Communicating the complexity of the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict through art: A search for cooperation

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The political and cultural disputes over borders, settlements, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the legitimacy of Israel have plagued the Middle East for more than half a century. Now the scarcity of water is an emerging environmental issue that is exacerbating the political instability and compromising the economic welfare of the region. As the populations of the Middle East increase and the demand for water grows, the below-average rainfall and persistent droughts of the past decade threaten the supply of water for both municipal and agricultural uses. The trans-boundary nature of the water crisis demands that cooperation amongst the Israeli and Arab states is crucial to the survival of the region. Social and environmental concerns of this magnitude must be communicated to the public, and activists are now turning to art as a way to address this and similar issues. This project has examined the role of water in the larger context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the use of visual art in order to increase the understanding on both sides of the conflict and to propose the possibility of water as a point of collaboration between the affected countries. This project sought to answer the questions, "How can art be used as a tool to increase awareness of the complexity of the water conflict between Israelis and Palestinians? And by increasing awareness, can art portray the water crisis as a starting point for cooperation and compromise, rather than for distrust and further disagreement?"

Chapter 1: The Israeli-Palestinian Water Conflict

Water is essential to the well-being of humanity, the environment, and the economy, and the Middle East is "the most concentrated region of water scarcity in the world" (Brooks 1994). The current impact of the global water crisis is similar in scope to the energy crisis of the early 1970s; the issue has been established and researched in a rapidly growing community, but a resolution has yet to be agreed upon. The water conflict in Israel and the occupied territories, specifically, is a threefold crisis that sets it apart from those limited to issues of mere water scarcity. The three crises, those of water quality, quantity, and distribution, interact and overlap so that there is no clear solution to a conflict that requires immediate cooperation (Brooks 1994).

A Brief History of the Israeli-Palestinian Water Conflict

To understand the complexity of the current threefold Israeli-Palestinian water conflict, it is first necessary to briefly examine the evolution of the relationship between water and power in the region through four periods of history collectively spanning the past century. The half-century preceding Israeli independence in 1948 can be classified as a time of "Zionist aspirations;" water was recognized even by the earliest Jewish settlers as valuable for both ideological and practical reasons (Zeitoun 2008). Theodor Herzl, the "father of the Jewish state," proposed a canal reaching from the Nile to the Sinai, stating that "the real founders of the country were the hydraulic engineers" (Zeitoun 2008). As they became aware that the entire economic future of the land was dependent on the supply of water, Zionist leaders took effort to harness control of the region's water, including attempts to extend borders to include the Upper Jordan River headwaters, plans for irrigation and hydropower, and proposals for the first national water carrier (later implemented as the Israel National Water Carrier) (Zeitoun 2008).

The "Ideological Era" in the years 1948-1967 is characterized by the asymmetrical development between Israelis and Palestinians. In nearly all aspects of institutional, economic, and political development, including water infrastructure, Israel was extremely organized and enterprising in comparison to the Palestinian community, which essentially operated as a feudal society with minimal nationalist efforts at the time of Israel's independence (Tessler 1994). Water extraction rates were on the whole unchanged between 1948 and 1967 in the West Bank

and Gaza under the rule of Jordan and Egypt, respectively. Israel, much the opposite, worked in these years to launch the "hydraulic mission," as it has been titled in academic literature. The nation's water policy was dictated by Zionist ideology, and therefore no settlement plan was ever rejected on the issue of the high cost of water supply (Zeitoun 2008). The National Water Carrier, which was originally intended only to supply irrigation water to the drier regions of Israel, was completed in 1964 as a way to combine the country's three fresh water sources into one water supply system complete with pipelines and pumping stations to carry 380 million cubic meters of drinking water per year over a distance of approximately 130 km (Mekorot). With the focus of development first on the most accessible sources of water found in the aquifers and later expanded to the Jordan River Basin, Israel's efforts toward hydraulic supremacy resulted in a tripling of groundwater production from 1948 to 1966 (Zeitoun 2008).

The outcome of the June 1967 war, including Israel's seizure of both shores of the Upper Jordan River, the headwaters of the Banias River, the west shore of the Lower Jordan River, and the Western, North Eastern, and Eastern Aquifer Basins, dramatically altered the hydropolitical map and resulted in a period of Israeli domination in the years between 1967 and 1995 (Zeitoun 2008). The Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian territories afforded no question of equality for the Palestinians who remained in the West Bank and Gaza; without a voice to be heard, the Palestinian community had no position to challenge Israel's plans or use of the water supply (Zeitoun 2008). At the time when the Palestinians began to see the disproportional allocation of water as a growing injustice, the issue of water virtually disappeared from Israel's public agenda because scarcity was no longer an immediate threat for the country (Zeitoun 2008). Israel was pursuing strategies for greater resource capture in order to support the rapidly increasing Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. At the same time, under the policies of Minister of Agriculture Ariel Sharon, crippling measures were implemented to maintain the weak status of the Palestinian water institutions as Israel consolidated its control over the transboundary resources (Zeitoun 2008). During the peak of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process in the early 1990s, Palestinian water rights were recognized and two institutions were developed to help shape the region's water activity under the Oslo II Accords in 1995 (Zeitoun 2008).

