at eighteen. This time therefore becomes one of the only ways many Turks encounter these tiny communities generally localized in major cities like Istanbul and Ankara. One young Armenian teacher, Aghavni, when asked about any positive changes she's seen in Turks after meeting them, said:

> None personally, my friends are not people that I meet the first time. They already have Armenian friends and say, "I know you." But my friends in the military have told me something about their time. They have always said (because the different people serving are from many places in Turkey), people [Turks] said, "Oh, you are Armenian? We didn't know you are like us!" My friends and I think that this is because they came from families that talked bad about Armenians, or because in school history lessons generally show that Armenians are our [Turks'] enemy. But when they meet us, they say, "Oh, you are like us!"[127]

Another teacher, Nazeli, recounted, "When my husband was doing his military service, he had this friend who didn't know he was Armenian for a certain period of time. When he did find out, he said, 'No way, you can't be an Armenian.'"[128] Therefore, obligatory military service in the Republic of Turkey can actually enable the face-to-face meeting of identities that otherwise never meet.

Another unique characteristic of these encounters is the surprise that Turks exhibit, for they generally do not realize that the Armenian is different in any way, for, as in the words of Father Avedis, "It we sit next to each other, you will not be able to notice (be able to tell) who is Greek, who is Armenian, who is Jewish, who is Turkish…because we are all belonging to Anatolia."[129] That is, there are no easy physical differences with which one can distinguish "origins," for each group has spent such a long time in the same land. I kept hearing the word "mixer" when locals

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[127] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015.
[128] Ibid.
[129] Ibid.

(Turks and otherwise) would refer to Istanbul's diversity in particular. Father

Avedis continued on to say (with proper artistic flair) that when people realize that

he is Armenian, it is as if:

> (They) are looking at you as a person from space, you are a lion…those
> persons are looking at you as if you are a lion. Coming from space. "Really,
> you are Armenian? Are you serious?" Of course, I am a human being too.[130]

Avedis gave the same emphasis to the acute moment of encounter and realization

that Goryoun did. That is, the, "oh, really?" moment, and Goryoun's assessment of

this interaction as:

> These two words are worth a thick book of social meanings and explanations.
> They mean that, "you are a good man, or you are a skilled man…how could it
> be?" For, to be an Armenian is to be worse than an enemy, it is used as a
> swearing word, (equated with) traitors.[131]

This can be elucidated by a few additional words about and from Levinas.

First of all, the fact that Levinas chooses to frame his answer to totalistic

ideology as "infinity" is very important. For something to be infinite, it is

inexhaustible. It is impossible to fully grasp or define, or to quantify qualitatively. It

is subjective, for its unending nature can be experienced in any myriad of diverse

ways based on the person experiencing it. Further, the infinite has a tendency to

overwhelm and thereby break boundaries. This power is tied into the human face,

the encounter, by Levinas, who writes, "The face resists possession, resists my

powers. In its epiphany, in expression, the sensible, still graspable, turns into total

resistance to the grasp. This mutation can occur only by the opening of a new

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[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

dimension."[132] This points to why surprise was exhibited by the Turks who learned that the face that stood before them at that moment belonged to an Armenian, one whom the totality they internalized had cast as untrustworthy and contemptible. This experience of the other showed that they had tasted the uncontainable, and their surprise reveals that the infinite had begun its work.

This is the reason for which I shared Asma's story above. Even though the focus of this paper has been the dominant Zionist totality as exhibited in the State of Israel, her story reflects beautifully this "infinite experience" that the face can catalyze. As can be seen, she grew up in a totality that (for some key reasons) cast the Jewish people, especially Israelis, as "the Satan, horrible people that took our land and made us refugees."[133] The "other," the Jewish people, were invisible to the totality. This was only accentuated by the reality that there were no Jews in the places she resided. The totality cast the only vision of them.

This changed when she moved from the Middle East to London, where this encounter with the Jewish family at the department store spurred a kind of, "bodily reaction. (With my) heart palpitating and such."[134] The infinite, the face that had been rendered "invisible" confronted the totality. The totality reacted, fighting this infringement, the resistance "to possession, to my powers" Levinas attributes to the face working in full force, thereby resulting in a literal physical reaction. Then, when required to work with an Israeli in a class concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict, what Asma described to be "my worst nightmare," her first true interaction with the

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[132] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 197.
[133] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016.
[134] Ibid.

other, the face came to pass. The infinite beckoned, and she began to see, "that he is a father and I am a mother, to see that you can have coffee together and sit together, to connect…" This, among other key encounters, led her to believe and truly live out this phrase, "the human needs to meet."[135] Or, in other words, two (or more) embodied, infinite faces must truly see the other as the infinite, that which shatters totalities and cultivates, "such a relationship (that) is metaphysics itself."[136] Furthermore, she has oriented her life around a path of "compassionate listening," where you learn to "explore your own responses" to a myriad of stories, beliefs, ideas, and the people behind them.[137]

This pursuit led Asma to listen to the story of a young Israeli woman in her twenties at a Compassionate Listening conference whose role in the military was to:

> Pick up the pieces of bodies after a bus explosion…I find it hard to even talk about. At the end, when we give feedback to the people we listened to, I remember looking at her and saying that I am so sorry this has been her experience. That I had kids her age that are spending their time exploring the world, going out with friends…and I just couldn't imagine her at such a tender age doing the kind of work she was doing. And she immediately teared up, and you could see that there was a connection made between her and me on a human level. I was somebody who got her suffering. For me, this was an eye-opener. When looking at somebody who was a soldier, it would be easy to say "big deal" or "serves you right" or whatever (for serving). "You want to steal somebody's country…" I could have gone that route. "You will pay the price." Or, you can really see the suffering.[138]

Asma's unique, hard-earned ability to "see the suffering" reflects a receptive heart and mind. Levinas writes, "It is therefore to *receive* from the Other beyond the capacity of the I, which means exactly: to have the idea of infinity. But this also

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[135] Ibid.
[136] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 32.
[137] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016.
[138] Ibid.

means: to be taught…it (this teaching) comes from the exterior and brings me to more than I can contain."[139] This path of learning, of radical listening, and willingness to expand reflects a capacious understanding of lived human experience, and points to the infinitude to which the totalizer (until exposed) is blind.

One may recall that for Levinas the concept of infinity is fundamentally an ethic. One of my interviewees in Haifa named Khalil, a local director of a nonprofit, told a story about his father that illustrates this picture, this ethic:

> One of the first stories that my parents had to deal with was a Jewish homeless man. He basically would curse my father every time he passed by, because of him [Khalil's father] being an Arab. Then my father succeeded in making contact with him, and his anger toward Arabs was not because he knew Arabs but because it is what he grew up with, that Arabs are our enemy…(and) he had lost so much from personal problems. Once he [Khalil's father] started talking with him, getting in touch, the person opened himself and started talking about his struggles and how he needed treatment[140]

Khalil's father embodied Levinas' words, "To manifest oneself as a face is to *impose oneself* above and beyond the manifested and purely phenomenological form…the very straightforwardness of the face to face, without the intermediary of any image, in one's nudity, that is, in one's destitution and hunger" which is "(a) being that imposes itself (that) does no limit but promotes my freedom, by arousing my goodness."[141] He saw the face of hunger, of destitution, and answered the ethical imposition that leads to freedom in goodness, and undermined the nationalistic totality that would relegate him and that homeless Jew to be enemies. After that, Khalil remarked, "He [the man] no longer cursed, was happy to get support and was

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[139] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 51.
[140] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016.
[141] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 2016.

eventually placed into an elderly house. Yet, he continued to visit us here, so this was only the beginning."[142]

This same kind of ethnical responsibility was echoed by another "infinitizer" in Istanbul, Father Avedis, who remarked:

> My aim is, when I wake up every morning, to go to school to teach the students how to be a person, a person who is just, a person who in any case (even if he has enemies), loves, to be a person learning about the culture, about the identity, and using the culture and identity of his own, mixing to the culture of the community of the land where he lives.[143]

The totality becomes lost in the desire to learn, delve into, integrate, and thrive within the cultures and values of the peoples that surround the individual. This "mixing" is not characterized by a loss of identity, but rather of growth in depth and width as the infinite begins to overflow one's conception of reality.