The period since 1995 that extends to the present is characterized, in terms of power, as Israeli hegemony, defined by Zeitoun as "control by a mix of coercion and consent" (Zeitoun

2008). Palestinian development in comparison to Israel in this period has been minimal, partially because the Oslo II Accords never matured into Permanent Status negotiations. In other words, the Palestinian water rights were recognized only in theory; they were never quantified or put into effect, leaving them to fester as part of the larger unresolved series of conflicts (Zeitoun 2008). Without any official change to the asymmetrical management of resources, the Palestinian Water Authority (PWA) has insufficient power to meet the water needs of over three million Palestinian citizens, develop a working water sector, or bargain for its own rights to equitable distribution of water (Zeitoun 2008). In contrast to the Palestinians once again, Israel has experienced growth in the development of a new water management paradigm that includes freshwater imports and the manufacturing of "new" water. That is, Israel, under pressure from the agricultural lobby and by threats to security, has embarked on a mission to create technological solutions to the ever-growing demand for water rather than focusing on the roots of the high-demand problems (Zeitoun 2008).

Water Quantity, Quality, and Distribution

The concept of water quantity in Israel and Palestinian territories is understood to be an economic issue rather than one relating to ecology. The region is one of the driest in the world, but the core of the conflict lies in the misallocation of water in Israel, as opposed to the general scarcity of water (Lipchin 2008). Following the 1967 War, Israel gained greater access to water, and demand quickly exceeded supply. Since the 1970s, Israel has been using water at or beyond one hundred percent of its resource potential (Brooks 1994). Approximately two-thirds of the water consumed each year in Israel is attributed to agriculture, and while that number is on par with the world average, it is disproportionate to the 4% of the labor force and 2.3% of the gross domestic product that are employed by the nation's agricultural sector (Brooks 1994). With high rates of population growth, increasing rates of immigration, and the assumption that water is becoming less available by the year, the issue of misallocation will only be more pronounced in the near future.

The issue of deteriorating water quality in ecological terms, caused by over-pumping aquifers and the pollution of watercourses, is another dimension of the crisis that may often take

a back seat to the question of quantity. Israeli and Palestinian populations draw their water from three main water sources, the Mountain Aquifer, the Coastal Aquifer, and the Jordan River (Gray 2008). The over-pumping of wells results in the decline of the water table. Low water tables are problematic because the water pressure in the aquifer is reduced, allowing low quality water to contaminate the aquifer's natural supply of fresh water (Brooks 1994). The Coastal Aquifer, which supplies water to the Gaza Strip, has been over-pumped with such consistency that one-fifth of the wells are too salty for agricultural use (Brooks 1994) and nearly ninety percent of the water provided to Gazans fails to meet the drinking water standards of the World Health Organization (Gray 2008). The region's water sources are also compromised by the "lack of enthusiasm for protecting water quality" put forth by the ministries of Agriculture, Health, Industry, and Interior (Brooks 1994). Agricultural runoff, insufficient sewage treatment, and excessive dumping are serious threats to the quality of the limited resource (Brooks 1994).

The geopolitical distribution of water in Israel and the occupied territories is perhaps the component of the conflict that makes the solutions so uniquely difficult to agree upon. Part of the problem is geographical; Israel has the advantages of exercising political supremacy of the upstream riparian land of the Jordan River Basin, and thus the country can determine the restrictions that allow Israel a much larger portion of the water than is granted to Palestine (Park 2008). In terms of aquifers, approximately one-third of the water consumed by Israel comes from the aquifer under the West Bank, land that, in the event of a two-state solution, will likely be awarded to the Palestinians (Brooks 1994). The control and distribution, rather than the collective use of a region's water, is a major point of contention in this conflict. The total groundwater resources of the combined aquifers add up to an average of 679 million cubic meters per year with water sharing between Israel and Palestine at a ratio of approximately 2.5:1. (Haddadin 2002). Water policies applied to Palestinian communities in the West Bank are decidedly discriminatory. The Israeli Military Authority controls all water developments, and Jewish settlements receive subsidies for water to encourage agricultural expansion, while Palestinians pay the same price for irrigation-quality water as Israelis pay for potable water (Brooks 1994). Further, Israel's water wells are on average 300-400 meters deep, while Palestinian wells are about 70 meters deep. The discrepancy in depth means that Israeli wells have lower levels of salinity and are capable of greater production, while Palestinians are forbidden by Israeli policy to repair or reconstruct their own wells (Park 2008).

Potential Points for Cooperation and Shared Management of Water Resources

Though there exist an increasing number of potential technological solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict, this project focuses on the potential policies and actions that would encourage sustainable systems of shared management of the region's water sources. Rather than struggle to stay ahead of the population and development curves by constantly searching for new ways to produce fresh water, this project proposes that it would be more efficient to reevaluate the current system of water allocation and to propose policies that would more equally disperse the natural resources to states in the region's watershed.

It should be restated that the issue, at least for Palestinians, is not the absolute scarcity of water but rather whether water will be available in the appropriate quantities, costs, and locations to allow for sustainable development (Brooks 1994). One possibility for the equitable management of the region's water is the concept of water as a market commodity. With the understanding that the Palestinians would have control of the West Bank aquifer if and when independence is attained, it has been proposed that the Palestinian water surplus in the West Bank could be used not only for internal development but also sold as a commodity to states with a water deficit or traded for access rights (Brooks 1994).

The Harvard Middle East Project, created by the Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East, proposes "a rational economic method for analyzing water issues that may help the parties to perceive the conflict and approaches to its resolution in a new way" (Brooks 1994). The project seeks to determine the current value of water based on water supply, cost of transportation, private demand curves, and national water policy so that water has a monetary value regardless of who uses it. In other words, owners of the water who use the water are not using it at no cost; by forgoing the opportunity to sell the water to others, they are essentially buying the water from themselves. This project advocates a water authority that would be jointly owned and operated by Israel, Palestine, and Jordan. The price for the transfer of water from one country to another would be based on the "full social value" of the water as determined by each side (Brooks 1994).

On a broader level, there are certain issues of concern that should be prioritized in the struggle toward resolution of the water problems between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian

Territories. Similar to the developed world's current energy crisis, the first priority is to limit demand. Perhaps the most important part of such limits would be an increase in the price of water, especially for agriculture, so as to create incentives to conserve (Brooks 1994). The second priority is to improve existing water institutions on both the local and national level for both Israel and the Occupied Territories. Without an efficient system of water authorities, it is impossible to attain collaboration of individual, private, and government agencies on the management of water (Brooks 1994). The last priority would be to augment the local and regional water supplies by identifying and developing rainwater harvesting, brackish water, and recycled water infrastructure (Brooks 1994).

The ultimate goal of this project is to utilize visual art as a medium for presenting this water conflict from both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives in a way that creates a new sense of understanding for the viewer. The following chapter examines various artists of the 20th century who have used visual art as a form of cogent social commentary during different periods of the past century, each having approached art as a tool for description, awareness, and change in vastly distinct manners. The third chapter will discuss the artwork that was completed as a part of this project, essentially combining the knowledge of social-oriented artwork with the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict.

Chapter 2: The Role of Art in Social Action

Social commentary is one the most prominent themes of modern and contemporary art. The subject of social commentary ranges from notable events in history to the conditions of everyday life. Whether explicitly stated or not, artists assume the role of visual journalist in the examination and analysis of our surroundings. In the words of painter Mark Rothko, "Art is not only a form of action, it is a form of social action. For art is a type of communication, and when it enters the environment it produces its effect just as any other form of action does." Though art, as a form of expression, has always communicated ideas, the messages of 20th century Western art became increasingly outspoken in response to social and political changes in Europe and the United States. This chapter will focus on several European artists of the early 20th century and several contemporary American artists, both of which have provided influential social commentary during particularly volatile periods in the past century.

A number of social movements arose during the years of World War I in response to the social, political, and economic turmoil of Europe, and Germany in particular. The Dada movement, which began at the outbreak of the First World War, was essentially an anti-war movement that was critical of bourgeois nationalist and colonialist interests. Often considered "anti-art" by pro-war nationalists, the aim of Dada artists, writers, and intellectuals was to oppose the establishment that led to the senseless war. German Expressionism lent itself to commentary of the social grievances of the wartime era and later gave way to the New Objectivity movement that cynically focused on the aftermath of the First World War (Hunter 2004).

Kathe Kollwitz (1867-1945) was a Prussian-born printmaker whose images of war, poverty, and the struggle for peace have been widely recognized as some of the most emotionally provocative images of the twentieth century (Prelinger 1994). Kollwitz's early works focus on peasant uprisings and the call for social equality and an end to oppression at the turn of the century in southern Germany (Hunter 2004). Her work became more personal after the outbreak of World War I, captured by the later series *Krieg (War)* and *Tod (Death)* [Figure 1], in response to the death of her son during battle in 1914 and the senseless pain and suffering inflicted on Europe by Hitler's Nazi Regime of the 1930s (Hunter 2004). Her work, a timeless reminder of

the emotional and physical destruction of war and poverty, employs devastating images of raw human suffering to espouse her ideals of peace and equality.