Nawal, a close friend of mine at the University, told me a story of protest, violence, tear gas, sound grenades, and horses that left scars on and in her. She shared this memory with suspense, pride, and sadness. I could tell that this reality of near constant conflict was beginning to weigh on her just as it is on so many others (both Jews and Arabs), a weight that is reflected in Khalil's words, "it (the conflict) makes a daily struggle. Instead of investing more time in developing your situation, your children, your surroundings, you invest most of your powers in dealing with this conflict."[144] Yet, Nawal's demeanor changed when I asked about her relationships with Jews. She told me, "I have two really good Jewish friends. We are very close. I met them when they were fourteen and fifteen. One is from Haifa, so

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[142] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016.
[143] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015.
[144] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016.

could have many interactions with Arabs when growing up, and the other is from a

town that doesn't have many (Arabs)."[145] When they met, they were surprised to

learn that she wasn't Jewish after she broke this reality to them by stating, "stop

occupying me," in her self-described "super straightforward, hurtfully

straightforward (manner where) I often use the conflict as a subject of humor."[146]

In spite of (or perhaps because of) these blunt mannerisms, they are friends

to this day. This then led me to ask her what difference she sees in these two

individuals, as opposed to the majority of Jews she interacts with. She answered:

> That is a difficult question. I think it's them—their personalities. It wasn't
> the context in which we met (at a conference), because I met other nice
> people there but I have kept in touch with these two. Both won't serve in the
> army, which is a big deal...one is male and the other female. They're doing
> something less than the army, not IDF but still serving the country.[147]

I continued to press, asking Nawal if it could be their parents:

> No, no, their parents are very very…no it isn't their parents. The girl, when
> she told her mom (that she wouldn't serve), she said "if you don't go, I will
> kick you out of the house." The guy once invited me over but decided against
> it because his father is a policeman, and therefore wouldn't like me that
> much. I don't know…it's a very interesting question. They're both very very
> unique. They both have gone through hard things in their lives. To answer
> your question fully I would have to know everything in their life. Yet I have
> seen them growing and have grown with them for two, three, four years now.
> They're just, they're very nice. They're very kind. They have gone through
> really hard things but love life. It sounds really cliché but they really love life
> and see all the goodness…they love the world and love life. I think when
> someone really understands the point of life and understands how much
> beauty is around us I don't think he would get stuck on…I don't like calling
> the conflict a little thing…but compared to the huge things around us it's
> really a little thing. Come on. Love each other. Settle down. Khalas (Arabic for
> stop/enough), it's been sixty years, let's just stop and take a moment to

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[145] Ibid.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Ibid.

appreciate how really beautiful life is. I think my two friends really understand that[148]

Her friends, these two infinitizers, were given to a kind of appreciation for beauty that totalizers, wrapped up in the radical inwardness that characterizes ethnic nationalism, don't possess. It can only be experienced, an experience characterized by, "the expression of a *desire*…for that which exceeds me and my self-centered categories."[149]

Inbreakings of the Infinite: Conclusion

In conclusion, some lived experiences of ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey and Israel are characterized by key "inbreakings of the infinite" that serve to undermine and shatter the nationalistic totalities of both the majority and minority cultures. Of course, the prevailing political and social climate serves to limit these essential encounters through well-worn channels like the media, military, education, and even law. Yet, in spite of all the barriers, there exist places like the non-profit in Haifa where I met men like Karim and Khalil, the latter of which said of their work:

> It's a place where, once you get in, you sense that it's not about your background, but about the essence of your existence, being a human being…(thereby) being treated equally, being taken care of, respected, and loved. I think those things have a lot of effect on people. It makes it a unique place.[150]

In a similar way, an Armenian teacher named Negdar mused near the end of our conversation:

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[148] Ibid.
[149] Wild, intro to *Totality and Infinity,* 16.
[150] Ethnographic Interview Haifa 2016.

> Many of them [Turks], they say, they use the word Armenian as a swear word. When they meet someone [an Armenian], "Oh! You are a good person." This is why they don't have any relationship or contact with them until today. This is the reason, I think. It they are able to work together or live together, they will understand that they are the same: human beings. Just their names are different or they go to church or mosque or synagogue…it doesn't matter. We are still people.[151]

Therefore, at both locations, there existed infinitizers. Students, teachers, religious leaders, doctors, and non-profit workers who seek to meet, know, and lean into relationships with those that are different than them. In this process, they have cultivated more capacious minds and hearts that, given the choice, would choose the path of learning, understanding, and respect rather than of definitions, boundaries, and exclusivity that so characterize that of the nationalistic totality.