Figure 1. Kathe Kollwitz. *Woman with Dead Child*. 1903. (Source: National Gallery of Art,D.C.)

John Heartfield (1891-1968), George Grosz (1893-1959) and Otto Dix (1891-1969) were associated with the Dada movement during World War I, as well as the New Objectivity movement in the post-war years. Though each had his own individual style, they reacted to the oppression of the Weimar Republic and the war in a more blatant manner than the Expressionism of Kathe Kollwitz. John Heartfield was a pioneer of the modern photomontage; he would use recognizable photos from magazines and reassemble them with text to radically alter their meaning. In *Millions Stand Behind Me: The Meaning of the Hitler Salute* [Figure 2], Heartfield uses scale to satirize Hitler's iconic pose, revealing Hitler as a puppet whose gesture merely symbolizes the acceptance of money from major industrialists (Honnef 1992). Published in magazines during the 1920s, Heartfield was one of the first to use techniques of mass media to question the reign of a political regime, and the result was "uncompromising in its harsh directness" (Honnef 1992).



Figure 2. John Heartfield: *Der Sinn des Hitlergrusses: Kleiner Mann bittet um grosse Gaben. Motto: Millonen Stehen Hinter Mir! [The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little man asks for big gifts. Motto: Millions Stand Behind Me!]* 1932. (Source: Honnef, 1992)

George Grosz and Otto Dix had similar messages, though their drawings and paintings were characterized by the style of social realism combined with a disillusioned and socially critical stance on the German society of the 1920-30s (Heller 2009). Graphic renditions of maimed soldiers, modern war, prostitutes, well-upholstered businessmen, sex crimes, orgies, and the femme fatale permeate the New Objectivity movement's vision of a society in shambles. After brief service in World War I, Grosz learned to hate war and German militarism; his work sought to expose the crime, murder, and sexual violence of German post-war society, as depicted in *Dedication to Oskar Panizza* [Figure 3] (Zeller 2009). Otto Dix, also a veteran of the First World War, was clearly haunted by the mutilated bodies and bleak landscape of mechanized warfare. In his grotesque depictions of post-war society, veterans are pitiful, limb-less characters who receive no recognition from surviving civilians [Figure 4].



Figure 3. George Grosz. *Dedication to Oskar Panizza*. 1917-18 (Source: Staatsgalerie , Stuttgart, Germany)

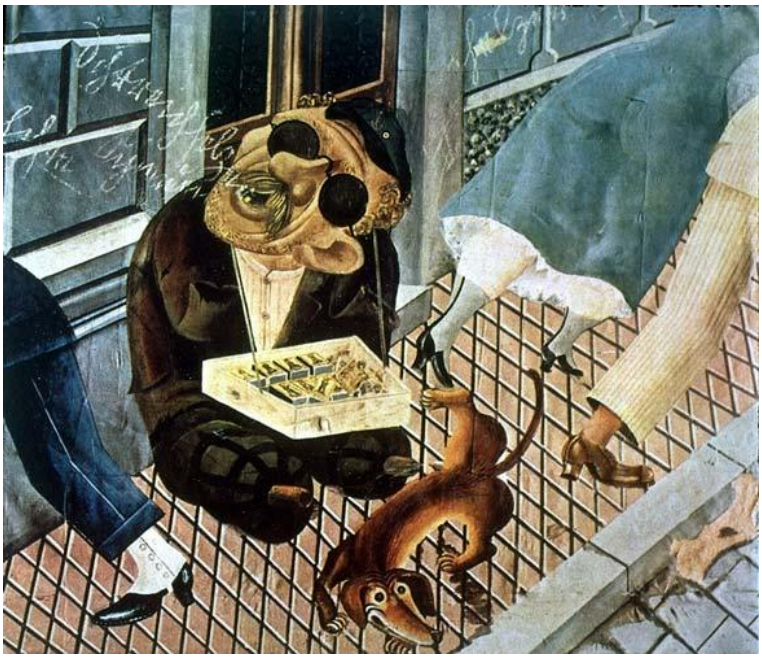


Figure 4. Otto Dix. *The Match Seller*. 1921 (Source: Staatsgalerie, Stuttgart, Germany)

American art of the early 20th century was also marked by a fresh sense of social relevance, though the reactions to Nazi Germany were far more removed for reasons of

geographical distance. The United States was plagued with its own set of social ills; themes of poverty and urban life, the Great Depression, immigration and labor injustices were dominant in the challenge to break esoteric assumptions of art and connect artists to the public in an attempt to inspire a demand for social change (Fineberg 2000). Ben Shahn (1898-1969), a Lithuanian-born American artist, used the famous 1927 trial and conviction of two Italian-American laborers for a hold-up shooting in Boston, for which the verdict was based entirely on circumstantial evidence, to comment on the justice system and ethnic profiling in *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti* [Figure 5] (Fineberg 2000). As Shahn's work became more commercialized, his posters also commented on specific events of World War II, such as the destruction of the Czech town Lidice as retaliation for the murder of SS Leader Reinhardt Heydrich by Czech partisans [Figure 6] (Voices). The use of commercial posters with titles like *This is Nazi Brutality* served to educate the public and comment on the injustice of society.



Figure 5. Ben Shahn. *The Passion of Sacco and Vanzetti*. 1931-32. (Source: Whitney Museum of American Art)

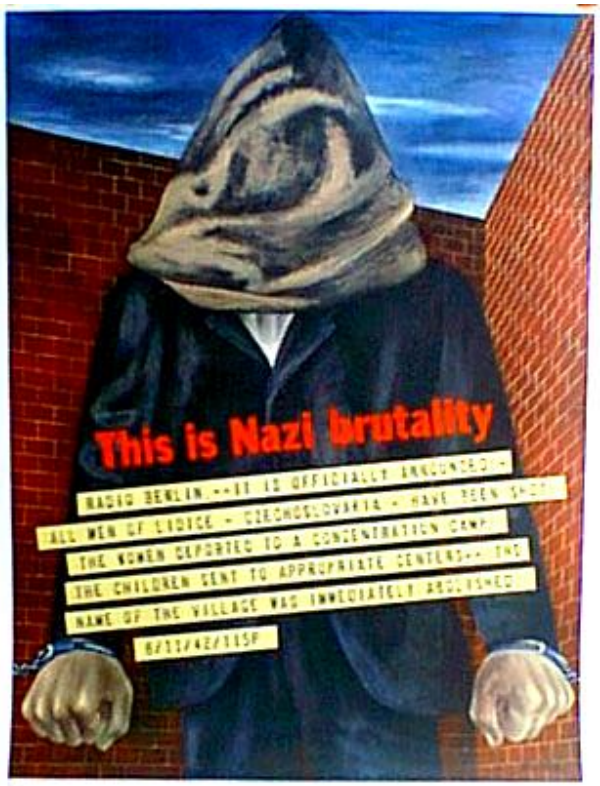


Figure 6. Ben Shahn. *This Is Nazi Brutality*. 1942. (Source: National Archives (NWDNS-44-PA-245)

Romare Bearden (1912-1988), an African-American raised in North Carolina, Pittsburgh, and Harlem, is known for his collages of the 1960s that broadened the canon of art history both in terms of subject matter and approach to medium (Fineberg 2000). As a student of expatriate George Grosz in the late 1930s, Bearden was exposed to the potential for political and social commentary to exist in "high art," which ultimately encouraged his focus on African-American subject matter (Fineberg 2000). Bearden's work was observational, characterized by images of daily life in Harlem or black life in the rural South; unlike Grosz, Bearden's work was more subtle in its criticisms of American society, concerning variations of timeless human questions rather than presenting one body as the root of all evils [Figure 7]. Hailed as the most brilliant "new collage-maker" of the decade, the technical aspect of his collages allowed for the improvisational quality that so authentically captured the rhythm and pace of the lives and narratives he sought to portray (Fineberg 2000).



Figure 7. Romare Bearden. *The Dove*. 1964. (Source: VAGA, New York, N.Y.)

Representing another peripheral faction of mid-20th century society, Jaune-Quick-to-See-Smith (b. 1940) is an American Indian painter and printmaker whose work presents a dialogue between Native American ancestry and 20th century American culture. Though her work speaks

specifically to the concerns of Native American identity, it also confronts natural-worldly problems that cut across race, gender, and culture. Smith has been described as a healing presence in the contemporary art world, "a harbinger, a mediator and a bridge builder" (Clark 1993). By straddling several communities, she seeks to enlighten and to share the meaning of the big picture. Though her messages have serious undertones, she often uses clever humor as a means of communicating her ideas. In *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People)*, Smith displays a variety of cowboys-and-Indians trinkets and sports souvenirs from the Washington Redskins and Cleveland Indians to suggest a mock-barter for land, recalling the purchase of Manhattan as a real bargain for the white man [Figure 8] (Borum 1993).