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[151] Ethnographic Interview Istanbul 2015.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I have argued that the historical roots and current manifestations of secular and religious nationalism in the Republic of Turkey and the State of Israel are well understood in light of Emmanuel Levinas' concept of totality. Furthermore, as discovered through ethnographic research I collected concerning the lived experiences of ethnic and religious minorities in these nations, I have explained that the best response to these all-encompassing, exclusive worldviews is found in the reality of the human face, as conceptualized by Levinas in connection with his notion of infinity. I have shown this through exploring the historical roots and present-day manifestations of Turkish nationalism and Zionism, introducing Emmanuel Levinas' thought, and analyzing ethnographic interviews collected among ethnic and religious minorities in both locations while utilizing Levinas' philosophy as an illuminatory tool.

This is by no means an exhaustive attempt at reconciling difference. Human institutions and thought are notoriously adept at defining and dividing. They utilize religious belief, socioeconomic sequestering, racial prejudice and disdain, and, as I have pointed to in this paper, secular and religious nationalism to foster these boundaries. These boundaries are largely constructed. For example, the concept of race and ethnicity is unintelligible to science; they are modern conceptions that possess no grounding in empirical reality. In a similar way, people of varying national and religious identity all share common desires for safety, meaning, and belonging, yet find remarkable ways to view those outside said groups as somehow lacking such deep, basic yearnings.

I believe these boundaries have been conceived and constructed in the past and present when people of difference meet in new and unprecedented ways. A typical response to these meetings is fundamentalism, that is, erecting of religious, racial, and national walls (both figurative and literal) that protect assets and insulate the group, thereby lessening the outsider and justifying indifference or violence in the name of safety and unicity. This characterizes Levinas' concept of totality, which gives us a language and framework from which to analyze these realities. This framework can be further applied to individual and systemic racism in America, radical religious ideologies throughout all faith traditions, and, I believe, all human ideologies of division.

Yet, I also hope to have shown the infinite localized in the human face is an antidote, a possible answer to the constructed totalities that characterize human governments, politics, rhetoric, class systems, education, economic hierarchies, and institutions in Israel, Turkey, and elsewhere. It is a subjective reality, as subjective as the individual faces and stories that meet. Yet, perhaps the power of this theory, this ethic, is that it flows from subjectivity. For totalities are truly objective: they define the way people are to be arranged, how and who they are to meet, and who is truly to be valued in the midst of terrestrial (and sometimes divine) existence. Therefore, I posit that what may the best response to these totalities is not another more powerful or comprehensive totality, but instead "the idea of infinity," the human face encountering the one outside its own totality, the Other, "a relationship (which) is metaphysics itself."[152]

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[152] Levinas, *Totality and Infinity,* 52.

APPENDIX A

WOFFORD

**Institutional Review
Board**

June 8, 2015

Phifer Nicholson
Department of
Religion Wofford
College
429 North Church
Street Spartanburg,
SC 29303

Mr. Nicholson,

  Thank you for submitting your protocol for research involving human subjects to the Wofford College Institutional Review Board. Your amendment to your application entitled "Inter-Faith Friendships: Seeking Peace in Difference" has been assigned protocol number **2015-5-24-2**. Your IRB protocol and consent form met the qualifications for expedited review. Katherine R. Mickley Steinmetz, PhD, Chair of the Wofford College Institutional Review Board completed the review of the protocol and consent form.

  On behalf of the IRB, I would like to let you know that you have met all of the requirements and are free to begin recruiting subjects. Please add the IRB protocol number to your consent form and use the number in all correspondence with the IRB regarding this protocol.

  If there are any changes to the protocol, please submit them to the board as soon as possible for our review. The protocol is valid for 12 months.

Thank you again for your submission. Good luck with your endeavors.

Sincerely,

Katherine R Mickley Steinmetz

Katherine R. Mickley Steinmetz,
Ph.D. Chair, Wofford College IRB

APPENDIX B

I utilized semi-structured ethnographic interviews that pertained to the individual's

ethnic/religious identity and personal relations with the majority culture.

Questions:

1. What is your religious/ethnic background?

2. Where are you from?

3. Where do you practice your religion?

4. Is it easy to be you where you live/where you are from?

5. What, if any, difficulties have you as a religious/ethnic minority?

6. Do you have many friends outside of your community? If so, where have these relationships formed?

7. Have you found that these friendships have changed how people of the majority view your religious/ethnic community? Vice versa?

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