Figure 8. Jaune Quick-to-See-Smith. *Trade (Gifts for Trading Land with White People).* 1992. (Source: Chrysler Museum of Art, Norfolk, VA)

Contemporary artist and illustrator Sue Coe (b. 1951) uses graphic images inspired by Kollwitz, Dix, and Grosz to provoke social change and political action in the varied arenas of animal rights, the American meat industry, apartheid in South Africa, Malcolm X, and the Ku Klux Klan. Though her work has consistently encountered criticism on the question of its validity in the realm of fine art, Coe argues that museums and galleries are not necessary to spread a message (Brody). Coe's work is absolute; there is no attention given to the plight of the

villain. In defense of Coe as merely proselytizing, a quote from political cartoonist Art Young (1866-1943) states,

> "These propagandists against propaganda amuse me. Propaganda is a kind of enthusiasm, for or against something that you think ought to be spread, that is, propagated. Your propaganda may be wrong or not worthwhile from another's viewpoint, but that is a personal matter...There never was a real work of art in which it is not plain that the author wants you to share his loves and sympathies and his ideas of right and wrong" (Brody).

Coe's publications, many of which imitate the format of children's books, couple illustrations with text and force the reader to witness the gruesome truths that she has deemed important for social awareness. Her drawings and paintings, "unsparing" in presentation, portray specific events and conditions in a way that is intended to mobilize her audience and provoke political action (Brody). Her aim is not to shock, but to educate and open a dialogue (Vaughn 2001). In *Sheep of Fools,* she combines over thirty paintings and drawings with narrative text to graphically describe the many ships exporting sheep from Australia to Europe that have caught fire and sunk, leaving the sheep abandoned aboard as they burn and drown to death in sardine-tight conditions [Figure 9, 10] (Coe 2005). In Dead Meat, Coe traveled around the United States, using her sketchbook where photos were prohibited, and followed in the footprints of chickens, pigs, and cows from factory farms to the "killing floor" of slaughterhouses. Her drawings, paintings, and crude sketches document the de-beakings, decapitations, dismembering, castrations, and electrocutions that are all neatly hidden behind the labels of our meat-eating culture [Figure 11] (Coe 1995).



Figure 9. Sue Coe. *Untitled (The Last Drowning Sheep).* 2002. (Source: Coe, 2005)



Figure 10. Sue Coe. *Unloading*. 2004. (Source: Coe, 2005)



Figure 11. Sue Coe. Debeaking. 1995
(Source: Coe, 1995)

Chapter Three: Artist Statement

Art as a necessary way to communicate the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict

Though this project began as a way for me to combine studio art and environmental studies, it has become evident in the midst of my research that art is truly a potent form of social communication, especially when it is exposed to the public in an accessible manner. Though I do not offer any technical solutions to the water conflict in the work, I hope that the juxtaposition of the narratives conveys the idea that cooperation on the issue of water has the potential to be a point of departure for compromise on other branches of the larger conflict, and to emphasize the reality that shared management of water resources is indeed necessary to the survival of both groups.

I have not been working with a specific audience in mind, but I would intend this work to reach people who do not necessarily have extensive knowledge of the conflict, people who may have an unrealized socially-ingrained bias one way or the other. It has been frustrating for me to simplify this complex situation into a straightforward narrative format, but I hope to show that Israelis and Palestinians have more in common than most people realize. While I am in no way asserting that both groups are equally responsible for the current state of the region's water resources, I wanted to avoid assigning "good guy" and "bad guy" roles to the narratives. That is, the water conflict should not be taken out of context. Both Israelis and Palestinians have inflicted serious damages on the other for the past sixty years, and, naturally, each side of the conflict has its own interpretation of historical events. With this work, I hope to offer a sense of understanding for both sides of the larger conflict and ultimately to promote the issue of water management as a place for compromise.

Imagery - Narrative

I decided to use images of trees to represent both Israeli and Palestinian people. I am trying to make a statement about the vitality and necessity of water as lifeblood for both humans and other organisms. I was reminded that if art is going to make a statement, it has to work visually so that we don't feel like we already know it. Rather than portray humans doing human

things, I wanted to use an accessible non-human image to show the narratives in a way that could provide a different view of the conflict. As I was reading an article about Zionism that used the phrase "ripped up again and again," it occurred to me that trees would be an interesting image for this situation because of their roots and their need for water. Roots in this context can represent both physical habitation of a place and cultural-historical connections to a place. Both Israelis and Palestinians have cultural and historical roots in the land of Palestine, and both groups have had physical roots in the same land at different periods in their long history with the contested territory. The extent of the root growth can be used to portray the strength of the community, both in terms of well-being of the community and in terms of development, population, and longevity in one place. Both groups have been unwillingly uprooted by outside forces at different points in history, and both believe that their roots belong in the land of Palestine. In the end, however, I want to show that neither can ignore the other for much longer. Their roots have become so entangled over the past century that to cut them apart from each other would cause significant damage to both groups, much as cutting the intertwined roots of two trees would mean certain death to both. Thus, the solution is cooperation and compromise.

Medium - Process

The concept of presenting two separate (but concurrent) narratives was an important part of this work from the beginning of the process. I wanted the two narratives to be connected to each other, unable to be separated. The idea of a book became an obvious solution after I was exposed to the work of artist Sue Coe, whose work is most commonly published in book format. In a book, the two stories of the Israelis and Palestinians are quite literally bound to each other. Further, books, as a medium, are often understood as a means of education. Considering that one of the goals of this project is the awareness of the water crisis in the context of the larger Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it was fitting that the art would be displayed in book format.

The choice to use collage as the medium for this project was directly influenced by the artists that I learned about in order to write an informed background section on the role of art in social action. I realized that in attempting to tell a story about modern history, photographs can be quite powerful in their ability to recall information and emotion in the viewer. While I

incorporated my own drawings and interpretations of the narratives with the evolution of the trees and placement of images, it is the assemblage of the photos that brings the history into the work.

Because of the photos he chose and the creative ways that they were juxtaposed, Romare Bearden's collages are known for their vitality and energy that captured the feeling of a very specific and unique time and place. John Heartfield's collages used images of popular culture and mass media and turned them on their heads to completely alter the meaning of the original image. Jaune Quick-to-See Smith uses images of American culture in a way similar to Heartfield's, exposing the darker or ironic side of an icon by placing it in a different context.

Without getting carried away, I attempted to use collage in my work to achieve some of the same effects as work by Bearden, Heartfield, and Smith. The recurrence of images on both sides of the story, such as the iron fist of the outsider, the newspaper clipping, the silhouettes of houses, and water, is intended to emphasize the similarities of the two communities, but also to portray how each side of the story interpreted historical events in very opposing ways. The fist, for example, represents the power of anti-Semitism and persecution in 20th century Europe for the Israeli narrative, and it also represents the power of the young state of Israel for the Palestinian narrative. And though this image of the fist clearly defines a sharp difference between the two communities, it also serves to show that both Israelis and Palestinians have been brutally uprooted in the past century.

The book, as it starts from both sides of the cover and meets in the middle, essentially has no "end." I hope to convey that the current method of water use and allocation is certainly not in a feasible place of stability, that there is no way that this conflict can "end" without inherently incurring damages to both sides of the border. The narratives of the Israelis and Palestinians are both long, cruel, and tired, but despite their constant score-keeping of casualties and misdeeds, they are now in the same sinking boat, and they must "sink or swim together."

How was art used as a tool for awareness of the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict?

Considering that this project has not been shown to an audience in a way that I could formally collect and analyze responses to the work, I, as the artist, must be the person who determines if art was useful as an educational tool in the understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian water conflict.

This experience has absolutely affected me as both an artist and as someone with an understanding of the water crisis in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. Armed with an academic understanding of the political, social, economic, and environmental circumstances in the region, it was difficult for me to step back and think of this complex situation in terms other than distinctly human. I was brain-storming for almost two full months before the idea of trees and roots finally fell into place. Once I decided to continue with the images of trees, it seemed that, with the exception of a few kinks here and there, everything came together in a very natural manner. (Indeed, the road to the due date would have been significantly rougher without the weekly meetings with Professor Sue Buck; it was incredibly helpful to have an external set of eyes to view the work, ask questions, and prod my mind on a regular basis.)

The artistic process, once it really began, was helpful for me in understanding another dimension of this conflict. At once, connections between people and plants were obvious in ways that they had not been before. We both need water to live. We both thrive with access to water, and we both are crippled without it. Sometimes there are plants that have the capability to use excessive amounts of water, and sometimes there are people who do the same. Roots, for plants, are the mechanism for the intake of water, and they will grow in every direction for the pursuit of it until they are walled off or prevented from growing any further. Humans, once again are the same; we will work to gather fresh water until we are physically prevented. The more I thought about humans and plants and our relationship with the natural world, it seemed the more ways that I could connect this socio-political water conflict to the images used in my artwork. My knowledge of this particular conflict has evolved into a broader understanding of the absolute need for cooperation. It may sound trite and idealistic, but as a result of this process, the technological and policy-driven solutions that had been researched for this project prior to art-making suddenly make complete sense and are immediately crucial if there is any hope of finding a final resolution.

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ROOTS THIRSTY FOR WATER, TWISTED AND TANGLED AND INTERTWINED:
A Narrative

LEAH COVER
Department of Environmental Science
Senior Comprehensive Project
April 2010



THE PALESTINE

POST

CARL MARX

POST

STATE OF ISRAEL IS BORN

The first independent Jewish State in 19 centuries was born in Tel Aviv as the British Mandate over Palestine came to an end at midnight on Friday, and it was immediately subjected to the test of fire. As "Moledet Yisrael" (State of Israel) was proclaimed, the battle for Jerusalem raged, with most of the city falling to the Jews. At the same time,

Most Crowded Hours in Palestine's History

JEWS TAKE OVER SECURITY ZONES

Egyptian Air Force Spitfires Bomb Tel Aviv; One Shot Down

Proclamation by Head Of Government

2 Columns Cross Southern Border

Etzion Settlers Taken P.O.W.

Villages Taken Road Battle







Roots thirsty for lifeblood, twisted and tangled and intertwined

To ignore the other is to sever the roots, the life, from the community

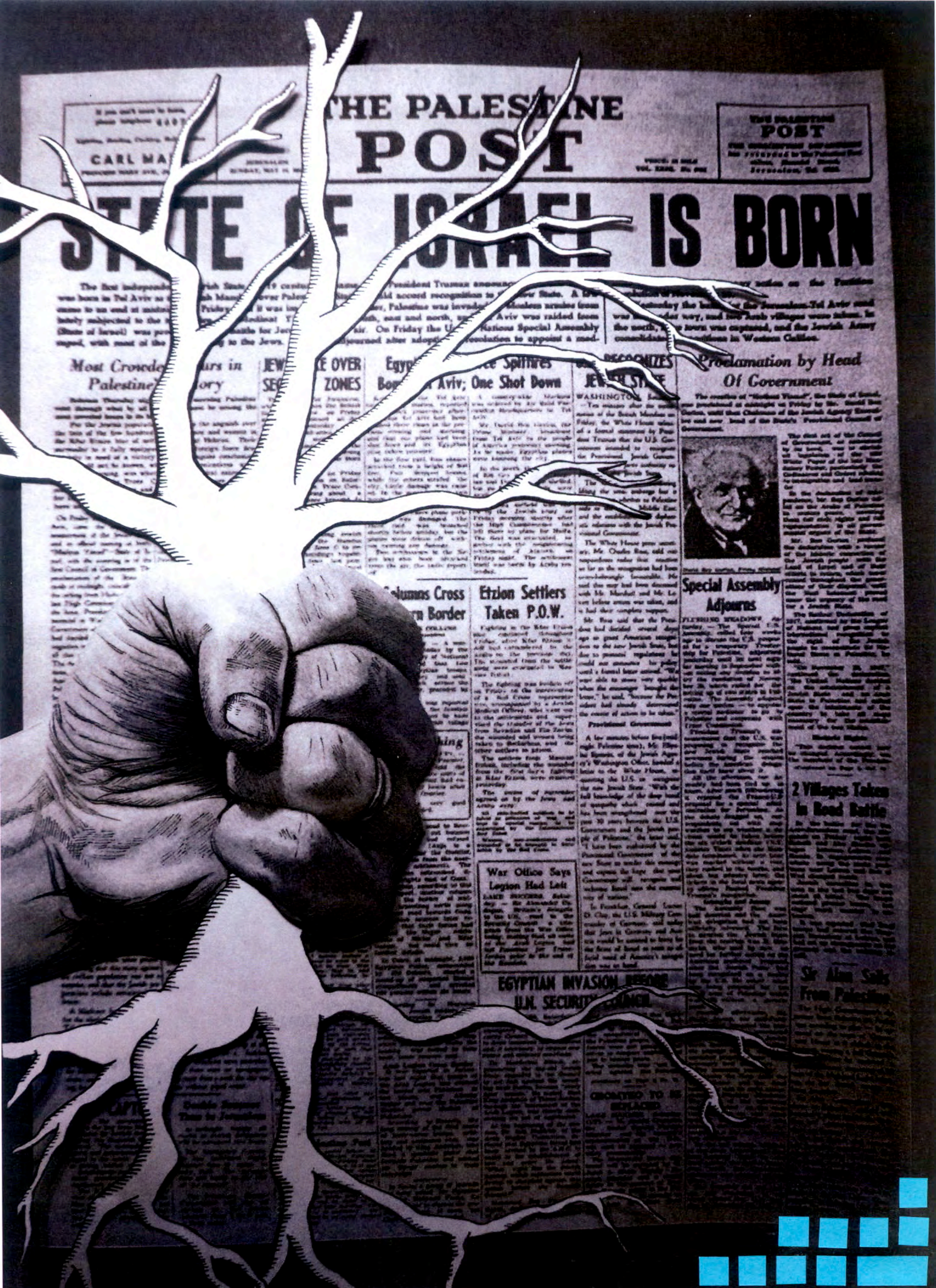
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